

Council Offices  
Argyle Road  
Sevenoaks  
Kent  
TN13 1HG



Published: 12.07.21

I hereby summon you to attend the meeting of the Sevenoaks District Council to be held in the **Stag Theatre, London Road, Sevenoaks TN13 1ZZ** commencing at 7.00 pm on 20 July 2021 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 25 May 2021 (Pages 1 - 6)
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) Adoption of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans (Pages 7 - 212)
7. Matters considered by other standing committees:
  - a) LGA Model Code of Conduct - Recommendation of Working Group (Pages 213 - 240)

- b) 2023 Parliamentary Boundary Review (Pages 241 - 248)
  - c) Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations (Pages 249 - 266)
  - d) Contracts Procedure Rules (Pages 267 - 296)
8. 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.
  9. 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.
  10. To receive the report of the Leader of the Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Council meeting. (Pages 297 - 298)
  11. To receive reports from the Chairmen of the Audit and Scrutiny Committees on the work of the Committees since the last Council meeting. (Pages 299 - 300)

#### 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.

**ANNUAL COUNCIL**

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2021 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Edwards-Winser (Chairman of the Council)

Cllr. Esler (Vice Chairman of the Council)

Cllrs. Abraham, Andrews, Ball, Barnett, Bayley, Bonin, Brown, Dr. Canet, Carroll, Cheeseman, Clack, Clayton, Penny Cole, Perry Cole, Collins, Dickins, Dyball, Edwards-Winser, Esler, Eyre, Firth, Fleming, Fothergill, Griffiths, Grint, Harrison, Hogarth, Hudson, Hunter, Layland, Maskell, McArthur, McGarvey, Morris, Nelson, Osborne-Jackson, Pender, Reay, Roy, Thornton, Waterton and Williamson

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Barnes, Coleman, G. Darrington, P. Darrington, Foster, Kitchener, London, McGregor, Parkin, Pett, Purves and Raikes

1. To elect a Member to be Chairman for the ensuing year.

Councillor Fleming proposed and Councillor Dickins seconded that Councillor Diana Esler be elected Chairman of the Council for the next municipal year.

Resolved: That Councillor Diana Esler be elected Chairman of the Council for the municipal year, 2021/22.

Councillor Diana Esler made the declaration of acceptance of office and took the chair. The new Chairman thanked the Council for her election and expressed her appreciation for the many good wishes she had received.

The new Chairman led the Council in expressing sincere thanks to the outgoing Chairman, Councillor Edwards-Winser, for his service to the Council and to the District and to Mrs Francis Edwards-Winser, in her role as Chairman's Consort. Members expressed their appreciation. The new Chairman presented the past Chairman's badge, shield and gift to Councillor Edwards-Winser, and a gift to Mrs Edwards-Winser.

In response to the thanks expressed, Councillor Edwards-Winser thanked Councillor Esler for her support as her Vice Chairman, and offered particular thanks to his wife.

Councillor Esler announced that her Consort for the year would be her husband, Mr Michael Pearsall and presented him with the badge of office and a gift. She announced that Reverend Anne Bourne, Parish of St Lukes, would continue and be her Chaplain, and invited her to say a few words. The Chief Executive presented the Chairman with a gift as she took her seat.

COUNCILLOR ESLER IN THE CHAIR

2. To elect a Member to be Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

Councillor Fleming proposed and Councillor Dickins seconded that Councillor Avril Hunter be elected Vice Chairman of the Council for the ensuing municipal year.

Resolved: That Councillor Hunter be appointed Vice Chairman of the Council for the municipal year, 2021/22.

Councillor Hunter made the declaration of acceptance of office and expressed her thanks to the Council for her appointment. Her husband, Mr Alan Hunter would be her consort, and he was presented with the badge of office.

3. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 April 2021.

The Chairman moved that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 April 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 April 2021 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Declarations of Interest.

There were no additional declarations of interest.

5. Chairman's announcements.

The Chairman, Cllr Esler, announced that after what seemed a lifetime of lockdown, isolation and general doom and gloom, she planned to offer many events over the year, all celebrating getting back to normality with good food, socialising and conversation in different locations, showcasing some of the lesser-known attractions the District had to offer. Her first event being a Civic Service at St. Lukes on 17 July 2021, which she hoped many fellow councillors would attend. The planned events were mostly outdoors and would highlight some of the many less visited places in the District. For example, a visit to Coakham Farm in Crockham Hill. Truly an eco-farm of tomorrow, an eye opener as to what farming could and should be.

She also wished to thank and celebrate the District's remarkable volunteers, who were the reason the district had not only been able to weather the Pandemic, but the reason the district had been able to offer caring support of many kinds and in so many ways to residents. She was planning a thank you event at the end of September/October to honour and acknowledge the contribution to the District made by so very many.

She further announced that she would be hosting a Dinner Dance at the end of January 2022, at the Westerham Golf Club. The function room was large and so she was delighted to be able to ask SDC staff and officers if they would like to

attend and celebrate with her. She hoped many would be able to join her at what promised to be a fun night featuring Cllr Peter Fleming, as Auctioneer.

It was her intention to be able to support not just the usual voluntary bodies but also expand the role to encourage innovation and new business ventures within the District. In addition to supporting new and established business ventures she also wanted to raise the profile of the armed services organisations such as the Royal British Legion and the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) amongst others.

She also aimed to continue to lend her support to those activities that ensured and promoted physical fitness and mental health amongst the less abled, not so young, sometimes lonely, and sometimes those who were either ill or vulnerable. To name a few groups she had already been associated with, forget me not cafes, every step counts, various care homes, Age UK and new initiatives not yet started.

She wanted to mention the outstanding and tireless hard-working officers and staff at SDC who had coped with enormous pressures and a never ending workload during the last many months. Often working from home with children who needed home schooling and a partner who also needed space to work. She thanked everyone who made Sevenoaks District Council truly an example of how a Council should and could be.

She also gave an enormous vote of thanks to all at Democratic Services, who she thought were an incredible team, and thanked them for all their support and advice and what they would be doing for her during the year.

She thanked her wonderful husband and consort, Michael. Not only for his endless support but also for taking it upon himself to create the administrative backstop to her Chairmanship. They looked forward to attending most events together and to being a team.

It had been an enlightening experience to have supported Cllr Edwards-Winser as his Vice Chairman. She thanked him for including her in almost everything and his wife for her warm and friendly welcome and continuing support.

Finally, she announced that she would be particularly supporting the charity DAVSS. DAVSS stood for Domestic Abuse Voluntary Support Services, and was conceived and innovated by a group of three ex council officers with ongoing financial support from their various councils. She was proud to have DAVSS representatives present and looked forward to helping raise their profile and supporting them over the next year.

6. Returning Officer's report.

Resolved: That the Returning Officer's report be noted.

7. To agree the allocation of seats to political groups in accordance with the political balance rules.

Councillor Fleming moved, and Councillor Dickins seconded and it was unanimously

Resolved: That

- a) the political balance of the Council be noted as: 46 Conservative; 3 Liberal Democrat; 2 Hextable Independent; 1 Labour; 1 Independent; and 1 no party description;
- b) the following political groupings be noted: 46 Conservative Group; 3 Liberal Democrats Group; 3 Sevenoaks Independent Group, leaving 2 ungrouped; and
- c) the allocation of seats as set out in the Appendix to the report be agreed.

8. Scheme of delegations:

Councillor Fleming proposed and Councillor Dickins seconded that the delegations to Committees and Officers, and delegations of executive functions by the Leader of the Council be agreed, and appointments to the Cabinet and the composition of the Cabinet Portfolios be noted.

Resolved: That

- a) the delegations to Committees (Parts 3 - 12 of the Constitution) and the delegations to Officers (Part 13 of the Constitution) be agreed; and
- b) the delegations of executive functions and appointments to the Cabinet, be noted.

9. To appoint the Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Membership of Committees for the ensuing year.

Councillor Fleming proposed and Councillor Dickins seconded that the appointments of Chairmen, Vice Chairmen and Membership of Committees for the municipal year 2021/22 as detailed in the appendix to the report, be approved.

Resolved: That the appointments of Chairmen, Vice Chairmen and membership of Committees for 2021/22, be approved.

10. To confirm the calendar of ordinary meetings for the ensuing year.

Councillor Fleming moved and Councillor Dickins seconded that the Calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2021/22, be confirmed.

Resolved: That the Calendar of ordinary meetings for the municipal year 2021/22 be confirmed.

11. To appoint representatives on other organisations.

Councillor Fleming moved and Councillor Dickins seconded that the appointment of representatives on outside organisations for the municipal year 2021/22 be agreed.

Resolved: That the appointments to other organisations for the municipal year 2021/22 be confirmed.

12. To note the outgoing Chairman's Report.

Councillor Edwards-Winser presented his outgoing Chairman's report adding that he wanted to thank the Chief Executive and all SDC Officers, for all their hard work during the pandemic. He had only received thanks and congratulations from local residents for the services provided and asked that the Chief Executive ensure all Officers were aware how greatly appreciated they were from the issuing of business benefits to Direct Services and refuse collections.

The report was noted.

FAREWELL

The Chairman informed Members that it was the last Council meeting attended by Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services (Team Leader) as she would be leaving the Council after nearly ten years. On behalf of all Members, she thanked her for her excellent service and wished her well for the future.

Members showed their appreciation.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.30 PM

CHAIRMAN



**Item 6 (a) - Adoption of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans**

The attached report was considered by the Cabinet on 8 July 2021, and the relevant minute extract was therefore not available prior to printing of these papers and will follow when available.

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## ADOPTION OF AONB MANAGEMENT PLANS

Council - 8 July 2021

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

**Status:** For Decision

**Also considered by:**

- Development and Conservation Advisory Committee - 6 July 2021
- Cabinet - 8 July 2021

**Key Decision:** No

**This report supports the Key Aims of:** supporting the wellbeing of residents, businesses and visitors, and ensuring that Sevenoaks District remains a great place to live, work and visit.

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. Julia Thornton

**Contact Officer:** Helen French, Ext. 7357

**Recommendation to Development and Conservation Advisory Committee:**

To note the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan

**Recommendation to Cabinet:**

To recommend to Council to adopt the Kent Downs and High Weald AONB Management Plans.

**Recommendation to Council:**

To adopt the Kent Downs and High Weald AONB Management Plans.

**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 Kent Downs & High Weald AONB.

### Introduction and Background

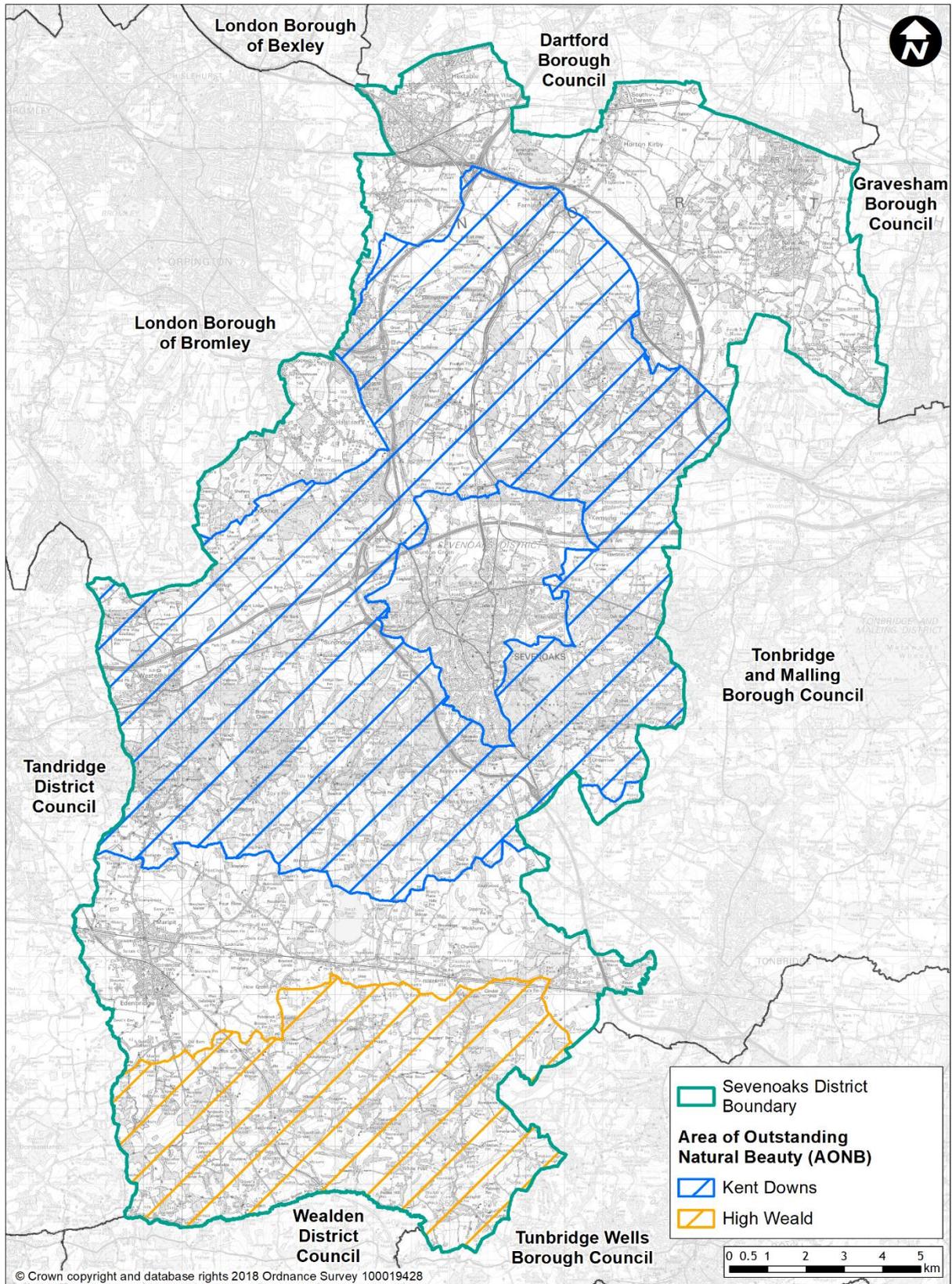
- 1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are national designations established by Natural England. The main purpose of an AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. The legal

## Agenda Item 6a

status and importance of AONBs is on a par with National Parks although they do not have the same administrative arrangements.

- 2 Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, Section 89, 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 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.
- 3 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. This report outlines the detail of the management plan for the Kent Downs AONB as the High Weald AONB Management Plan has already been agreed by Cabinet. The Management Plans are required to be adopted by Full Council.
- 4 Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) has a statutory responsibility with regards to the management of the AONBs. The CRoW Act 2000:
  - places a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to 'have regard' to the purposes of AONBs; and
  - 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.
- 5 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 landscape and scenic beauty. 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.
- 6 The guidance provided in the AONB Management Plans 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 LA1 of the Proposed Submission Version of the Local Plan. More widely, the use of the Management Plans can assist the Council in delivering the greener aims contained within the SDC Community Plan.

Map 1: Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Sevenoaks District



### The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan

- 7 The Kent Downs AONB was designated in 1968, covers 878sq.km (326 sq. miles) and stretches from the Surrey/Greater London border to the Strait of Dover. Sevenoaks District Council is a member of the Kent Downs Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership of Kent County Council and the 11 local authorities that cover the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and who each, according to their relative interest, jointly fund the JAC. Cllr Avril Hunter currently represents SDC on the JAC and Helen French is the lead officer.
- 8 The Kent Downs 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 AONBs through the conservation and enhancement of their landscape and supporting the social and economic wellbeing of communities
- 9 The plan sets out the key components, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB. It states:

*“The rich landscape of the Kent Downs AONB, is made up of landscape components with special characteristics and qualities which together distinguish it as a landscape of national and international importance and underpin its significance and natural beauty. Often the setting of the Kent Downs has great value and was a principle reason for the Kent Downs AONB designation. The identified components, characteristics and qualities are consistently recognised and valued by the public, individuals, institutions, organisations and experts alike; the Covid-19 pandemic brought a new spotlight on the importance of contact with nature and beauty and places the National Landscapes in a key position for societal and economic recovery.”*

- 10 The landscape components of Kent Downs have been identified as:
  - Dramatic landform and views; a distinctive landscape character
  - Biodiversity-rich habitats
  - Farmed landscape
  - Woodland and trees
  - A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage
  - The Heritage Coasts
  - Geology and natural resources
  - Tranquillity and remoteness

- 11 The following social and economic components are also included:
- Vibrant communities
  - Access, enjoyment and understanding
  - Public Perception of the Kent Downs
- 12 The Management Plan identifies the key characteristics of each component and how it contributes to the natural beauty of the landscape. It also sets out the main issues, opportunities and threats, and includes clear principles for each component. 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.

### Summary of Review Process

- 13 In 2004 a statutory plan for the Kent Downs was produced as a rolling 20 year strategy to be reviewed every 5 years. The current review covers the period 2021-2026 and was approved by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) of the AONB unit on 26th January 2021.
- 14 The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnership has worked closely with many individuals and organisations to prepare and produce this revision of the Management Plan. SDC has been involved in the development of the Plan through its membership of the JAC and through comments on the draft plans.
- 15 The review process for the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan has been delayed for a number of reasons; there was a question about the role of policies within the plan and consequently its consistency with the CRoW Act and subsequent guidance; this was resolved to the satisfaction of Natural England and the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee. Once a draft plan was agreed for consultation this was delayed by purdah for the 2019 General Election and subsequently the impact of the first Covid-19 lock down.
- 16 There has been careful and thorough engagement and consultation leading to the revised plan that is recommended for adoption. There has also been a statutory process which has included the production of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environment Report, a Sustainability Appraisal, an Equalities Impact Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment.

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- 17 A participation and engagement process has been carried out involving over 1000 individuals and organisations who have an interest and role to take in the Kent Downs AONB. The process has included:
- meetings with officers and elected members from the AONB Local Authorities (through the Joint Advisory Committee) with discussion and debate about the key issues and opportunities they wish to see addressed in this Plan, and the way that policies need to be presented.
  - An extensive engagement process linked to the celebration of the Kent Downs AONB 50th Anniversary.
  - A series of ‘expert opinion debate’ meetings, presentations and discussion with a wide range of other key stakeholders including public bodies and voluntary organisations, town and parish councils and farmers, to examine what is important and what are key issues to them, and solutions that the Management Plan can take forward.
- 18 A formal consultation process was supported by Kent County Council’s consultation team on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee. Copies of the draft third revision of the Management Plan were distributed to the Joint Advisory Committee and widely through the KCC consultation portal and contact lists which included relevant officers, parish councils, appropriate government agencies, public bodies, businesses, interest and amenity groups relevant to the Kent Downs as well as interested members of the public. Special efforts were made to contact and engage ‘hard to reach’ groups.
- 19 A good response was received with feedback and comments from over 140 individual respondents from the main groups of organisations and many members of the public. Summary findings included:
- 92% of respondents strongly agree or tend to agree with the overarching vision for the Kent Downs AONB in 2030
  - 96% of respondents strongly agree or tend to agree that the Management Plan identifies what makes the area distinctive and special
  - 85% of respondents strongly agree or tend to agree that the key social and economic components have been identified
- 20 Following the consultation a final draft plan was circulated to the Joint Advisory Committee in December 2020 and reviewed by the JAC on the 26th January 2021. The JAC recommended it for adoption.

### **Other options Considered and/or rejected**

The Council could consider not adopting the AONB Management Plans 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 AONB Management Plans have been subject to an EQIA which found that the plans are unlikely to any significant negative impacts on equality.

#### Net Zero 2030 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.

### **Conclusion**

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 Units to review the plans. 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.

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### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2021-2026

<https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/management-plan-2021-2026/>

Appendix B - High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

<http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/joint-advisory-committee-papers/2018-2019/2244-jac-approved-high-weald-aonb-management-plan-2019-2024/file.html>

### **Background Papers**

Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA)

Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Available at:

<https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/management-plan-2021-2026/>

**Richard Morris**

**Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services**

# Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

## Management Plan 2021-2026

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# Introduction

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is exactly what it says it is: a precious landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them.

AONBs represent only 18% of the land area of England and Wales. In this small proportion of the country it is the landscape that must come first. The Kent Downs is home to some of the most enchanting landscapes of southern Britain. Put simply, the purpose of this Management Plan is to set out the strategy to conserve and enhance the landscape and to bring forward the wider benefits to society that this work brings including supporting the sustainable development goals and enhancing health, well-being and creating the simple joy that beautiful landscapes can provide.

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnership has worked closely with many individuals and organisation to prepare and produce this revision of the Management Plan for this special place. We are grateful to the many people who have been involved in developing this Plan. The Management Plan provides the strategic framework energy, direction and commitment for the future of the landscape and through the previous versions of the Plan, much has been achieved. Indeed the Kent Downs AONB partnership is recognised nationally as one of the most effective at securing resources to support the management of this fine landscape.

At the same time the pressures on this particular landscape have grown once again, Kent is facing unprecedented levels of development and change including the challenges of the climate and biodiversity crises.

Our response to this greater pressure and to the difficult financial environment is not to retreat to seeking merely to protect the Kent Downs; instead, this Plan is more ambitious for the landscape and seeks wider, stronger and more collaborative and inclusive partnerships to meet its positive objectives. The ultimate goal of the Management Plan remains to ensure that the natural beauty of the landscape and vitality of the communities in and around the Kent Downs AONB are recognised, valued and strengthened well into the future. We seek to do this in a way which enhances health and well-being, is inclusive and engaging and supports much needed sustainable growth and development especially in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We encourage you to take part, to work with us to conserve and enhance this most beautiful and most threatened landscape.

Chris Reynolds  
Chairman

Nick Johannsen  
Director

# 1. The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

## Overview

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an exceptional landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so precious that they are safeguarded in the national interest. The Kent Downs is recognised nationally and internationally for its quality and character. This is a landscape of drama and intimacy; there is diversity and contrast within the AONB; there are ancient places as well as the bright white of a new cliff fall, the quiet of a woodland walk, dramatic hills and tranquil valleys, birdsong, breath-taking views, dazzling wild flowers, stars at night and the crashing of waves. The landscapes of the Downs have been shaped by the combination of nature and human hands, creating a place that has inspired art and science; retains remarkable historic places and patterns, internationally valued nature and is much valued by people. This is a distinctive, national landscape of outstanding quality and value.

### 1.1 A vision for the Kent Downs AONB in 2041

The first AONB Management Plan agreed a 20-year vision; while this 2004 vision remains fundamentally unchanged the context has changed markedly, with unprecedented growth predicted in Kent by the Kent Growth and Infrastructure Framework, adding around 25% to the population by 2031, just 10 years. The decline in biodiversity and impact of climate change which has been declared or recognised as an emergency by Parliament and most of the AONB partnership and there is a consensus that radical change is required by 2030 if we are to address these emergencies. The policy context that the AONB partnership is operating in is rapidly moving and in the light of this – while the partnership remains far sighted and ambitious for the AONB, with a long term overall vision for the landscape each section of the plan is re-focused order to spur impact and the achievement of the aims and principles of the plan in a 10 year period.

#### Our vision for the Kent Downs

In 2041... the qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB, the dramatic south-facing scarp, far-reaching views, secluded dry valleys, network of tiny lanes, isolated farmsteads, churches and oasts, orchards, dramatic cliffs, the ancient woodlands and delicate chalk grassland along with the ancient, remote and tranquil qualities, are valued, secured and strengthened.

The Kent Downs has become a landscape where change supports the AONB's distinctive and valued features. Nature recovery, responses to development pressures and climate change have enhanced the Kent Downs landscape. The Kent Downs is greener, healthier, wilder and more beautiful, it is recognised and valued, enjoyed and cherished and its future conservation and enhancement is a certainty.

Strong, assertive leadership from the AONB partnership along with positive partnerships with organisations, civil society, local people and land managers act together with wider publics to recover, conserve, enhance, enjoy and promote a nationally and internationally recognised and valued landscape.

## **1.2 The special components, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB**

The rich landscape of the Kent Downs AONB, is made up of landscape components with special characteristics and qualities which together distinguish it as a landscape of national and international importance and underpin its significance and natural beauty. Often the setting of the Kent Downs has great value and was a principle reason for the Kent Downs AONB designation. The identified components, characteristics and qualities are consistently recognised and valued by the public, individuals, institutions, organisations and experts alike; the Covid-19 pandemic brought a new spotlight on the importance of contact with nature and beauty and places the National Landscapes in a key position for societal and economic recovery.

The landscape components of Kent Downs have been identified as:

### **Dramatic landform and views; a distinctive landscape character**

The Kent Downs dramatic and diverse topography is based on the underlying geology. Key features comprise impressive south-facing steep slopes (scarps) of chalk and greensand; scalloped and hidden dry valleys, especially valued where they have a downland character; expansive plateaux; broad, steep-sided river valleys, and the dramatic, wild and iconic white cliffs and foreshore.

Breath-taking, long-distance panoramas are offered, often across open countryside, estuaries and the sea from the scarp, cliffs and plateaux. The dip slope dry valleys and river valleys provide more intimate and enclosed vistas.

The character of the Kent Downs is much valued; it arises from a distinctive, recognisable and pattern of elements in the landscape that make the Kent Downs particular and special as well as significant nationally and internationally.

### **Biodiversity-rich habitats**

The unique landscapes of the Kent Downs create and contain a rich and distinctive biodiversity of local and often national or international importance. This landscape provides a home to several species that are largely or wholly confined to the Kent Downs in Britain.

Habitats found in the Kent Downs include chalk grassland and chalk scrub; woodlands (ancient woodland, veteran trees and wood pasture), traditional orchards and cobnut platts, chalk cliffs and the foreshore, chalk streams and wet pasture, ponds and spring lines; heath and acid grassland. Hedgerows and trees outside woodlands are key features of the landscape and serve an important wildlife function along with networks of linear features of shaws, flower-rich field margins and road verges.

The wildlife of the farmed landscape is special in the Kent Downs. Many key habitats are farmed and the Downs support some of the most important arable weed communities in Britain.

### **Farmed landscape**

A long-established tradition of mixed farming has helped create and maintain the natural beauty of the Kent Downs. The pastoral scenery is a particularly valued part of the landscape. Farming covers around 64% of the AONB. Disconnected 'ribbons' of permanent grassland (shaves) are found along the steep scarp, valley sides, and on less-productive land having been created by grazing. Locally concentrated areas of orchards, cobnut plats (nut orchards), hop gardens other horticultural production are also present, their regular striate form can enhance the rise and fall of the land, increasingly widespread vineyards add to this ordered character.

### **Woodland and trees**

The Kent Downs is one of Britain's most wooded landscapes. Broadleaf and mixed woodland cover around 23% of the Kent Downs and frame the upper slopes of the scarp, dry valleys and plateaux tops. Almost 70% of the woodlands are ancient woodland meaning they have been continuously present at least since at least 1600; they support nationally important woodland plant and animal species. Large areas of sweet chestnut coppice are present throughout the Downs. Woodland is a much-valued component of the landscape, the sights, changing colours, smells and sounds adding to the perceptual qualities of the landscape.

Individual, hedgerow, fine and ancient trees outside woodlands are a most important, characteristic and sometimes dramatic element of the landscape.

### **A rich legacy of historic and cultural heritage**

Millennia of human activity have created an outstanding cultural inheritance and strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs. In the original designation the characteristic villages, churches and castles are particularly noted and the historic settlement pattern remains an important distinctive component of the AONB. There are the remains of Neolithic megalithic monuments, Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age hill-forts, Roman villas, roads and towns, medieval villages and hamlets focused on their churches, post-medieval stately homes with their parks and gardens and historic defence structures from Norman times to the twentieth century.

Fields of varying shapes and sizes and ancient wood-banks and hedges, set within networks of droveways and sunken lanes have produced a rich historic mosaic, which is the rural landscape of today. Architectural distinctiveness is ever present in the scattered villages and farmsteads and oast houses, barns and other characteristic agricultural buildings, farmsteads, churches and historic country houses. The diverse range of local materials used, which includes flint, chalk, ragstone, timber, brick and peg tile, contributes to the character, colour, tone and texture of the countryside.

The AONB landscape has long been an inspiration to artists, scientists and leaders, from Shakespeare to Samuel Palmer, Darwin to Churchill and Turner to Moore; it was Toys Hill, in the Kent Downs, 'that inspired Octavia Hill to found the National Trust'. Today contemporary and more diverse publics are drawing their own inspiration from this extraordinary place. The inspiration that the landscape of the Kent Downs offers is not

confined to the influential and famous, we know that a wide variety of people greatly value this place for many of the same reasons.

### **The Heritage Coasts**

The Heritage Coasts either side of Dover, include the shoreline, marine flora and fauna cliffs, heritage features and adjacent downland. The White Cliffs form part of our national identity and display internationally important geological exposures, they form a soaring land and seascape of vast horizons of sea and sky extending westwards to the subtle crumbling Greensand and Clay cliffs of Folkestone.

The wildlife of the Heritage Coasts is internationally important, the clifftops consisting of nationally important chalk grassland and scrub, the cliff-faces supporting important breeding sea bird colonies including Fulmars, Rock Pipits, Lesser-black backed Gulls and the only Kent population of Kittiwakes. Seabirds wheeling high in the sky connect the sea and sky.

### **Geology and natural resources**

The imposing landform and special characteristics of the Kent Downs is underpinned by its geology. This is also the basis for the considerable natural capital and natural resources which benefit society. These include the soils which support an important farming sector and can sequester carbon; soil represent and is important biodiversity resource in its own right. The water and the water resources which support rivers teeming with wildlife and offering enchanting landscapes. Hidden below the chalk is a significant aquifer providing 75% of Kent's drinking water and feeding the much-valued chalk streams of the Downs. Fresh, clean air is experienced across the AONB and the vegetation patterns of the Downs are effective at removing air pollution.

### **Tranquillity and remoteness**

Much of the AONB provides surprisingly tranquil and remote countryside – offering dark night skies, space, beauty and peace. Simply seeing a natural landscape, hearing birdsong, seeing and hearing the sea, watching stars at night or 'bathing' in woodland are important perceptual qualities of the AONB.

## **2. Quality of life in the Kent Downs**

While not defined as characteristics and qualities of the landscape, the social and economic components of the Kent Downs are vital to the communities of Kent, the Kent Downs and beyond and key to its future conservation and enhancement.

### **Vibrant communities**

The Kent Downs is a living, working landscape shaped and managed by people. The most up to date population estimate as shows a total population of 96,000. While changing in nature, many of the Kent Downs communities are strong and vibrant, assertively seeking to conserve and enhance the place that they live in. Surrounding the AONB are large, rapidly growing and increasingly diverse urban communities, the Kent Downs offer a greatly valued landscape of peace, beauty and space to breath.

### Access, enjoyment and understanding

The Kent Downs is an easily accessible and charming landscape well provided with access opportunities; well over 1 million people live within a kilometre of the AONB boundary. There is considerable demand for access and recreation in the Kent Downs and providing this in a way which supports the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB is an increasingly important but challenging task; many site managers are reporting ‘over-visiting’ with sites being at and beyond their capacity on many occasions.

The AONB provides a public rights of way network four times as dense as the national average and there is a high relative density of bridleways and byways. Active user groups help to promote the sustainable management and use of the AONB for quiet countryside recreation.

Access to the Kent Downs AONB particularly through walking, cycling and riding provide demonstrable benefits to health and well-being at the same time visiting can support the local economy and services.

Improving the understanding and enjoyment of the AONB is an important task, without this the landscape may not be fully recognised, valued or enjoyed and its future conservation and enhancement may not be assured.

### Public Perception of the Kent Downs

In the preparation of the 2004 Management Plan and its subsequent reviews, comments and engagement have been sought from many participants including local authorities, stakeholders, local residents and visitors to the AONB. A key issue was to confirm what is most valued about the Kent Downs and what are the most important related issues and priorities in the view of respondents. The main consultation method used for the 2004 plan was a written questionnaire in the Kent Downs newspaper, *The Orchid*. Respondents could also complete an online questionnaire.

For this 2019/20 review the AONB Unit used the ‘Head for the Hills’ 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Kent Downs AONB to reach a wider audience. Nearly 1000 individuals and organisations participated and, as in previous consultations, the special characteristics and qualities that formed the basis of the original AONB designation are still those most valued by people today.

*Nb in final printed version this table will be presented in order of importance as per 2019 survey*

<b>Most important components of natural beauty in the Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2019</b>
Chalk Downland	59%	74%	71%	70%
Woodland	52%	43%	41%	48%
Landform & Geology	45%	41%	34%	34%
Ancient Lanes and Paths	33%	47%	40%	45%
Orchards/Cobnut Platts	21%	17%	14%	12%
River Valleys	20%	21%	19%	13%
Hedgerows	20%	19%	18%	15%
Historic Settlements	17%	25%	24%	23%

Mixed Farmland	14%	17%	12%	14%
Dry Valleys	7%	7%	8%	11%
Historic Parklands	6%	9%	7%	9%
<b>Most valued features of the Kent Downs AONB</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2019</b>
Scenery and Views	86%	83%	79%	74%
Wildlife	49%	48%	39%	58%
Peace and Quiet	46%	49%	39%	45%
Outdoor Recreation	33%	10%	12%	16%
Villages and Village Life	32%	32%	29%	21%
Historic Buildings	24%	17%	14%	13%
Dark Skies	n/a	6%	7%	12%
Amenities	10%	8%	7%	4%
Available Local Produce	7%	8%	5%	6%
Visitor Attractions	n/a	n/a	7%	4%
PROW Network	n/a	41%	45%	47%
Locally Distinct Highways	n/a	1%	3%	2%
<b>Priorities for Action</b>				
Prevention of Illegal Activities	56%	77%	71%	62%
Conserving Wildlife	54%	63%	59%	69%
Conserving Views and Scenic Beauty	50%	55%	56%	53%
Conserving Tranquillity	38%	36%	43%	59%
Preventing Loss of Historic Buildings	8%	22%	20%	22%
Management of Equine Land Use	n/a	8%	5%	4%
Information about Access to Countryside	2%	10%	15%	8%
Information on Features of AONB Landscape	12%	8%	2%	7%
More organised events	9%	6%	8%	5%
Research and Response to Climate Change	n/a	12%	7%	12%
Access	n/a	n/a	4%	n/a
<b>Action Needed to Improve Enjoyment of AONB</b>				
Encourage farmers to use more environmentally friendly techniques	45%	39%	44%	52%
Improve Sustainable Transport	23%	39%	38%	32%
Ensure Peace and Quiet	29%	64%	50%	50%
Greater Emphasis on Development Control	27%	34%	43%	39%
Getting Out and About	23%	14%	13%	15%
Better Information on Wildlife in Area	22%	9%	10%	13%
More Information on Where to Go in AONB	20%	17%	21%	17%
Improve or Increase Visitor Facilities	16%	17%	15%	12%
More Information on Local Produce	11%	11%	12%	9%
Highways Management that respects sensitivity of AONB	n/a	23%	22%	27%
Control of Light Pollution to Protect Dark Night	n/a	19%	18%	26%

Skies				
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Figure 1.1 'Have Your Say' Survey Results 2003-2019

In addition to the AONB Survey, the Kent Downs AONB partnership participates in the Kent Environment Strategy Public Perception Survey (2018) which demonstrates that 97% of Kent respondents felt that the countryside was either important or very important to them with over 80% using the countryside at least once a fortnight; for many people walking, benefits to their children, loving nature were important motivators, the most important elements of the Kent countryside were woodlands, rivers and lakes, undeveloped coast, low lying hills and wildflower grasslands, all important components of the Kent Downs AONB.

## 2. The Management of the Kent Downs AONB

### Our vision for the management of the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... the Kent Downs AONB is widely recognised and greatly valued. It is a landscape cherished and held in the highest esteem by those who visit, live and work there and nearby as well as by those who influence its future. Residents and visitors know where the AONB is and they understand its character and qualities and support and help deliver the purposes of its designation. The Kent Downs AONB partnership is acknowledged, supported, funded and equipped to be the main and an influential and effective advocate, convenor and champion for the AONB. A diverse range of individuals and organisations are delivering positive action on the ground and are collaboratively engaged in the partnership and management planning. The AONB partnership is engaging and open about the conservation and management of the AONB.

#### 2.1 The Kent Downs in context

##### 2.1.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland cover approximately 1/8th of the land surface. In England 33 AONBs amount to 15% of the total land area. They vary greatly in landscape character and size ranging from the smallest, the Isles of Scilly (16sq. km) to the largest, the Cotswolds (2,038 sq. km). In Kent, the High Weald and Kent Downs AONB cover around a third of the county's land area.

The distinctive character and natural beauty of AONBs make them some of the most special and cherished places in Britain. AONBs are living, working landscapes that contribute some £16bn every year to the national economy. Although home to less than half a million people (under 2% of England's population), over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of an AONB and at least 170 million people visit English AONBs every year, spending in excess of £2bn.

Together with National Parks, AONBs represent our most outstanding landscapes; unique and irreplaceable national assets, each with such distinctive character and natural beauty that they are recognised internationally as part of the global protected areas family to be managed in the interest of everyone – local residents, businesses, visitors, and the wider public - and protected for future generations.



Figure 2.1 National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England

### 2.1.2 International recognition

Areas of Outstanding National Beauty are recognised and classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Along with National Parks and Heritage Coasts the AONBs in England and Wales fall into Category V – Protected Landscapes/ Seascapes. These are defined 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 IUCN primary objective for Category V Protected Landscapes is ‘to protect and sustain important landscapes/seascapes and the associated nature conservation and other values created by interactions with humans through traditional management practices.’

Until recently, the AONB designation was regarded (together with that of UK National Parks) as an anomaly in the international protected area system which prioritised ‘naturalness’ as a criterion of value. In the last quarter-century, however they have come to be recognised, particularly within Europe, as leaders in the move towards area-based sustainable development. AONBs, in particular, as ‘working’ landscapes, lead the way in pioneering new approaches to integrated countryside management based on voluntary partnerships engaging and working with local communities to secure common goals.

### 2.1.3 National legislation

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 legislated for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. Their purpose was to be similar – to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The Countryside Commission further defined the purpose of AONB designation in a statement of 1991.

Purpose of AONB designation...

‘...is primarily to conserve and enhance natural beauty’.

‘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.’

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

Various Acts progressively strengthened the legal framework for AONBs; the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, revised and partially replaced the AONB provisions of the 1949 Act, including a requirement that a management plan be prepared for each AONB and reaffirms the primary purpose (Section 82). In the case of the Kent Downs AONB (and others covered by more than one local authority), the management plan must be prepared by the local authorities acting jointly, it is the AONB Unit which takes forward this work with and for the Local Authorities.

Four common national aims unite AONBs partnerships and management plans:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK’s AONBs ensuring they meet the challenges of the future.

- Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Promote public understanding and enjoyment of AONB landscapes and encourage people to conserve and enhance them.
- Value, sustain and promote the benefits that AONBs provide for society including clean air and water, food and carbon storage.

### 2.1.4 The Kent Downs AONB

The Kent Downs AONB is a nationally important landscape and one of the most enchanting parts of southern England. The AONB was designated in July 1968; it covers 878sq.km (326 sq. miles) stretching from the Surrey/Greater London border to the Strait of Dover. Aside from a small area within the London Borough of Bromley, the AONB lies wholly within the county of Kent and covers around 23% of the total land area of the county. It rises to an altitude of 250m above sea level at its highest point at Toy's Hill south of Sevenoaks, and is crossed in three places by the river valleys of the Darent, the Medway and the Stour, all flowing northwards.

The Kent Downs are the eastern half of the North Downs ridge of chalk stretching from Farnham in Surrey to the English Channel. The western half of the chalk ridge lies within the Surrey Hills AONB, which adjoins the Kent Downs. The same ridge of chalk reappears on the French side of the Channel, where it lies within the Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d'Opale. In Kent, the North Downs, along with part of the Greensand Ridge and Lympne Escarpment form the Kent Downs AONB.

The Kent Downs is the eighth largest AONB in England and Wales, and administratively one of the most complex falling within twelve local authorities and lying partly or wholly within 137 parish council boundaries.

When the Kent Downs were confirmed as an AONB, the overall remarks of the designation committee were summarised as:

“The scarp slope and dry valleys of the Kent Downs are the main target for designation, particularly where they retain a downland character, that woodlands are highly valued throughout the designated area and particularly on the scarp slope and dry valley sides, and that other qualities of note are views from the escarpment, pastoral scenery, parklands, villages, churches and castles.”

The boundary of the Kent Downs AONB was drawn over 50 years ago, over time a variety of requests to extend the boundary have been submitted but the view of the Joint Advisory Committee has been to hold off from formally promoting boundary reviews until the process for extension has been simplified, despite the merits of extension (the body currently responsible for designation and boundary reviews is Natural England). Simplifying boundary extensions is a recommendation of the Government's Landscape Review which might create the opportunity to extend the AONB in the future (the Review also recommends a new National Landscape Service which would take responsibility for the designation process) .

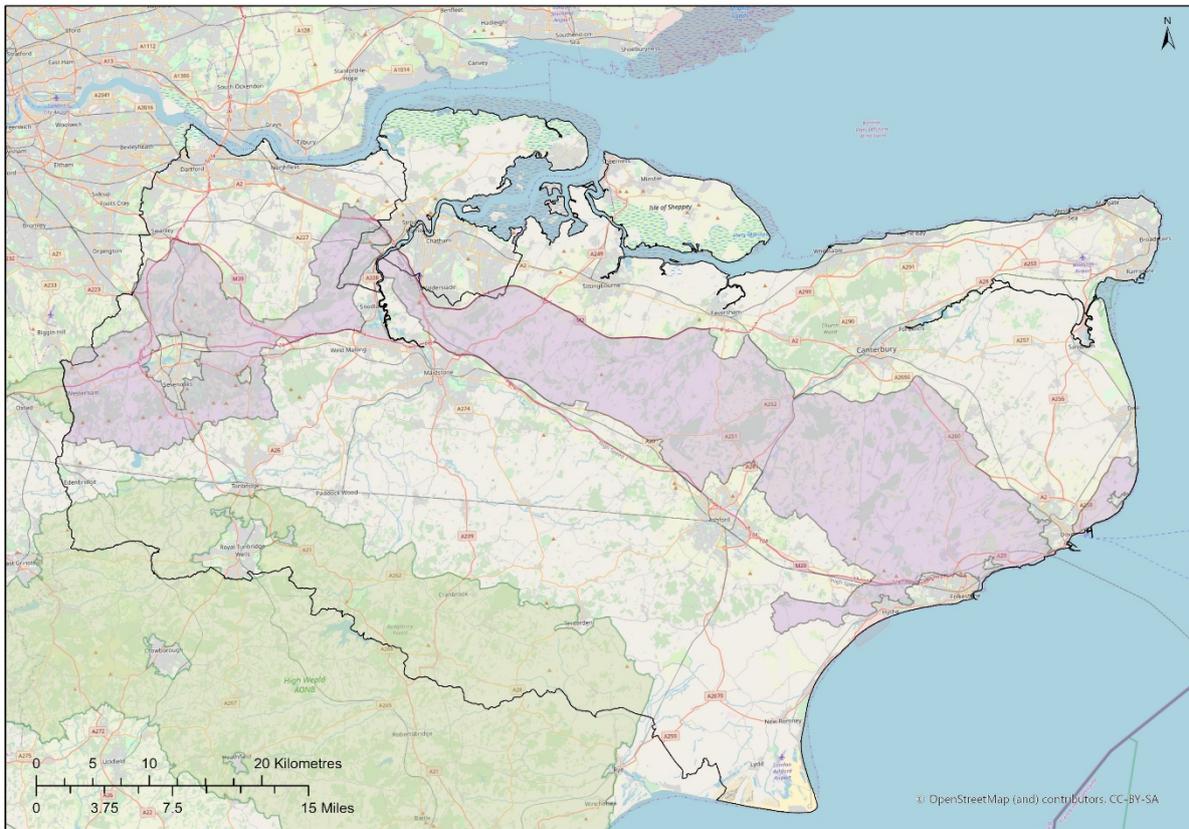


Figure 2.2 Kent Downs AONB Boundary

### 2.1.5 Definition of natural beauty and landscape

The term ‘natural beauty’ remains at the heart of the purpose of AONB designation. Part IV of the 2000 Act provides the following definition of natural beauty:

“Any reference in this Part to the conservation of the natural beauty of an area includes a reference to the conservation of its flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features”.  
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, section 92.

The term ‘natural beauty’ was always intended to embrace more than just the visual or scenic elements of the landscape and the definition has been updated and broadened to include historic and cultural heritage. Government agency guidance specifically on AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition:

“Natural beauty is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries.”

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

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).’

At the core of the secondary purpose of AONB designation is the understanding that the landscape is not just scenery, but it is the result of the historic and on-going interaction between people and place. Social and economic activity that contributes to the landscape and natural beauty is fundamental to shaping the future of the AONB.

The important link between people and place is emphasised in the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe) where landscape is defined as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. The convention, ratified by the UK in 2006, also recognises that “the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere; in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas”.

## 2.2 Management planning for AONBs

In recognition of the national and international importance of AONB landscapes the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 required relevant Local Authorities to jointly prepare, publish and subsequently review a Management Plan. It is required that the Plan (as a whole) formulates their policy for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. The Management Plan is essentially about conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB, the statutory purpose of the designation, but it is widely scoped partly because of the complexities of what is included in ‘landscape’ and ‘natural beauty’ and also to respond to the wide variety of functions Local Authorities are responsible for.

Increasingly the Management Plan is designed to enhance the beauty and character as well as the quality of the landscape, the essential services the landscape provides to society and should be seen as a part of a suite of Management Plans for all of the National Landscapes which together make up a strategic resource for the nation.

### 2.2.1 The role of this management plan revision

The first statutory Kent Downs AONB Management Plan was adopted in April 2004. This is the third revision. In their formal observations the Countryside Agency and subsequently Natural England recognised the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and its early reviews as representing ‘exemplary’ and ‘best practice’.

This revised Management Plan is based on the original plan and its subsequent revisions. It justifies and details the aims and principles for the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB. It has been prepared by the Kent Downs AONB Unit and Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for, and on behalf of, the twelve local authorities that have land within the Kent Downs, thus fulfilling part of their statutory obligations.

The public consultation on this plan was extensive and took place during the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. Feedback from businesses, individuals and organisations was generally that the experience of the Pandemic made the vision aims and policies of the AONB Management Plan ever more important and urgent.

## 2.2.2 The status and role of management plan principles

The overarching aim of this Management Plan is to achieve the purpose of AONB designation.

The scope of the CRoW Act was wide for AONB Management Plans requiring policy both for the management of the AONB and for the Local Authorities to carry out their many functions. As part of this review process the Joint Advisory Committee has recommended that the approach of the plan is altered to recognise that the Management Plan as a whole represents their Policy (to be consistent with the CROW Act 2000 and PPGs). With this in mind what were described as 'Policies' in previous versions of the plan are now described as 'Principles'; some previous Policies have been removed so as not to repeat national policy.

The Management Plan does not and cannot formulate land use planning policies but provides evidence to assist in the policy and decision-making process in planning. The status of the Management Plan combined with the thorough process of Management Plan making and review means that the AONB Management Plan is a material consideration in planning matters and should be afforded weight in decisions. The Planning Practice Guidance confirms this, stating that 'AONB Management Plans may contain information which is relevant when preparing plan policies, or which is a material consideration when assessing planning applications'.

## 2.2.3 A Duty of Regard

The strengthened status of AONBs through the CRoW Act has brought commitments from a wide range of organisations – including those who are not directly involved in the AONB partnership. Section 85, Part IV of the CRoW Act requires all public bodies, statutory undertakers and relevant authorities to demonstrate that they have taken account of the purposes of the AONB in their decision making.

The Kent Downs AONB partnership has prepared a series of guidance documents, which support the Management Plan and inform and provide practical ways for organisations and individuals to implement their Duty of Regard.

In support of the Duty several Public Bodies and Statutory undertakers have either signed Joint Accords or have developed practical projects to deliver the conservation and enhancement of Natural Beauty on the ground. Notable amongst these are the Forestry Commission, Natural England and UK Power Networks.

## 2.2.4 Who is the plan for?

First and foremost, the Management Plan belongs to the AONB local authorities – the plan provides the vision, aims and principles that formulates their policy for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it.

Second, this Management Plan is for all the government agencies, statutory undertakers, utilities and public bodies which have a 'duty of regard' (under S85 of the CRoW Act 2000)

for the purposes of the AONB designation in their functions and operations. All public bodies and relevant authorities have to demonstrate that they have taken into account the purposes of the AONB designation in all their functions within the area. This Management Plan will inform, guide and influence that process.

Finally, and importantly, this is a plan for everyone who cares for, manages or whose work might affect the AONB as well as for those who live, work or play in the Kent Downs. The impact and difference that can be made by farmers, land managers, individuals, countryside management organisations, and community and voluntary organisations, when viewed as a whole is critical to the future of the Kent Downs. We intend that this Management Plan is practical and relevant to a wide and diverse range of individuals and organisations, and that it will help advise and influence activities, decisions and the perception people have of the Kent Downs.

### 3. The role of the Kent Downs AONB partnership

Within an area as large and varied as the Kent Downs, there are many hundreds of individuals and organisations which have a role in managing the landscape, supporting local business and communities and enabling quiet recreation.

Together the Kent Downs AONB partnership plays a central, pivotal and convening role in realising the strategic vision for the Kent Downs AONB and overseeing the Management Plan.

**The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)** for the Kent Downs AONB was established in July 1997 and is at the heart of the partnership. JAC membership includes the twelve local authorities who have joint responsibility to prepare and review the Management Plan, namely: Ashford, Bromley, Canterbury, Dover, Gravesham, Kent, Maidstone, Medway, Sevenoaks, Folkestone and Hythe, Swale and Tonbridge & Malling; as well as Natural England. Additional advisory members are the Environment Agency, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), the National Farmers Union (NFU), Visit Kent, The Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK).

**An Executive** of JAC representatives and some outside advisors has assisted in steering the work of the Kent Downs AONB Unit. At a much larger scale, an occasional Kent Downs Forum is held for a wider audience, to discuss current issues and gain input and advice.

**The AONB Unit** is employed through and hosted by Kent County Council and works on behalf of Government and the JAC to carry out the preparation and review of the Management Plan, to advocate its vision, aims and principles and work in collaborative partnerships to deliver a range of actions described in the Action Plan.

The objective of the JAC is to ensure that the AONB Unit is effective, efficient and authoritative, recognised and valued by partners and policy makers as a professional body securing the purposes of the designation, delivering significant added value and enabling action on the ground.

The approach of the AONB Unit is to:

- Build knowledge and partnerships in order to inform and realise the ambitions of the

Management Plan.

- Deliver great value to partners, providing authoritative advocacy, advice and support, catalysing activity amongst existing organisations and leading where appropriate.
- Carry out a timely, inclusive and authoritative review of the AONB Management Plan on behalf of Local Authorities.
- Lead on the delivery of the AONB Management Plan and generate partnerships and collaboration in support.
- Build capacity, motivation and professionalism and retains expertise and high quality, highly motivated staff.
- Actively seek finance, partnerships and other resources to support the delivery of the Management Plan.

In doing this the Unit retains the highest standards of business management and relates positively and openly with partner organisations, individuals, businesses and civil society.

Defra and local authority partners provide essential funding to support the AONB Unit to enable it to fulfil its role in the wider AONB partnership.

**Together the JAC, its Executive and the Unit form the Kent Downs AONB partnership.**

The Government's **Landscape Review** made several recommendations about the future governance, funding and staffing arrangements for both AONBs and National Parks, these seek to ensure that AONBs in particular had sufficient resources to meet the objectives of the designation, improve efficiency and collaboration, strengthen participation and inclusion and enhance delivery. In addition the impact of the Covid-19 have been substantial on the health and wellbeing of society as well as the economy and has placed a new focus on the role of the AONB in recovery. In the light of the findings of the Landscape Review and the need to support the recovery from Covid-19 pandemic it is expected that the behaviours, values and culture of the AONB partnership, its governance and the funding arrangements of the Kent Downs AONB will be reviewed in the plan period.

*'Today, we have a system [in England] which is fragmented, sometimes marginalised and often misunderstood. Indeed it is not really a system at all, but 10 National Parks, who do not always work together effectively, and an entirely separate network of 34 less powerful Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). They have different purposes from National Parks, vastly less money, but sometimes greater pressures; and yet cover areas that are more visited, sometimes more biodiverse and are just as beautiful.'*

### **The AONB partnership's role in planning policy and decisions**

Planning and development issues have a fundamental impact on the statutory purposes of AONB designation; until the CRoW Act 2000, the land use planning system was the main mechanism by which AONBs were protected, conserved and enhanced.

Within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework and planning legislation, the Kent Downs AONB partnership has agreed to take on a limited land use planning role, in summary this is to:

- Provide design guidance in partnership with AONB Local Authorities.
- Comment on forward/strategic planning issues e.g. Local Plans.
- Involvement in development management only in exceptional circumstances, e.g. in terms of scale and precedence.
- Provide planning advice/comments on development management in other cases at the request of a Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory member and /or local authority Planning Officers and Government.

This Management Plan is required by the legislation to ‘formulate the local authority policy for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it’. The planning function of Local Authorities is a critical way to conserve and enhance the Kent Downs.

### **Delivering in partnership and developing wider collaboration**

Much that has been achieved since the publication of the first Kent Downs Management Plan has been through the many partners who work on the ground in the AONB. The Kent Downs AONB partnership is recognised nationally as one of the most effective at securing activity and resources in support of the Management Plan and its principles; this revision recognises that even greater benefit could be generated through larger scale and more broadly scoped collaborative partnerships working across sectors, seeking greater inclusion and diversity and at a landscape scale, including working beyond the boundary of the Kent Downs, for example for landscape scale conservation, projects and programmes which benefit populations outside the AONB and for the Nature Recovery Network.

## **4 The management of the Kent Downs AONB – issues opportunities and threats**

The Governments Landscape Review has provided an overarching evidence-based assessment of the issues opportunities and threats affecting the management of our National Landscapes, they are recognised and supported by the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee and so this plan does not repeat them here. The local response to the Review will be framed by the vision, aims and principles of this plan.

## **5 The management of the Kent Downs AONB - aims**

A landscape in which:

1. In line with the findings and recommendations of the Government’s Landscape Review the partnership leading the conservation and enhancement of the landscapes of the Kent Downs is effective and influential, properly resourced, suitably representative and has powers which are fit for purpose.
2. The AONB partnership provides leadership and direction for the future conservation and enhancement of the AONB within the context of the Kent Downs AONB

Management Plan and is open to the views of all people, is adaptive and flexible to change.

3. The AONB partnership provides leadership and direction for the future conservation and enhancement of the AONB within the context of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.

## 6 The management of the Kent Downs AONB - principles

MPP1 The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and its supporting documents, supported by a strong partnership approach, will be pursued as the primary means to develop, co-ordinate and promote the management, conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB.

MPP2 The Kent Downs AONB is a material consideration in plan making and decision taking, and so local authorities will give a high priority to the AONB Management Plan vision, aims, principles and actions in Local Plans, development management decisions, planning enforcement cases and in taking forward their other relevant functions.

MPP 3 The development of strong, diverse working partnerships and landscape scale collaborations to implement the vision, aims and principles of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan will be pursued.

MPP4 Collaborative working partnerships and initiatives with other National Landscapes and the implementation of the findings of The Landscape Review will be pursued.

MPP5 The involvement and engagement of diverse interest groups in decisions about and affecting the Kent Downs AONB future will be pursued.

MPP6 The preparation and review of the Management Plan, advocacy of its vision, aims and principles and work in partnership to deliver the actions described will be pursued through a properly resourced Kent Downs AONB Unit supported technically and financially by the local authorities.

## 3. Sustainable Development

### Our vision for sustainable development in the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031 ... the principles and goals of sustainable development are at the heart of the management of the Kent Downs. Change reinforces and enhances the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs and benefits its communities and economy. While the surrounding urban areas have expanded considerably, innovative management techniques and policy approaches successfully address the pressure and opportunities presented by growth to the landscapes of the AONB. Through landscape scale restoration, conservation and enhancement the Kent Downs has a key role in mitigating and balancing any negative environmental impacts of the significant growth that Kent has (and continues to) experience.

The impacts of climate change are being felt but the mitigation and adaptive responses taken are landscape led, effective and carefully chosen to enhance the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the landscape rather than detracting from them. The natural capital and ecosystems service provision of the Kent Downs has been enhanced. Important areas of tranquillity have been identified, protected and expanded and provide 'oases of calm'.

The Kent Downs landscape and partnership take an important and appropriate role in the economic and societal recovery from Covid-19.

#### 3.1 Overview

Achieving sustainable development is an overarching principle for much national and international policy. The UN General Assembly defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

##### 3.1.1 The Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a historic global agreement to eradicate extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice and leave no one behind. Agreed by world leaders at the UN in 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs are universal with all signatories expected to contribute to them internationally and deliver them domestically. This Management Plan is underpinned by and contributes towards delivery of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals; the Plan contributes locally to some of the ways that the UK Government is supporting the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals domestically.

##### 3.1.2 Sustainable Development in the Kent Downs AONB

Sustainable development has economic, social and environmental dimensions. In the context of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, sustainability should be judged widely and in accordance with the sustainable development goals but with a focus on

the purposes of the AONB designation.

Applying this to the local circumstances of the Kent Downs, particular attention should be given to the special characteristics and qualities of the area and supporting a landscape led approach. These in turn help to apply to a variety of plans, strategies and policy frameworks so that proposals in or affecting the AONB can be judged. The protection afforded to the AONB should be commensurate with the national and international status of the area and give appropriate weight to the AONB's importance.

To assist this process, this management plan identifies the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs landscape and provides an updated description of the landscape character of the area. In this context, key issues, threats and opportunities are identified along with a vision, aims and principles which respond to them. Strategic issues are identified in this section of the plan these are: over-arching 'guiding themes' (3.2) arising from the purposes of designation the context of the natural capital approach and the need to respond to climate change and ecological loss, and 'recurrent themes' (3.3) which arise frequently across the topics in this plan. These themes will be considered first when considering projects, proposals, policies and local authority functions, before turning to specific sections later in the management plan. In the absence of local criteria-based policies, the intention is that this management plan's vision, aims and principles will provide helpful evidence to assist with decision making.

### 3.1.3 Unprecedented growth and development pressures

The position of the Kent Downs, close to London, mainland Europe, major urban centres and growth areas means that the Kent Downs AONB, perhaps more than any other of Britain's protected landscapes – AONBs, Heritage Coasts or National Parks, has experienced and is experiencing severe development pressure. Evidence from a Defra commissioned review of growth and development in AONBs carried forward by Prof. Bibby (University of Sheffield) shows the Kent Downs AONB as being an 'outlier' in the amount of growth it has accommodated *'The Kent Downs AONB stands out as an area which has experienced major, but expected, change, showing a rate of urban growth of almost 10%.pa, with the urban area spreading by 14 ha over the decade'* (2014 unpublished) the population of the Kent Downs has increased by 3% in the previous plan period.

The Kent Growth and Infrastructure Framework (2018 update) prepared by a wide partnership of Local Authorities at the County level has identified an unprecedented level of planned growth in Kent in the period 2011 to 2031, this includes a 24% growth in the number of homes (additional 178,600) and a 23% growth in the number of people (additional 396,300); there is an increase of 21% of jobs (additional 170,300) planned. It should be noted that the Government's 'standard method' which uses a formula to identify the minimum number of homes expected to be planned for, increases Kent and Medway's housing need, compared to the Kent Growth and Infrastructure framework.

It is the scale and pace of change which was the primary reason that the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee decided to shorten the immediate vision period of the AONB Management Plan from 20 to 10 years; so that the plan responds effectively to the immediate issues of growth, biodiversity loss and climate change.

The issues of growth, urbanisation and development present a variety of opportunities and threats. New transportation infrastructure including strategic trans-European highways, High Speed Rail, the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, communications infrastructure and

housing, as well as the pressures of intensive agriculture and forestry, increased recreational use and illegal activities such as fly tipping and off road driving, loss of tranquillity, landscape character and qualities can detract significantly from this important landscape.

An important role of the management plan is to achieve the management and mitigation of the detracting pressures on the landscape and to do so with ambition and at a scale to match the threat – good examples include the creation of land bridges which can mitigate the very significant negative impacts on the AONB from major roads and provided ecological connections. At the same time the approach of the Management Plan is to seek a positive exchange of goods and services between the Kent Downs and the surrounding urban areas. Despite the intense pressure experienced in the Kent Downs, it is still true that the AONB has largely retained its character and qualities. Community based, focused projects have shown the real benefit of sustainable development approaches.

The development pressures experienced in the Kent Downs AONB are specifically referenced in the Government’s Landscape Review describing the Kent Downs (and High Weald) as:

*‘especially large AONBs which cross multiple local authority boundaries and under particular development pressure,’*

### 3.1.4 Cumulative Change

Against this backdrop of large-scale development, there is continual pressure for small-scale development and change creating a cumulative impact on the special character and qualities of the AONB. The landscape character assessment review of the Kent Downs continually picked up small scale poorly designed or inappropriately located, housing development, detracting influences from recreational land management, such as golf courses, equine facilities and visitor attractions, poor boundary treatments, badly designed highways, water and telecoms infrastructure, each individually small impact taken cumulatively is progressively diminishing the qualities and character of the AONB at a strategic scale. At the same time the cumulative impact of careful enhancements made through individual agri-environment schemes, conservation projects and carefully judged development can cumulatively conserve and enhance the landscape.

### 3.1.5 The London City Region

The Kent Downs AONB Unit led a group of organisations from 12 National Landscapes operating in the London City Region to develop a 25 year vision. The vision recognises the opportunities and threats generated by the area’s predicted population growth from 12 – 20m in the period 2017 to 2042. The overall aim is to collaborate to establish London and the South East as the World’s Greenest City Region, where the Protected Landscapes are treasured and the population mobilised to enjoy and care for these natural environments.

A 7 point plan of goals was created; this management plan seeks to deliver against those goals at the local level.

## 3.2 Guiding themes

Some of the sustainability issues to be addressed in the Kent Downs AONB are of a high-level, over-arching nature which underpin much of the quality as well as character and beauty of the landscape which should inform actions and decisions in the area generally.

These are natural beauty (outlined in section 1.2.1), natural capital and the provision of ecosystems services, climate change, ecological loss and nature recovery, a landscape led approach, net gain and green infrastructure provision.

### **Natural capital and the provision of resilient ecosystem services**

This plan is strongly informed by a natural capital approach; natural capital includes the air, water, soil and ecosystems that support all forms of life, the various sections of the plan contribute, where appropriate, to supporting the natural capital goals of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan: clean air, clean and plentiful water, thriving plants and wildlife, reducing environmental risk, using resources more sustainably, managing environmental pressures, mitigating and adapting to climate change, minimising waste, enhancing biosecurity and, most particularly, enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

The UK government has repeatedly emphasised the importance of 'natural capital'. Natural capital offers a range of goods and services that society benefits from, called ecosystem services. These services range from crop pollination soil fertility maintenance, waste sinks to climate and water regulation. Ultimately all human life depends on ecosystem services for clean air, clean water and food production. Services have been grouped into four categories:

- Supporting services, such as nutrient cycling, oxygen production and soil formation. These underpin the provision of the other 'service' categories.
- Provisioning services, such as food, fibre, fuel and water.
- Regulating services, such as climate regulation, water purification and flood protection.
- Cultural services, such as education, recreation, and aesthetic value including beauty.

The ecosystems services of the Kent Downs are identified in Natural England's National Character Assessment for the North Downs and Wealden Greensand and are therefore not repeated here. The Kent Nature Partnership is in the process of generating a high level Natural Capital Account for Kent including the Kent Downs AONB. The Management Plan, taken as a whole, seeks to secure, conserve, enhance and make more resilient the natural capital value of the Downs and therefore the ecosystems services that the landscapes of the Kent Downs offer society.

### **Climate Change in the Kent Downs**

Climate change will affect the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The UK Climate Projection (UKCP) Programme 2018 provided a much finer grain (2.2km<sup>2</sup>) projection of climate change to 2100. Headline changes include hotter, drier summers; particularly hot summers and hot summer days are expected to become more common. While summers are expected to be drier there will be an increase in the intensity of heavy summer rainfall events. Warmer, wetter winters are also predicted with greater rainfall intensity. Sea level rise is predicted to continue (already 17cm since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), with predictions ranging from around 30cm to 90cm by 2100 depending on the emissions scenario, these are significantly higher than the 2009 projections.

The UK Climate Impact Programme (UKCIP 2019) provides tools to establish adaptation

approaches to the projections. At a Kent level the information and evidence provided by the UKCP and UKCIP has provided an evidence base for the Kent Climate Change Risk and Impact Assessment (KCCRIa 2020). Key impacts are consistent with the UKCP predictions. Several key characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs are predicted to change these include introduction of new pests and diseases, sea level rise and coastal erosion, wild fire, both drought and flooding affecting water bodies, water scarcity, soil erosion, air quality issues, changes in species distribution and abundance and changes in land management practice.

In recognition of the very serious threats climate change places on society the UK Parliament has declared an environment and climate emergency. Many of the local authority partners to the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee have either declared or recognised an emergency or have plans to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. There are a number of nature-based responses to climate change, some of which are mentioned in the Committee on Climate Change report on land use (2020) these include wilding, tree and hedgerow establishment, permanent grassland creation and management and soil carbon enhancement for instance through regenerative farming, all of which would be coherent with the Kent Downs AONB landscape character and qualities and which increase resilience and reduce the impact. New energy crops are promoted along with a shift in consumption from (and therefore production of) the most carbon intensive foods these approaches are reflected and promoted elsewhere in the plan.

There is an important role for both the AONB landscape and partnership in helping to achieve carbon sequestration and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Ecological loss and nature recovery.**

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the future of the natural world, intergovernmental and national reports demonstrate that the current response to the effects of human impact on nature is insufficient, along with the clear guidance from the Government's Landscape Review – there is a clear and pressing need to increase the scale and pace of nature recovery activity in AONBs. This is recognised in the National AONB Declaration on Nature in AONBs, the Colchester Declaration, which sets out a strategy for change. Nature recovery is an essential guiding theme of the Management Plan and the local implementation of the Colchester Declaration an important priority in order that we restore functioning ecosystems and extend and return lost habitats and species to the landscape.

### **A landscape led approach, local character and qualities**

Section 4 of the Plan demonstrates that landscape is made up of many component factors; it is complex and all the more wonderful for that. The primary purpose of an AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, this must take into account all of the factors identified in this plan and in relevant guidance. The landscape of the Kent Downs AONB extends beyond administrative boundaries and is a strategic matter which should be specifically considered in local authority's duty to cooperate in plan making.

A landscape led approach to design, resource management and development means starting with an understanding of the landscape as a framework for evidence. In a nationally protected landscape the purposes of the designation have to be the driving force when

considering or undertaking change. The starting point of achieving landscape led approach is an understanding of the site and its setting, the local landscape character, supporting this it is the landscape elements, context, special character and qualities, distinctiveness, sense of place, patterns and sensitivities; how it is perceived by people and for what reasons it is valued by people are key to the approach. Applying best practice and an iterative approach are key in practice to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

A landscape led approach does not mean simply imposing an intervention within an existing landscape pattern. In a landscape led development, a site's landscape capacity will not be exceeded. For policies, plans and projects in or affecting the Kent Downs AONB delivering the purposes of the designation should be a primary consideration from start to finish, taking a landscape led approach is essential to achieving this.

Local characteristics and qualities are the triumph of the distinctive and the diverse over the uniform. Each section in this management plan explains what that means in the Kent Downs. Many aspects of local characteristics and qualities are specific to the designated area, such as the landform and landscape of the scarp and dip slope, the woodland and biodiversity which thrive on the steep scarp slopes, the sights and scents, the ecosystems services provided by the landscape, the time depth, access routes, patterns of settlement and farming practices which respond to them all.

Many more local characteristics are distinctive to individual places or small localities, from building materials to traditional events, fruit trees to dew ponds and dene holes. These provide variety around different parts of the AONB, in addition to the sense of place which comes from being within the designated area. These qualities, features and experiences should not be seen in isolation but as vital components of a landscape led approach to AONB management which reveres and therefore conserves and enhances what is locally special.

As part of the statutory review of this Management Plan a revision of the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment has been taken forward; Landscape Character Assessment is covered in more detail in section 4. Landscape Character Assessment is an important tool for taking a landscape led approach and the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment forms an integral component of this plan.

### **Intended Net Gain**

The intention of achieving a net gain, initially for biodiversity and eventually for the environment as a whole, through development is a key principle in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan. It is expected that biodiversity net gain will become mandatory during the plan period. Net gain is also required by national planning policy in the National Planning Policy Framework para 170 and 174. Biodiversity Net Gain is covered in more detail in section 5 (Biodiversity).

Net Gain provides the potential to generate substantial new investment streams to achieve the sustainable development and biodiversity objectives of the AONB Management Plan. While this is important and welcome for the AONB whether a net gain can be achieved is yet to be proven.

### **Green infrastructure provision**

The Kent Downs AONB is recognised as a strategically important component of the Green

Infrastructure of Kent and the south east of England. Green Infrastructure provision is embodied in the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance and is an essential component of good planning for urban and rural areas. Green infrastructure is a key tool to create a resilient environment in the face of climate change supporting biodiversity and access opportunities.

### 3.3 Recurrent themes

Some topics arise so frequently when seeking to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs that they should be understood for their strategic importance to the landscape management of the AONB. These cross-cutting topics are usually one of a number relevant to any action or decision affecting the AONB. They are assembled here to highlight their overall importance and should be viewed as matters to address first whenever this management plan is relevant, before turning to specific topics in each of the following sections. This does not mean that each one will necessarily be significant to every decision or action, but that their possible applicability should always be considered.

#### Tranquillity and remoteness

The perception of being away from the noise, sights and smells of modern life is a much valued feature of many parts of the AONB where people can refresh body and soul. In the south east of England absolute tranquillity is an increasingly rare resource. The Landscape Institute's overview on Tranquillity (2017) recognises the importance of relative tranquillity which is relevant in the case of a busy county like Kent:

*A distinction is made between absolute tranquillity and relative tranquillity. When we refer to tranquillity in the UK, it is therefore almost always relative tranquillity that we are referring to, but in differing degrees. For instance, the tranquillity promoted by a summer sunrise on a calm day on top of a high mountain may be close to absolute, with almost no disturbance of any kind detracting from that state of mind. Yet the benefit to people of the relative tranquillity .... may be very high, despite intrusion from background traffic noise or the presence of many other people. Both sorts are important to recognise and value...'*

Research by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has shown that since the 1960s England has lost over 20% of its tranquil areas to urban sprawl, traffic and light pollution. The average size of our tranquil areas has reduced by 73%. As Kent's population increases, this resource will become more important and increasingly under threat. National tranquillity mapping carried out by the CPRE and more recently by Winchester University has confirmed that the Kent Downs offers important areas of relative tranquillity.

A 2016 CPRE survey documents the loss of dark night skies through badly designed and sited night lighting, it also identifies the areas of England with pristine night skies; the report suggests a series of recommendations to protect and enhance dark skies. An accepted and often valued part of living in or visiting the countryside has always been dark, star-filled skies. These qualities are increasingly difficult to enjoy outside the AONB, while there are parts of the Kent Downs which benefit from truly dark skies it is important to seek to both protect and extend these.

The importance of tranquillity has been noted in the National Planning Policy Framework which requires (paragraph 180 (b)) that planning policies and decisions should aim to 'identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise

and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason'. One way that tranquillity within the Kent Downs is currently impacted is as a result of several main flight paths passing over the AONB; the impact of overflying airplanes on landscape tranquillity can be significant, especially where background noise is otherwise low.

The erosion of tranquillity is an issue that has been emphasised in the public engagement stage of this AONB Management Plan, it is an important issue for the public and local authority partners and a part of the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs.

**Tranquillity mapping will be inserted**

### Setting

The setting of the Kent Downs AONB is broadly speaking the land outside the designated area which is visible from the AONB and from which the AONB can be seen, but may be wider when affected by intrusive features beyond that. The setting of the Kent Downs is not formally defined or indicated on a map. The setting of the AONB landscape should be distinguished from the setting of listed buildings and other heritage assets (on which there is legislation and also policy in the National Planning Policy Framework and elsewhere).

Proposals which would affect the setting of the AONB are not subject to the same level of constraint as those which would affect the AONB itself. The weight to be afforded to setting issues will depend on the significance of the impact. Matters such as the size of proposals, their distance, incompatibility with their surroundings, movement, reflectivity and colour are likely to affect impact. Where the qualities of the AONB which were instrumental in reasons for its designation are affected by proposals in the setting, then the impacts should be given considerable weight in decisions.

The Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee has prepared a 'Setting Position Statement' which provides helpful further advice supporting the vision, aims and principles of the Plan.

### Design and materials

The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs include the quality of the built heritage and settlement patterns. To conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the scale, extent and design of new development, re-development and restoration is critical. The NPPF places considerable focus on the importance of good design, stating that 'Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions' while the Planning Practice Guidance advises that all development in AONBs 'will need to be located and designed in a way that reflects their status as landscapes of the highest quality'.

To support the statutory Duty of Regard towards the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty placed on public bodies and statutory undertakers the Kent Downs AONB Partnership has produced a series of design guidance documents:

- The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook
- The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook
- The Kent Downs AONB Farmsteads Design Guidance

- Managing Land for Horses – a guide to good practice in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.  
The Kent Downs AONB Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development
- A Buildings and Settlement Design Guide is planned.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally distinctive architecture in locally derived building materials such as Ragstone, flint and chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The predominance of local materials helps to establish the distinctive character of the built environment. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled craftsmen who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular. High quality modern design can draw from the past. New development should use available, sustainably sourced traditional as well as appropriate new materials and a design approach which fits neatly with and complements the valued traditions, forms and patterns of the past, while securing environmental efficiency and affordability.

### Mitigation

This plan promotes the use of the mitigation hierarchy so that first adverse impacts on any of the sustainable development goals should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, measures to mitigate the impact should be applied. Where adequate mitigation measures are not possible, compensatory measures should be adopted.

This approach is supported in para. 32 of the National Planning Policy Framework; this management plan follows the priorities set out in the NPPF by focusing on the avoidance of damage to the characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB. However, mitigation is also important. Reducing the impacts of unavoidable change from infrastructure and growth and a growing population close to the AONB, changing land management, the needs of the AONB population and access and enjoyment, for instance, is an on-going challenge. Likewise, infrastructure and growth in the setting of the AONB can challenge the qualities of the AONB itself. Mitigation will also be needed where schemes which have benefits for the AONB also themselves have adverse effects, for example where:

- affordable housing to sustain local AONB communities is needed but must be constructed in ways which minimise impacts on their surroundings;
- infrastructure to reintroduce woodland management (with benefits including biodiversity, wood products, renewable energy, and employment) may also need road access, harm local amenities or erode tranquillity; and
- improved recreational access to enjoy the qualities of the AONB could erode those very qualities.
- Farm management and diversification activities

In addition, the AONB must play its part in appropriately mitigating the impacts of climate change, which demands responses by all sectors. This should be achieved in a way which supports rather than harms the character and qualities of the AONB.

Given the anticipated pace and scope of growth it is increasingly likely that impacts on the AONB may not be mitigated satisfactorily. In these circumstances the AONB partnership will seek compensatory measures to enable conservation and enhancement of the landscape

elsewhere in the AONB.

### 3.4 Sustainable development – main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. The predicted scale and pace of growth in Kent and the London City Region is unprecedented; to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and to create benefit for existing and new communities significant new efforts and investment in the enhancing the green infrastructure, landscape, its natural capital and ecosystems services will be required. Through landscape scale restoration, conservation and enhancement the Kent Downs has a key role in mitigating and balancing any negative environmental impacts of the significant growth that Kent has (and continues to) experience and should be a target for net gain investments in Kent.
- b. There is a rapidly changing context in which the management, conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB landscape is conducted.
- c. Cumulative loss of landscape features, biodiversity, tranquillity and character and suburbanisation has been experienced in the AONB due to incremental poorly located, designed and badly screened development, visitor pressure and leisure uses, intensive agricultural and forestry and woodland management practices, pressure from traffic and significant levels of urban growth and development.
- d. The expected impact of climate change is clear, being felt and will be substantial; mitigation and adaptation responses supporting decarbonisation of the economy and focusing on nature based solutions should be implemented that are urgent, evidence based and enhance landscape character, qualities and resilience.
- e. There is a need to work at a community level to support project-based sustainable development initiatives and exemplars in the AONB and to increase the scale, integration and impact of activity.
- f. Despite a significant loss and continuing pressure, the Kent Downs still provides important relatively tranquil areas; the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to identify tranquil areas.
- g. Dark night skies are a feature of some parts the Kent Downs and are a valued part of the experience of tranquil rural areas.
- h. The quality of the setting of the AONB particularly in the experience of views is recognised as important in the original designation and in the enjoyment of the landscape today.
- i. The choice of design and materials in restoration, new development and landscape management are recognised as critical when seeking to conserve and enhance the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB.

- j. By applying the Sustainable Development Goals to the management principles of the Kent Downs AONB the partnership can bring forward environmental, social and economic benefits for existing and new communities.
- k. Biodiversity net gain and eventually environmental net gain provide major opportunities to take forward the conservation and enhancement of the landscapes of the Kent Downs AONB
- l. The Kent Downs AONB landscape and partnership is well placed to take an appropriate role in supporting efforts to recover from the economic and societal impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, including supporting the rural and visitor economy, supporting the resilience of farming and food production and the health and well-being of communities.

### 3.5 Sustainable development – aims

A landscape in which:

- 1. AONB conservation and enhancement, sustainable development goals and the vision aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan are the starting point of net gain and green infrastructure investments, plans, projects and policies affecting the Kent Downs.
- 2. The character and distinctiveness of villages, farmsteads and individual buildings are conserved and enhanced by combining the best traditions of the past with the best technologies of the present to create environmentally sustainable and locally enhancing development.
- 3. A positive, proactive and urgent approach is taken to the implications of climate change and intelligent and effective mitigation and adaptation responses are chosen which support landscape character, resilient ecosystem services and drive rapid greenhouse gas reductions and increase in sequestration.
- 4. All development achieves landscape enhancement, biodiversity gain and supports carbon neutrality; conservation and mitigation is delivered in every case.
- 5. A comparatively tranquil environment is protected, conserved and enhanced.
- 6. The setting and views in and out of the AONB are conserved and enhanced.
- 7. The detrimental impact of existing infrastructure on the qualities of the AONB is significantly reduced.
- 8. Individual and cumulative development and change contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB rather than detracting from it.
- 9. The AONB partnership takes an active and appropriate role in supporting the economic and societal recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 3.6 Sustainable development – principles

- SD1 Ensure that policies, plans, projects and net gain investments affecting the Kent Downs AONB take a landscape led approach are long term, framed by the Sustainable Development Goals appropriate to the Kent Downs, cross cutting and recurrent themes, the vision, aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan.
- SD2 The local character, qualities, distinctiveness and natural resources of the Kent Downs AONB will be conserved and enhanced in the design, scale, siting, landscaping and materials of new development, redevelopment and infrastructure and will be pursued through the application of appropriate design guidance and position statements.
- SD3 Ensure that development and changes to land use and land management cumulatively conserve and enhance the character and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB rather than detracting from it.
- SD4 A strategic, evidence led approach to both the adaptation to and mitigation of the impacts of climate change on the natural beauty and historic character of the Kent Downs, and its human consequences, will be pursued with an urgent focus on supporting greenhouse gas emission reduction and sequestration through nature based solutions.
- SD5 Renewable and sustainable energy initiatives and energy efficiency measures will be pursued where they help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to local people and ensure proposals conform with the Kent Downs AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement and resisted where they do not.
- SD6 Activities to increase understanding of the importance and the extent of tranquillity, remoteness and dark night skies within the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- SD7 New projects, proposals and programmes shall conserve and enhance tranquillity and where possible dark night skies.
- SD8 Ensure proposals, projects and programmes do not negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character, special characteristics and qualities, the setting and views to and from the Kent Downs AONB.
- SD9 The particular historic and locally distinctive character of rural settlements and buildings of the Kent Downs AONB will be maintained and strengthened. The use of sustainably sourced locally-derived materials for restoration and conversion work will be encouraged. New developments will be expected to apply appropriate design guidance and to be complementary to local character in form, siting, scale, contribution to settlement pattern and choice of materials.
- SD10 Positive measures to mitigate the negative impact of existing infrastructure and growth on the natural beauty and amenity of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.

- SD11 Major development should avoid the Kent Downs AONB in line with NPPF guidance. Where it is decided that development will take place that will have a negative impact on the landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB or its setting, mitigation and or compensatory measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained. The removal or mitigation of identified landscape detractors will be pursued.
- SD 12 Transport and infrastructure schemes and growth areas are expected to avoid the Kent Downs AONB. Unavoidable developments will be expected to fit unobtrusively into the landscape, respect landscape character, be mitigated by sympathetic landscape, buffering, land bridges and design measures and provide compensatory measure through benefits to natural beauty elsewhere in the AONB.
- SD13 A strategic, landscape led approach to green infrastructure and net gain investments is taken to ensure the recovery, conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB and its setting. The Kent Downs AONB takes a key role in accommodating net gain investments derived from growth elsewhere where the intended gain cannot be delivered locally.
- SD14 The Kent Downs AONB partnership will support efforts to achieve an economic and societal recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic in a way that supports the vision, aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan.

## 4. Landform and Landscape Character

### 4.1 Our vision for landform and landscape character in the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... the rich diversity of landscape character and qualities distinctive to the Kent Downs are protected, enhanced and managed to the highest standards in a co-ordinated and continual programme. The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB are widely recognised, valued and strengthened and landscape character informs land and resource management, nature recovery plans, intended net gain and natural capital investments, responses to climate change and development decisions.

### 4.2 Overview

The fundamental and special characteristics that distinguish the natural beauty of the Kent Downs landscape were identified when the Kent Downs AONB was designated in 1968. These were reconfirmed in the 1995 Kent Downs AONB Landscape Assessment and its reviews and again in the views expressed in the public and stakeholder consultation for the original AONB Management Plan and its subsequent reviews.

### 4.3 Landscape Character Types and Areas within the Kent Downs AONB

#### Landscape character

Landscape character is described as a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another and can provide a helpful description and sense of place to our surroundings. A landscape led, Landscape Character supported approach, further supported by historic landscape character assessment, can assist in informing landscape management decisions and its use is supported by Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment.

The founding Kent Downs AONB Landscape Assessment was prepared by the Countryside Commission (1995 CCP 479); it identified 13 Landscape Character Areas in the AONB. Many of these have been divided into local character areas which detail specific local characteristics and identify some of the pressures facing them. Drawing from these descriptions, the 2004 Landscape Assessment of Kent described Landscape Character Area condition and sensitivity assessments. At a local level landscape character assessments have been prepared as part of the Local Plan Process for several Kent Downs Local Authorities.

As part of this review of the Management Plan a full review of the **Landscape Character Areas** (LCAs) was taken forward. This used a professionally led approach and up to date guidance and included defining Landscape Character Types and reviewing the established Landscape Character Area descriptions and some boundaries.

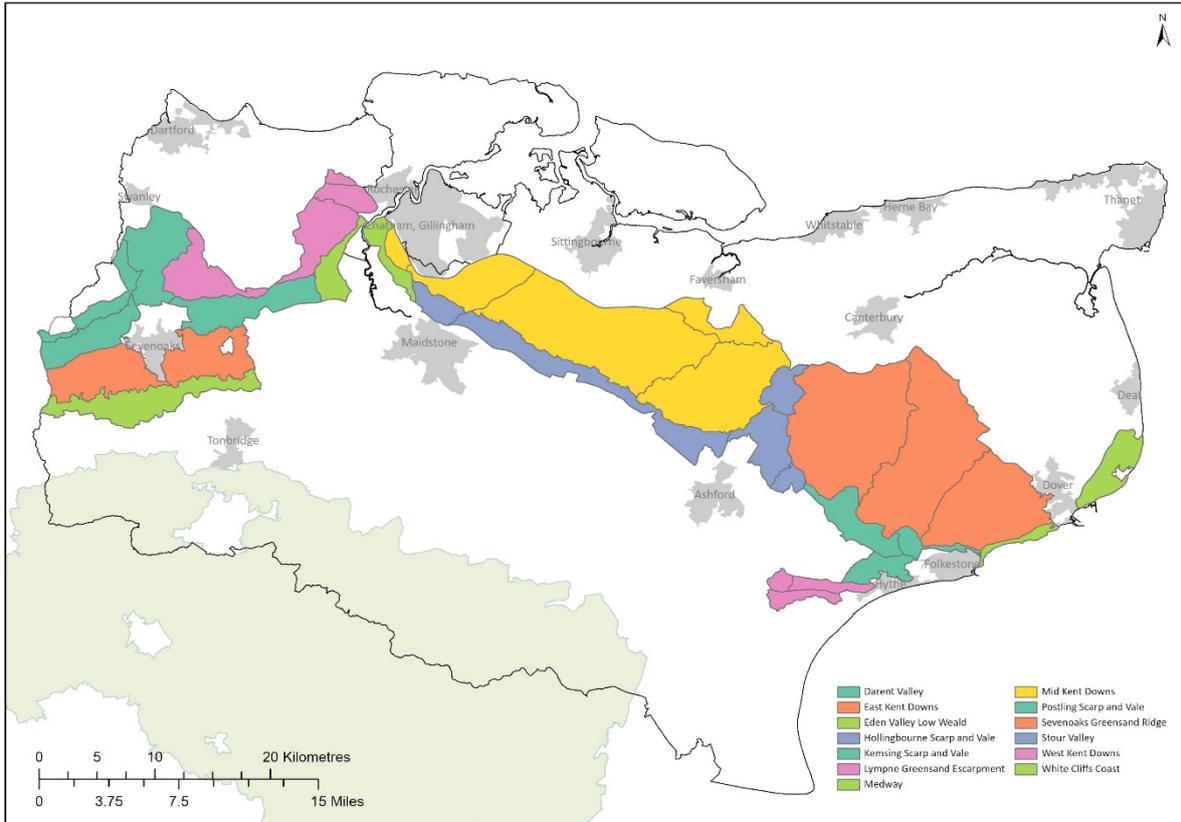


Figure 4.1 Kent Downs AONB landscape character areas

**Landscape Character Types (LCTs)** are defined as distinct types of landscape that are relatively homogenous in character. They are generic in nature in that they may occur in different areas but wherever they occur, they share broadly similar combinations of geology, topography, drainage patterns, vegetation, historical land use and settlement pattern.

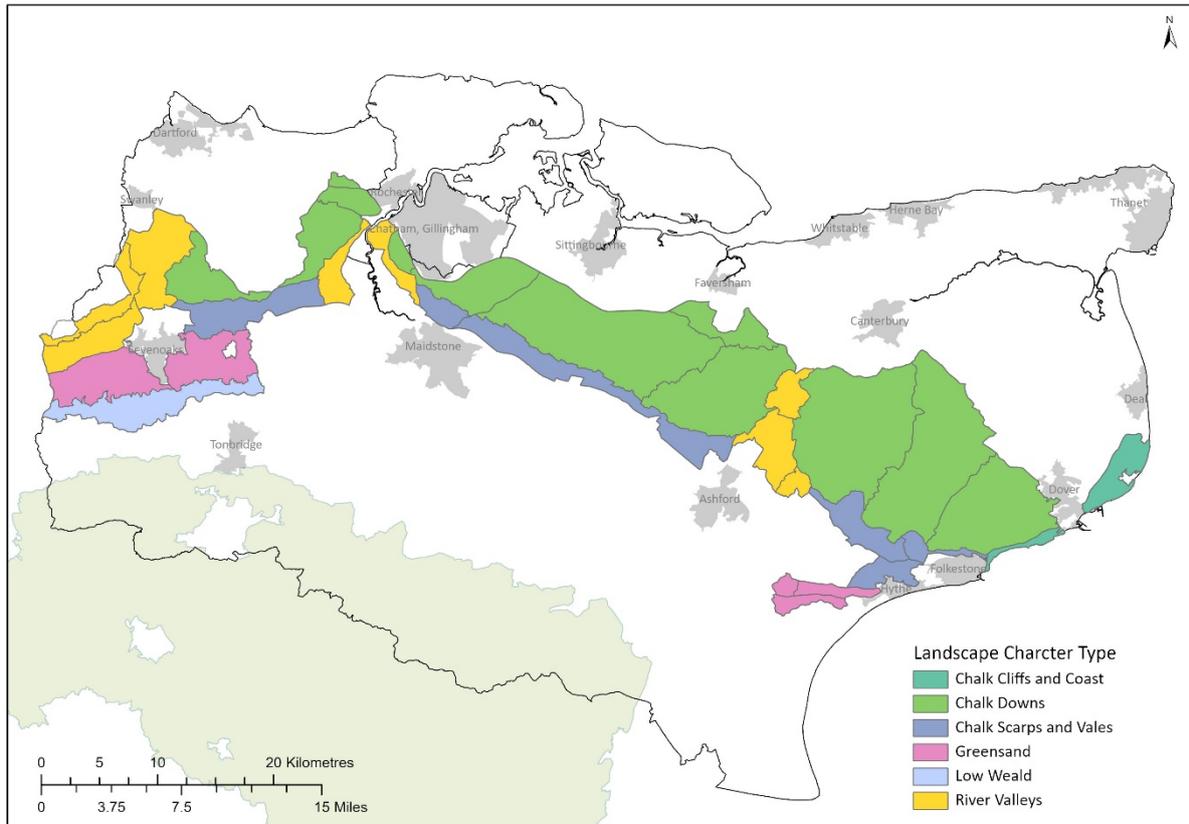


Figure 4.2 Kent Downs AONB landscape character types

There are six LCTs within the Kent Downs AONB, reflecting the area’s underlying geology and its topography; these are Chalk Scarp and Vales, Chalk Cliffs and Coast, Chalk Downs, Greensand, Low Weald and River Valleys.

**The Chalk Scarp and Vales**

The long arc of the North Downs chalk ridge is the most dominant element of the AONB, consisting of the steep, south-facing scarp slope rising above the Gault clay vale below. Spectacular views are offered along the chalk escarpment across the Vale of Holmesdale; the scarp along with the dramatic views it affords was a key target for the original designation of the Kent Downs AONB.

**The Chalk Cliffs and Coast**

The Chalk scarp ends dramatically at the English Channel forming the White Cliffs, one of the most evocative and best-known British landmarks. The scale of the Kent Downs landscape is at its greatest here. The high vertical cliffs and the white chalk contrast starkly with the foreshore and constantly changing sea below with the bustle of ferries and shipping; overall the coast provides an awe-inspiring panorama. The expansiveness and drama is increased further by enticing glimpses of the French coast on the horizon.

**The Greensand**

The undulating Greensand Ridge rises to one of the highest points in southeast England at 250 metres at Toy’s Hill. The views from along the length of the Greensand Ridge are some

of the best in southern England, and on a clear day, the High Weald and the South Downs beyond can be seen. In the east Kent Downs, the Lympne escarpment of calcareous Sandstone and Ragstone provides a spur of higher ground affording dramatic views across the near-level Romney Marsh and Hythe Bay.

### **The river valleys**

Further diversity is provided at the points where the three main rivers, the Darent, Medway and the Great Stour cut through the chalk. Each river flows in a northerly direction and they form broad, steep-sided valleys with open vistas along the river corridors. The River Medway does not lie in the AONB itself, although parts of its tidal flood plain are within the boundary.

### **Chalk Downs**

Behind the scarp, open plateau and dry valleys offer a beautiful, greatly valued and intimate feature of much of the Kent Downs landscape and they are often criss-crossed by a maze of tiny, sunken one-track lanes. The downland valleys often have a narrow strip of rough grassland, scrub or woodland along their steepest slopes, locally known as shaves, which are important for wildlife. The larger dry valleys such as Elham and Alkham have the sporadic winterbournes such as the Nailbourne in Elham, flowing occasionally during the very wettest winters. The plateaux areas often dominated by stiff clay with flint soils overlying the solid chalk, the soils were historically difficult to cultivate and were used extensively for sheep grazing. Much of the ancient woodland remains framing the plateaux and enclosing the dry valleys.

### **National Character Areas**

Natural England has described National Character Areas (NCAs) which divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision making framework for the natural environment. The National Character Areas Profiles which cover the Kent Downs AONB include the North Downs (119), Wealden Greensand (120) and Romney Marshes (123).

### **Landscape condition and change**

Landscape condition is strongly influenced by external factors which can contribute to or detract from landscape character. The assessment of condition evaluates the landscape pattern and the presence of incongruous features (detractors). It also evaluates how well the landscape functions as a habitat for wildlife and the condition of cultural or 'man-made' elements such as enclosures, built elements and roads. Urban fringe areas are often under pressure and are therefore often described as being in poor condition whilst other more remote areas may still have the same basic features but be described as in a better condition. It is therefore practical to assume that condition may vary throughout a character area and any conclusions should be regarded as a summary of the overall situation.

Landscapes are not static; they change and evolve over time. In a Protected landscape setting the purpose of management planning is to drive positive change that '*conserves and enhances*' the character and qualities that are valued and for which the landscape was designated. It is remarkable and re-assuring how consistently the public attitude of what is most valued in the Kent Downs reflects the original targets for designation.

More than for any previous revision of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan the context is changing rapidly; there are new opportunities and threats from leaving the EU and a

shared urgency to respond to climate change, biodiversity loss and the economic and social impacts of the Covid pandemic. In this context this Management Plan seeks to be forward looking and to promote positive landscape change that supports the purposes of the designation, reflects what is valued by the public and takes a positive approach to the climate and ecological emergencies, this means that the plan will promote more tree establishment than has been suggested in the past, is positive about wilding and will be more active on low carbon land management and encourage new opportunities for access for health and well-being.

#### 4.4 Landform and landscape character - main issues, opportunities and threats

While the Landscape Character Area review found an overall positive picture driven by the interventions of the AONB partnership, partner organisations, farmers and land managers and many others there remains concern and further opportunity, these are picked up in detail in the revised Landscape Character Assessment of the Kent Downs AONB 2020.

- a. Loss of and damage to the quality and character of the AONB through the cumulative effect of inappropriate, poorly designed general development, unsustainable land management approaches and land use change, the impacts of growth in visitor pressure.
- b. Degradation of the setting and urban fringe impacts in certain Kent Downs landscape character areas through development, infrastructure, urbanisation and recreational pressure.
- c. The impact of Ash Dieback disease with the consequent loss of tree cover in woodland, roadsides and in open landscapes is already impacting significantly on landscape character and will continue to do so.
- d. The erosion of natural beauty and special character through illegal and antisocial activities such as fly tipping, abandoned cars and illegal off-road vehicles.
- e. The opportunity to promote landscape character conservation and enhancement through at a substantial scale new funding mechanisms (E.L.M.s, Net Gain etc.) and new partnerships specifically focusing on proposed positive management actions as well as addressing the enhancement to ecosystems services and seeking to remove or mitigate identified detractors.
- f. General lack of awareness of the importance and value of the Kent Downs landscape, its characteristic features and the social and economic benefits it brings.
- g. A landscape led approach, supported by a landscape character assessment is not used sufficiently or appropriately in land-use, land management, design and development management decisions, Landscape and Visual Appraisals, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments and design; landscape character assessments are not always consistent or up to date.
- h. Major potential threats and opportunities lie in responses to climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of intended net gain policies and natural capital/ ecosystems services payments. These could drive outcomes which are either

contrary or supportive of the valued landscape characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs.

- i. New and innovative forms of land management which meet natural capital enhancement objectives (such as wilding, regenerative agriculture and agro-forestry) may bring new and potentially valued character to the landscape.

#### 4.5 Landform and landscape character - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The diversity of landscape character across the Kent Downs is properly described and understood, maintained, conserved and enhanced, and the strong sense of place of individual localities is recognised, reinforced and celebrated.
2. A landscape led approach supported by landscape character is used to inform AONB management decisions and areas of opportunity and threat are identified and become the focus for action.
3. The highest standards of landscape conservation, restoration and enhancement are encouraged and integrated into all land uses in the Kent Downs and its setting.
4. There is better understanding of which landscape features local people and visitors value and all people are encouraged to play a part in retaining and enhancing these features.
5. New interventions in the landscape developed to provide, public good, intended net gain, natural capital enhancement, nature recovery and climate mitigation support the valued characteristics of the Kent Downs, seeking to manage, enhance, change positively so as to amplify and augment landscape character and qualities and make it more resilient and more valued for the future.

#### 4.4 Landform and landscape character - principles

- LLC1 The protection, conservation and enhancement of special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB will be supported and pursued.
- LLC2 The promotion, management, restoration and appropriate creation of viewpoints will be supported.
- LLC3 The provision of co-ordinated and high-quality landscape conservation guidance will be pursued, focusing on the special characteristics and qualities, natural beauty and the landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB.
- LLC4 The prevention, detection and enforcement action against illegal and overtly damaging activities which detract from landscape character will be pursued.
- LLC5 The revised Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment forms an integral,

interconnected, component part of the AONB Management Plan and should be used to inform proposals and land management impacting the AONB.

- LLC6 The improved awareness and appreciation of all the special qualities of the Kent Downs AONB landscape and its conservation to people who influence the future of, live, work in or visit the AONB will be pursued.
- LLC7 The development of strategic, long-term, landscape action and enhancement plans for areas of the Kent Downs AONB which present the greatest threats or opportunities or where natural capital enhancement, intended net gain, nature recovery, ELM or climate mitigation investments are proposed, will be pursued.

# 5. Biodiversity

## Our vision for biodiversity in the Kent Downs AONB

By 2031... the distinctive nature of the Kent Downs is understood better, enjoyed, celebrated and is in favourable, resilient condition with key habitats and species flourishing. There is a far-sighted, effective nature recovery plan being implemented across the Downs, which recognises and responds to the substantial changes that will be experienced and is connected with a wider national nature recovery network. An ambitious approach to intended biodiversity net gain is agreed and implemented, it is achieving secure advances in biodiversity across the Kent Downs. There has been an increase in the extent and quality of key characteristic habitats and abundance of species of the Downs. People, policy and funding regimes recognise, value and support the importance of nature in the Kent Downs.

### 5.1 Overview

#### 5.1.1 Nature in the Landscapes of the Kent Downs

The unique landscapes and history of the Kent Downs created and contain a rich and distinctive biodiversity which contributes greatly to the natural beauty of this exceptional place, adding much of the detail which makes the Kent Downs significant, characteristic and special.

The natural vegetation of the Kent Downs is believed to have been broadleaved woodland. This would have been varied in structure and composition, with open glades and patches of grassland and heath created by fallen trees and grazing animals, and chalk grassland refugia found on exposed areas such as cliff tops. Many of the species originally contained in the wilder landscape of the Downs are now absent. The 'wildwood' would have been a dynamic system with varied habitats but much the woodland element has been cleared and managed over the last 6,000 years. Woodland clearance gave way to the expansion of grasslands, scrub and arable, however heavy, flint laden soils have meant that woodland clearance has been less than in many parts of Britain. The Kent Downs is a heavily wooded landscape and in many places a centuries-old landscape remains in place, nonetheless, farming and cultivation has been a significant influence on the biodiversity of the AONB.

#### 5.1.2 A rapidly changing context

While the natural heritage of the Kent Downs is characteristic, distinctive, valued and vested through millennia, the strategic and policy context for biodiversity conservation and enhancement has changed substantively. This is partly due to multiple failures to prevent biodiversity loss at a local, national and international level, at the local level monitoring has indicated declines in species abundance and biodiversity across the AONB. The 2019 State of Nature Report shows that, at a national level, the 'UK's wildlife loss continues unabated' with 41% of species in decline since 1970, abundance of wildlife in decline and 15% under threat from extinction. At the same time the potential impacts and risks of climate change are now better researched and understood and the approach of the plan needs to be far sighted in its response, nature based solutions to climate change will be an important part of the tool kit.

Many of the Local Authority partners to the Kent Downs AONB have declared or recognise a Climate and in some cases Ecological Emergency; The Government's 25 Year Environment

Plan gives us some idea of the ambition and direction of travel and stated clear intent for AONBs and National Parks; The Government's Review of Designated Landscapes has been clear that there is much more that can be done in National Landscapes to support nature recovery and what we have now is 'not good enough'. The AONBs and National Parks have been identified by the Government as potentially forming the key component of the UK's commitment to protect 30% of the UK's land for the recovery of nature by 2030 and are described as the 'backbone' of a national nature recovery network. The mechanisms by which the ambitions of the 25 year plan, the 30% commitment to recover nature and the Landscape (Glover) Review will be delivered are still in development.

### **5.1.3 IUCN Category V Protected Landscape Status and nature conservation.**

The Kent Downs AONB is recognised as an International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Category V Protected Landscape. The primary objective of Category V status is, 'To protect and sustain important landscapes/seascapes and the associated nature conservation and other values created by interactions with humans through traditional management practices.' The conservation and enhancement of nature is a primary objective of this Plan and traditional management practices are a vital component of the methods available for the conservation of both the species and habitats of the Kent Downs. Be it in woodlands, farmed landscapes, heath or down, the integrity of the interaction between people and nature over time has produced the distinctive character and is an essential component of its future conservation and enhancement.

### **5.1.4 The Colchester Declaration**

At its national conference in July 2019, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty jointly agreed ['The Colchester Declaration'](#).

The Declaration recognises the global concern for the future of the natural world and has established a series of pledges that the AONBs will take forward if Government provides the powers and resources to do so. The principles and actions of this plan will take forward the commitments made in the Declaration.

### **5.1.5 A Local Nature Partnership for Kent**

The Natural Environment White Paper created the opportunity to develop Local Nature Partnerships to further objectives for the natural environment. The Kent Nature Partnership has a vision for the Garden of England to have a healthy natural environment that is rich in wildlife, is enjoyed and valued by all and underpins our long-term economic, social and personal wellbeing. The Kent Downs AONB partnership is represented on the Board of the Kent Nature Partnership and this plan is an important part of delivering that wider vision.

### **5.1.6 Kent Biodiversity Strategy**

The Kent Nature Partnership's Biodiversity Strategy for Kent was published in 2020 and it is clear that most species and habitats important in the Kent Downs AONB have been recognised a significant part of the Kent Resource. This Management Plan and the Kent Biodiversity Strategy are closely aligned, within the wider context of the Colchester Declaration and national legislation.

### **5.1.7 The Lawton Principles**

The Lawton Report 'Making Space for Nature' draws from a wide range of evidence to review England's wildlife and ecological network. The report reiterates that the natural world is fundamental to our wellbeing, health and economy and that priorities for action at a

landscape scale should be:

- 1st Manage existing sites better
- 2nd Make existing sites larger
- 3rd Create new sites
- 4th Enhance connectivity
- 5th Create new corridors

While much emphasis is now being placed on new and larger areas for nature, landscape scale approaches to enhancing biodiversity, the Lawton principles promote the better management of existing sites first in most cases. In addition the contribution of many small-scale individual enhancements can help support this more overarching approach, indeed it is a critical component.

### 5.1.8 Wilding

In recognition of the loss of biodiversity and that high input habitat management can be unsustainable and even counter-productive, there is a new emphasis on the restoration of natural processes. The ‘wilding’ approach calls for the establishment of large expanses of land set aside for nature and natural processes, connected by corridors which allow the movement of species between the larger areas. The approach encompasses terrestrial, aquatic and marine environments.

It is recommended that wilding takes place on sites of least risk first (i.e. where there is limited other value), this builds on the central idea that natural processes should be allowed to take their course, including natural succession on open habitat, fluctuations in population abundance and presence of species without deliberate intervention. This is in contrast to much conservation practice which often involves the close management of habitats to maintain them at a particular successional stage (such as grassland or heathland) in order to support a distinct array and abundance of species in ‘favourable status’. Intervention under a rewilding approach is limited to restoring missing species and missing parts of the system which allow natural processes to occur. (Definition taken from Woodland Trust position statement). The charity Rewilding Britain emphasises the ‘need to encourage a balance between people and the rest of nature where each can thrive’.

The most prominent example of wilding in southern lowland Britain is at the Knepp Estate in Sussex, in Kent more recent examples include the Wilder Blean and Wilder Nashenden projects (in the Kent Downs). The landscape generated by wilding evolves and differs from that which is described in the designation of the Kent Downs AONB and understanding of its biodiversity value is emerging and will change over time. Knepp represents wilding at a large scale, the concept of wilding can however be adopted at many different scales across urban and rural landscapes. It is expected that wilding will be an important part of a suite of tools deployed in nature recovery and climate mitigation, including in lowland Britain and in Designated Landscapes such as the Kent Downs AONB, where large scale wilding projects would create a new more natural landscape character.

### Intended Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity net gain is an approach which, in the context of new development, aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than beforehand. It is expected that the Environment Act will mandate a net gain of 10% for all new developments when granting planning permission.

This change could substantially increase the investment made available for nature in Kent and the Kent Downs. Given the significant pressures on Kent's natural environment, land lost to, and fragmented by, development and urban creep, alongside the evidence that there has been major losses in Kent's wildlife over the past century, the Kent Nature Partnership is proposing a county wide 20% net gain standard (as measured by the Natural England metric). This increased target for net gain may also enable some of the net gain investment to be targeted off site, to areas of strategic opportunity for nature recovery and low threat of future development – this places the Kent Downs as a potential strategic area for net gain investments. The proposed approach of the Nature Partnership is supported in principle for the Kent Downs AONB however it is recognised that this is subject to further evidence and testing and any requirement will ultimately be decided and set out individual local authorities local plans.

### **Nature Recovery in the Kent Downs AONB**

The Environment Bill 2020 (subject to amendment after this plan is published) made commitments to recover nature through Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and a wider Nature Recovery Network. The Protected Landscape network of National Parks and AONBs has been described by Natural England as the 'backbone' of the Nature Recovery Network.

In the Colchester Declaration, each AONB has committed to developing a nature recovery plan.

LNRSs are described as forming spatial strategies for nature covering the whole of England. They will support delivery of mandatory intended biodiversity net gain and provide a focus for a strengthened duty on all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity which are expected to be introduced by the Environment Act they will also underpin the Nature Recovery Network.

In Kent the Kent Downs AONB Unit is part of a wider partnership established to agree priorities for nature's recovery which will map the most valuable existing habitat for nature and specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environmental goals. Unless the Environment Act directs a different approach, it is the intent of the AONB Unit and partnership that a Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB will be developed collaboratively and coherently with the county level strategy and as part of a wider national Nature Recovery Network, for which the AONBs and National Parks will be a key component.

## **5.2 Biodiversity - special characteristics and qualities**

### **5.2.1 The wildlife of the Kent Downs**

The wildlife of the Kent Downs is particularly rich and distinctive, it is also varied, reflecting historic land management approaches, changes in the local climate, geology, soils and topography and its close proximity to the European continent.

In planning to recover nature in the Kent Downs AONB there is a clear need to increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activity to restore and recover habitats and species at

a landscape scale.

**Key species of the Downs**

In Britain, there are several very rare and charismatic species largely or wholly confined to the Kent Downs. This is true of several beautiful rarities, such as the lady, monkey and late spider orchids, black veined and straw belle moths as well as rare arable field wildflowers. Other rare and threatened species occur in good numbers; for example the dormouse, the edible or Roman snail, the adder and rare arable field wild flowers along with several butterflies associated with downland. Many of these are recognised in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act as species of principle importance in England. Semi-natural habitats of particular importance in the Kent Downs are also recognised in the UK list of priority habitats and in the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and the Kent Downs is recognised as containing nationally ‘Important Plant Areas’ by the charity Plantlife and large parts of the Downs are included in Buglife’s ‘Important Invertebrate Areas’.

As part of the Colchester Declaration key species conservation will be an important priority of the nature recovery efforts in the Kent Downs, which has been identified by Natural England as an area with potential ‘Species Big Wins’. **Insert map**

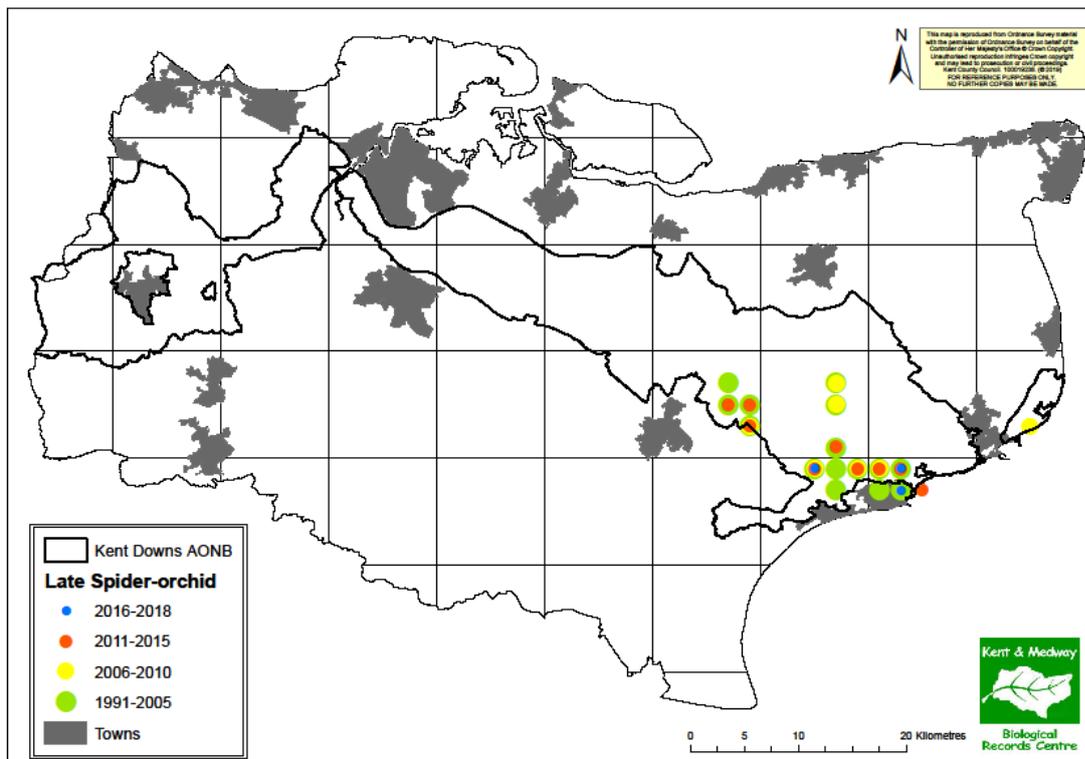


Figure 5.1 White Helleborine distribution in the Kent Downs AONB

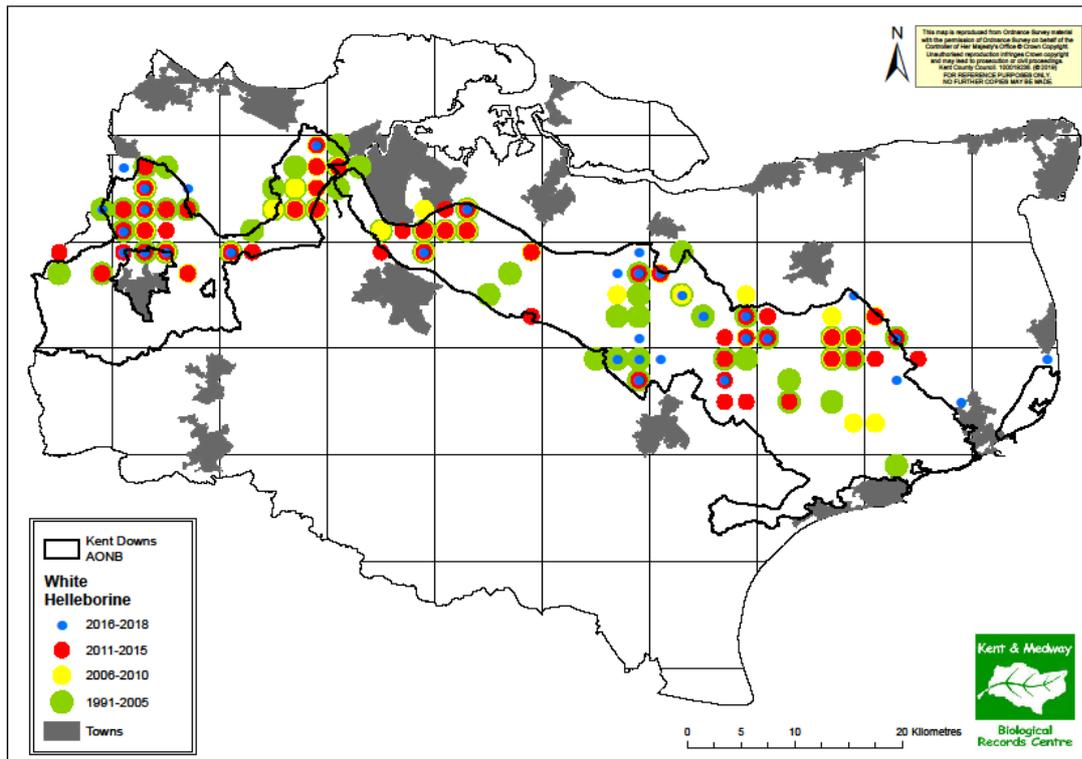


Figure 5.2 White Helleborine distribution in the Kent Downs AONB

## Key habitats of the Downs

### Grassland

Unimproved chalk downland is for many the essence of natural beauty in the Kent Downs landscape with its flower-rich, scented springy turf and profusion of insect life. Orchids and butterflies of chalk downland are symbolic of this habitat and the AONB supports populations of some of the country's rarest chalk species. Chalk grassland is an internationally important habitat, with over half the world's resource found in England. Although this habitat is one of the most valued features of the Kent Downs, the remaining extent of unimproved chalk grassland is less than 2% of the AONB land area (about 1500 ha or 80% of the Kent and 6% of the UK resource). For many rare species in the Kent Downs it is the warm, sunny south-facing chalk slopes which are most important.

The Kent Downs is home to other grassland habitats often overlooked and less designated; neutral grassland can be found in valley bottoms and often forms part of Local Wildlife Sites, road verges and church yards, providing flower rich areas supporting a variety of pollinators, reptiles, amphibians and insects. Where grassland is managed primarily for production or equine uses there is a tendency to overgrazing which means that potentially diverse habitats are depleted.

### Ancient woodland, chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform

These are important, special and characteristic habitats of the Kent Downs AONB which are covered in detail in separate sections of the plan.

### ***Chalk streams and wetlands***

Chalk streams, river corridors, winterbournes, flood plains and spring lines, together with ponds, dew ponds and small wetland areas, are the principal wetland types in the Kent Downs. Winterbournes and ponds are frequently seasonal in nature and often host characteristic species. Chalk streams are very special and highly valued with only around 200 in the world, most of which are found in the southern half of England. In the Kent Downs the Darent, Little Stour, Stour and Dour are defined as chalk streams.

### ***Acid grassland and heaths***

Acid grassland and heaths on the greensand and clay plateau typically survive in parkland, common land and Chart Woods. Acid grassland can occur on clay caps near downland adding an interesting diversity to the landscape.

### ***Species-rich hedgerows and road verges***

Species-rich hedgerows, headlands, ditches and road verges and the sunken lanes of the Downs are a special, diverse and distinctive feature. Often the road verges and hedges are rich in plant and animal diversity, providing important and very beautiful habitats and connectivity. Hedgerow trees are particularly striking in the landscape and, in combination with the hedge, provide important ecological connectivity.

### ***Farmland habitats***

Farmland habitats and species adapted to traditional mixed farming practices; in particular the Kent Downs supports a nationally important site for arable weed communities – supporting some of the UK’s most threatened native plant species and farmland birds. More generally farmed parts of the landscape are capable of supporting a much wider diversity of nature and intensive farming practices have been responsible for the loss of significant amounts of biodiversity

### ***Wood pasture and parkland***

There is a strong legacy of parkland and wood pasture in the AONB where there are often large, open-grown and veteran trees which are special features in their own right. Trees outside woodlands are particularly threatened and important part of the beauty and ecology of the landscape of the Downs.

### ***Traditional orchards***

The Kent Downs landscape is strongly associated with fruit growing, with orchards making a significant contribution to the local distinctiveness of parts of the Downs. The terms ‘traditional’ or ‘old’ orchard, usually refer to orchards of apples, pears, plums and, in the Downs, cherries with large, widely spaced fruit trees, traditionally with grazed grassland below; traditional Kentish Cobnut platts are important and distinctive, particularly in the western portion of the AONB.

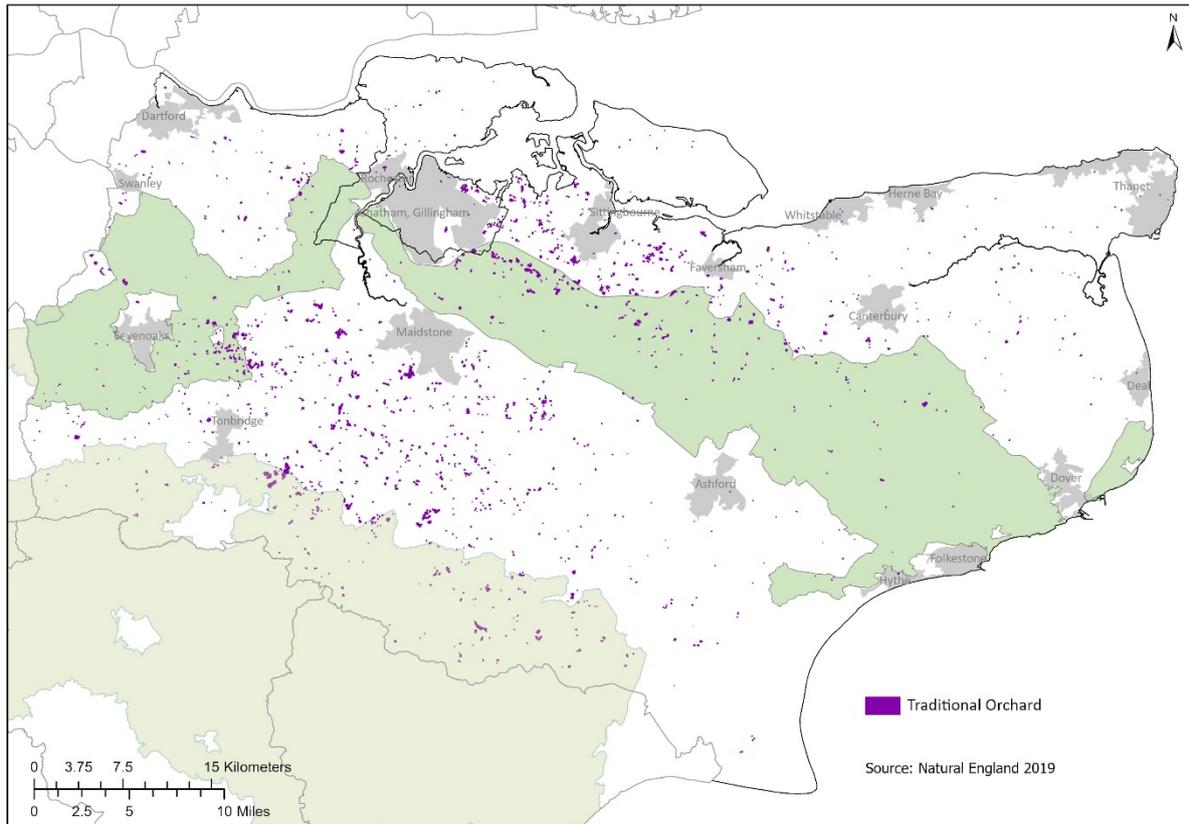


Figure 5.3 Traditional Orchards in Kent

### 5.2.2. Designated nature conservation sites

A number of the most important nature conservation sites in the Kent Downs are legally protected and managed primarily for their biodiversity value. There are 38 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Kent Downs AONB covering some 4420 Ha, of these the following sites are of international importance and were protected under the European Union's Habitats Directive as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and now form part of the UK legal framework following the UK's exit from the EU:

- Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment
- Wye and Crundale Downs, National Nature Reserve
- Queendown Warren, Local Nature Reserve
- Lydden and Temple Ewell, National Nature Reserve (on the AONB boundary)
- Park Gate Down
- Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs (the only SAC for the maritime chalk cliff features in the country)
- North Downs woodlands. The scarp slopes of the Medway Valley are designated for internationally important beech-yew woodland communities.

Management of these important sites rests largely with Government and public bodies, and specialist conservation organisations. However a number of key sites are in private ownership, such as parts of the Folkestone and Etchinghill escarpment owned by Eurotunnel, and the Medway Valley escarpment by Lafarge or Trenport Holdings.

Of recognised county level importance the Local Wildlife Site network is also critical in conservation of the landscape and wildlife and is felt to be at increasing risk; research by the Kent Nature Partnership showed limited reference to Local Wildlife Sites and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Local Plans despite the importance of these sites is recognised in the Natural Environment White Paper and Lawton review. In total Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) cover some 16% of the AONB.

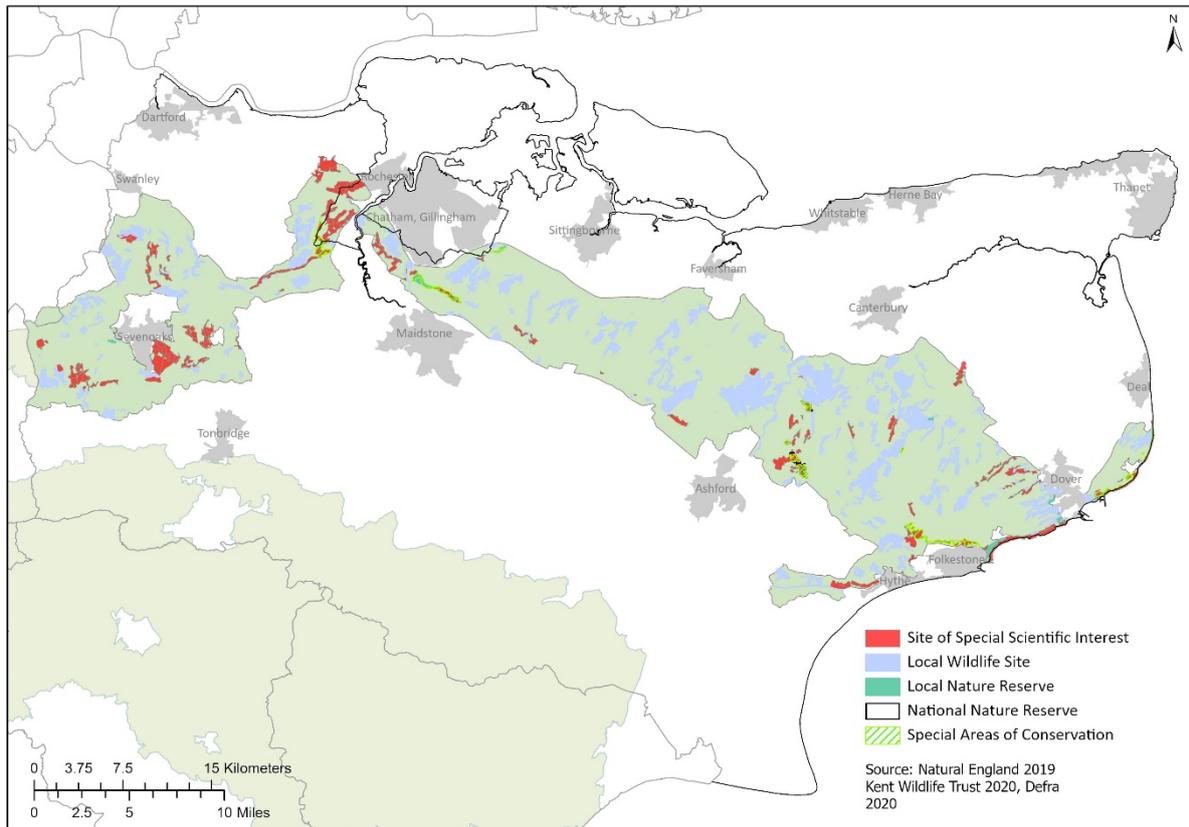


Figure 5.4 Nature Conservation Sites in the Kent Downs AONB

### 5.3 Biodiversity - main issues, opportunities and threats

Despite the extent of recognised and recorded nature conservation sites in the AONB some are losing species and condition, elsewhere habitat loss and change, alien species, pests and disease and the impact of climate change are damaging and degrading the biodiversity of the Kent Downs. Many important plant and animal species depend on suitable long-term management of appropriate habitats in the wider countryside.

In the context of continued biodiversity loss and while a wide range of national and local policy development is live there is an opportunity for the Kent Downs AONB partnership to influence policy development so as to benefit the characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs.

a. Growth and an increasing population along with increased public access to sensitive sites have been identified by site managers as a key issue in maintaining the quality of special habitats. This is in part a 'problem' of the successful promotion of access to nature and creates the opportunity to create new, less sensitive places for people and nature and to reduce pressure on the most sensitive sites and species. Such an approach can be an important part of achieving intended biodiversity net gain.

b. Habitat fragmentation, damage from intensive agriculture, introduction of invasive species, decline, damage, and loss are recognised as issues across Kent Downs habitats. In response there is the opportunity to manage, extend and connect existing priority protected and designated sites and habitats as well as promote sustainable farming, create new habitat and areas of wilding as a critical step to conserve and enhance biodiversity and generating high quality Green Infrastructure for Kent in which the Kent Downs could play a focal role. Examples of new habitat creation, for instance from green hay from chalk grassland, show how positive changes can be achieved over time and with consistent intervention. The Kent Downs has been identified as a key area for enhancement for pollinators and is mapped as a 'B line' by Buglife, the Downs can also make an important contribution to Kent's Plan Bee.

c. Great uncertainty prevails over the livestock industry. A lack of grazing livestock or poor returns from managing remaining areas of semi-natural grassland, and other traditionally grazed habitats important in the Kent Downs (particularly small, inaccessible or unprotected sites) means that often the most effective and landscape appropriate way of securing the established wildlife interest as well as landscape quality (by grazing) is increasingly uncertain.

d. There is a general lack of awareness and understanding of the biodiversity resource and its designations; trends in biodiversity; the value of the nature of the Kent Downs and how it contributes to landscape condition, carbon sequestration, the quality of life, health and wellbeing and the economy is combined with an associated lack of funding and support for management. The Colchester Declaration promotes the restoration of nature if sufficient resources are made available.

e. Need to provide accessible and well-managed sites with easy access from urban areas to provide contact with nature, health and wellbeing benefits, as well as to reduce pressure on existing particularly sensitive sites is seen as an important opportunity particularly for the new Environmental Land Management Systems.

f. Need to respond to the repeated failure to meet UK Biodiversity targets (2010/ 2020\*) and the opportunity for the Kent Downs AONB to make a significant local contribution to meet future targets.

[JNCC report](#)

g. Kent Downs landscape is sensitive to changes in climate, pollution and to more abrupt changes caused by extreme weather events; both are predicted. The UK and Kent Climate Change Risk Assessments identify key risks to Kent Downs biodiversity. At the same time the ability of each habitat to sequester carbon has been identified and could be an opportunity to link habitat creation to climate change mitigation; the so called 'nature based' solutions which will achieve multiple benefits for the public good.

- h. The opportunity to develop significant collaborative partnerships and large-scale investment areas to secure intended net gain funding and to help meet biodiversity objectives of the plan.
- i. In the light of new approaches to nature conservation such as wilding and intended net gain; there is an opportunity to create new and valued habitats and landscape character at a large scale, reflecting what exists and is valued but also resilient for the future increasing the abundance of nature in the Kent Downs. At the same time a significant risk exists for the loss of sites where previous environment schemes have achieved significant gains.
- j. New crops (such as vines) and cropping patterns (such as zero tillage, agro-forestry and regenerative agriculture) create both challenges and opportunities for biodiversity landscapes of the Kent Downs.
- k. In the context of the recent departure of the UK from the EU there remains considerable uncertainty covering wildlife regulations and payments for the enhancement of nature.

## 5.4 Biodiversity - aims

A landscape in which:

1. The rich diversity of natural features, wild animals, plants and habitats are recognised, conserved, enhanced and positively managed so that the extent and condition of key habitats is enhanced and the pace and scale of nature conservation is accelerated in a way that allows both rare and characteristic species to flourish and to be resilient to future change.
2. A functionally connected nature recovery network of well-managed, functioning, wilder and connected sites of biodiversity importance covers the Kent Downs. These provide habitats for locally typical and rare species and communities, places for people to connect with nature and the essential building block to achieve functional, resilient ecological networks.
3. Rare species confined to the Kent Downs are conserved and increased and distinctive and characteristic species of the Kent Downs which are more common and widespread flourish due to careful and sensitive management.
4. Comprehensive and easily accessible data informs and influences land management and development decisions and monitors changes to biodiversity.
5. The natural heritage and wildlife is recognised for its inherent value for contributing to the landscape character, nature based solutions to climate impacts, quality of life and the economic value of the Kent Downs.
6. Collaborative management at a landscape scale secures significant enhancement to the habitats and species, of the Kent Downs, improves resilience as a local response to the national and international challenges to biodiversity.
7. At least 75% of the 38 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Local Wildlife Sites in public or protective ownership in the Kent Downs are restored to favourable

condition by 2030.

## 5.5 Biodiversity – principles

- BD1 Creation of new habitats, wilding and connecting habitat corridors will be pursued, informed by the Lawton principles, landscape character, the needs for new recreation, the needs for resilience and the threats to existing habitats and species. Delivery will be through collaboration to establish resilient, functional ecological nature recovery networks and high-quality green infrastructure.
- BD2 Local, regional and national biodiversity targets and spatial priorities for habitats and species distinctive to the Kent Downs will be supported; a role for Kent Downs AONB landscape and partnership in delivering a wider Nature Recovery Network, the Kent Biodiversity Strategy and Colchester Declaration will be defined and delivered.
- BD3 Targeting of advice, grants and agreements to reduce fragmentation and enhance the biodiversity of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.
- BD4 The collection, promotion and sharing of information on land cover, designated wildlife sites, habitats and species to assist in effective biodiversity and landscape character management and monitoring will be supported.
- BD5 The protection, conservation, enhancement and extension of Kent Downs AONB priority and distinctive habitats and species will be pursued; the Biodiversity Duty of Regard will be actively promoted.
- BD6 The generation of sustainable markets for the products of sensitively managed UK Priority Habitats characteristic to the Kent Downs AONB will be supported.
- BD7 The Kent Downs AONB Partnership will be active in seeking to secure the best outcome for the biodiversity of the Kent Downs from the changing national policy framework.
- BD8 Generating a greater connection between people and nature will be pursued at the same time as dispersal of visitor pressure from sensitive wildlife sites where the biodiversity interest is at threat.
- BD9 The opportunities presented by intended Biodiversity Net Gain and other legislative changes are secured in the Kent Downs AONB in a way that support the vision, aims and principles of the Management Plan. Development permitted in the Kent Downs will secure 20% biodiversity net gain subject to further evidence and testing; any requirement will ultimately be decided and set out individual local authorities' local plans.

# 6. Farmed Landscape

## Our vision for the farmed landscape of the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... the Kent Downs AONB is a place where agriculture takes and is appreciated for a pivotal role in the conservation of natural beauty and landscape qualities and character of the Kent Downs. Sustainable farming is the predominant land-use of the AONB and the heritage of mixed farming is retained in a contemporary context, supporting and enhancing landscape character, soils health, nature and is an important part of the Kent Downs contribution to achieving net zero carbon emissions. There is a greater public understanding of the roles of farming and more opportunities to gain carefully managed access to farmed landscape and to understand farming systems. Despite the changing context a broad range of crops are sustainably produced and are suited to the increasing extremes of climate, local conditions and market forces as well as the landscape. Naturally diverse permanent grasslands are well managed and orchards, plats and hop gardens retain an important place in the landscape. The flourishing number of vineyards are managed in a way that conserves the characteristics and qualities of the AONB. The high-quality products of the Kent Downs are commercially successful and high environmental quality is a market advantage.

### 6.1 Overview and context

The Kent Downs AONB is principally a farmed landscape, with around 64% of its land classed as agricultural. Centuries of changing farming practices have shaped the landscape to create an important part of the natural beauty which is celebrated today. Historically the range of soil types of the Kent Downs has supported mixed farming practices where arable crop production has co-existed with livestock grazing and horticulture. The patchwork of land-use created by mixed farming is also vital for many valued plant and animal species associated with farmland. The farmed landscape is much valued for the access afforded along public rights of way, permissive paths and open access land.

Departure from the European Union is expected to be the most significant change to the context for farmers and land managers in the Kent Downs, since the UK joined the European Community in 1972. This management plan will operate during a period of substantial change in the farming economy. The intended direction of travel has been signalled in the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan the Agriculture Act (2020) and Environment Bill but agriculture is operating in an increasingly uncertain and volatile environment.

### Farm tenure and farming type in the Kent Downs

Figure 6.1 indicates that the Kent Downs AONB continues to be a landscape of mixed agricultural use. There has been a reduction in overall farmland area as well as a rationalisation of farming practice. *This data originates from Defra, Geographical breakdowns are only available in the years that correspond to the EU Farm Structure Survey, next updates expected early 2021 which will be inserted if available.*

% of Farmed Land cover	1961	1972	1990	1999	2007	2008	2009	2010	2013	2016
Arable	53	64	58	55	50	54	55	54	52	54

<b>Grassland</b>	37	27	35	30	34	35	34	34	35	32
<b>Grassland with scrub</b>	0	0	1	9	Data not available					
<b>Orchards and hops</b>	7	6	4	4	2	3	2	2	2	2
<b>Parkland</b>	3	3	2	3	Data not available					
<b>Area of Farmed Land (ha)</b>	64,227	64,925	64,141	64,546	60,836	57,833	57,213	55,797	55,477	58,132

Figure 6.2 shows an increase in the changing nature of farm holdings in the Kent Downs, this picture is expected to change still further in the plan period. There has been a move to larger 'contract' farming and cooperative farming ventures, especially on the most productive land in order to achieve economies of scale, this can lead to larger fields to accommodate larger machinery and to crop rotations on a whole farm rather than field scale. The move to larger scale farming shown in Figure 6.2, can also lead to monocultures over large areas which

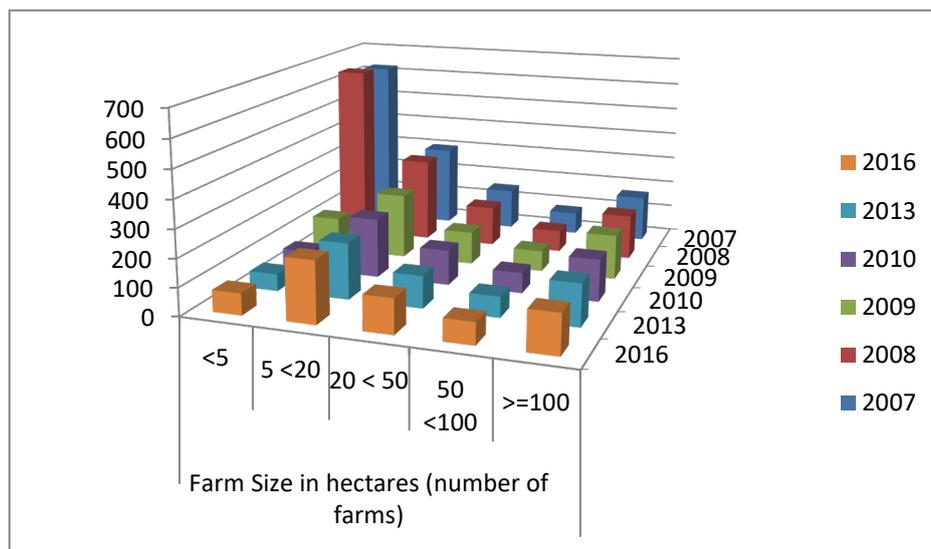


Figure 6.2 Farm Size in the Kent Downs AONB

consequently leads to lack of mosaic and therefore reduced opportunity for natural biodiversity, and increasing fragmentation of natural biodiverse pathways.

When medium sized farms are absorbed into larger holdings, farmhouses and buildings can be sold off with small holdings or to 'amenity' farmers and landowners who are not reliant on agriculture as a main income. The general setting and relationship between buildings in farmsteads and immediate landscape around farm buildings is becoming more 'suburbanised'. The separation of farm holdings and farm cottages and the increasing price of housing effectively prices agricultural workers out of the rural housing market.

An increasing focus for farm business is to enhance the skill base or human resource so that farm enterprises can remain viable, resilient and effective; operating sustainably with a strong knowledge base that encompasses the wide context that farming now operates within. At the same time the automation of elements farming means that low skilled work is less

likely to be available.

### **Changing financial signals to farmers.**

Since WWII early government policy and incentives encouraged increased food production. Farm businesses responded by adopting new crops, technologies and practices, which have seen a marked increase in crop production and efficiency of scale. In some cases, the cost has been the loss of landscape quality, biodiversity and historic features that have been part of the mixed farming landscape for centuries; elsewhere farmers have chosen to conserve and enhance the landscape at the same time as increasing productivity.

Where there has been removal of hedgerows, woodlands and field margins, deep ploughing of grassland and drainage of wetlands, as well as the intensive use of pesticides and inorganic fertilisers the result is sometimes sterile farmscapes with little wildlife or reduced landscape interest, and damaged soils, albeit this form of agriculture is highly productive.

More recently the agricultural economy has been subject both to the removal of production-based subsidy and to increasing volatility driven by global markets and climatic fluctuations affecting both produce value and production costs. These pressures require farmers to make increasingly market led decisions and to use up to date methods to retain competitive advantage, reduce risk and add financial and environmental resilience. At the same time public opinion and Government policy has strengthened in favour of environmentally sensitive farming that produces high-quality food with less cost on the public purse.

The departure of the UK from the EU brings with it potentially significant changes and challenges and substantial amounts of uncertainty. The signals from Government through the Agriculture Act and Environment Bill indicate that future public financial support for agriculture will be focused on ‘the public good’; this will include new access opportunities; enhancement of water, soil and air, investments in nature recovery and in landscape beauty, so called ecosystems services. The details of the new Environmental Land Management systems will be piloted and implemented during the plan period and the Kent Downs AONB Unit will be delivering a ‘Farming in Protected Landscapes’ programme.

### **Livestock farming in the Kent Downs**

Sheep and beef cattle play an important part in the AONB land-based economy and form an important part of the mixed farming landscape. There has been a continued decline in livestock numbers (particularly sheep which have nearly halved in number since 1990). Grazing is important to retain the special character of the AONB particularly in permanent semi natural grasslands. Grazing animals are linked to greenhouse gas emissions and there is a focus on reducing meat consumption as part of the response to climate change; in this context it is important to note that low intensity grazing on natural sites has a much lower greenhouse gas footprint than many other sources of beef and lamb. The decline in livestock numbers is expected to continue following the UK exit from the EU the High Weald AONB has researched opportunities to redress the change (Restocking the High Weald report) – many of the proposals are applicable to the Kent Downs.

There are multiple pressures faced by livestock enterprises. The loss of grazing livestock and skilled graziers due to the poor economics of grazing, has led to areas of grassland that were previously grazed, falling out of use only to be ploughed up for crops, planted with trees, converted to leisure use or scrubbed over through abandonment, indeed research by the [University of Sheffield \(2020\)](#) shows that tree planting may become more financially viable than sheep farming. At the same time the role of sustainably managed livestock in

improving soil quality is increasingly understood and there is a potential that rotational agriculture may increase in response to soil degradation.

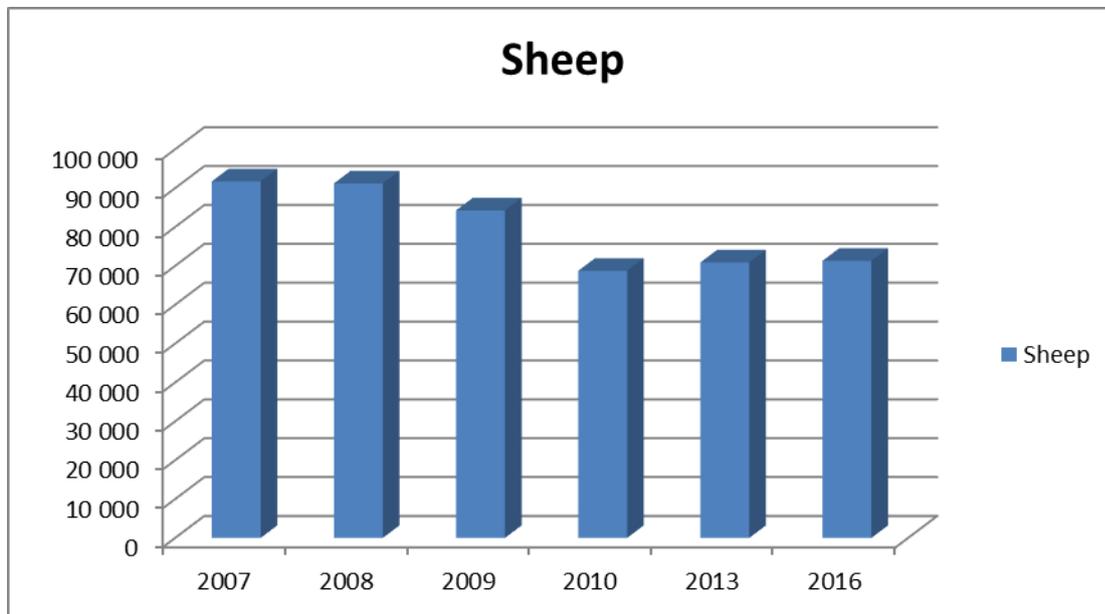


Figure 6.3 Sheep numbers in the Kent Downs AONB

Horses are an increasingly common grazing animal in the AONB; equine management is classed as leisure rather than agricultural use. Equine activities play an important role in the AONB land-based economy and can provide a market for local farm produce for feed and bedding for instance. If managed in a sustainable and sympathetic manner, horse grazing can make a positive contribution to the management of the pastoral quality of the AONB's natural beauty. However examples of good practice can be difficult to find and the impacts of growth in equine enterprises have tended to detract from the Kent Downs landscape character, creating subdivided paddocks, new structures, overgrazing, lighting and ménages. Good practice guidance has been published for the management of land for horses in the Kent Downs AONB.

### Arable agriculture

Part of the mixed farm picture of the Kent Downs landscape arable agriculture is an important economic component of the Kent Downs. Key crops include wheat, oil seed rape and barley. There is an unusually high amount of grade 2 and 3 agricultural soils in the AONB, when compared with other Protected Landscapes, making arable agriculture viable with parts of the AONB being a focus for production based agriculture. Arable crops are undifferentiated commodities with generally little opportunity to add value in the farm enterprise and local economy. Like many types of agriculture, arable farming is increasingly driven by technological innovation which can lead to the simplification of crop rotations and field patterns but can also drive greater precision and efficiency. At the same time the role of minimal or no tillage farming in improving soil quality is increasingly understood and there is a potential that this form of cultivation as well as other regenerative agricultural practice may increase in response to soil degradation and climate change mitigation and resilience.

Arable field wild-flowers are amongst the most threatened groups of plants in the UK. Some of the arable farmland of the Kent Downs include some of the most valuable sites for these plants in Britain, notably Ranscombe Farm nature reserve. The Kent Downs offers the potential to enhance the abundance of these most threatened plants

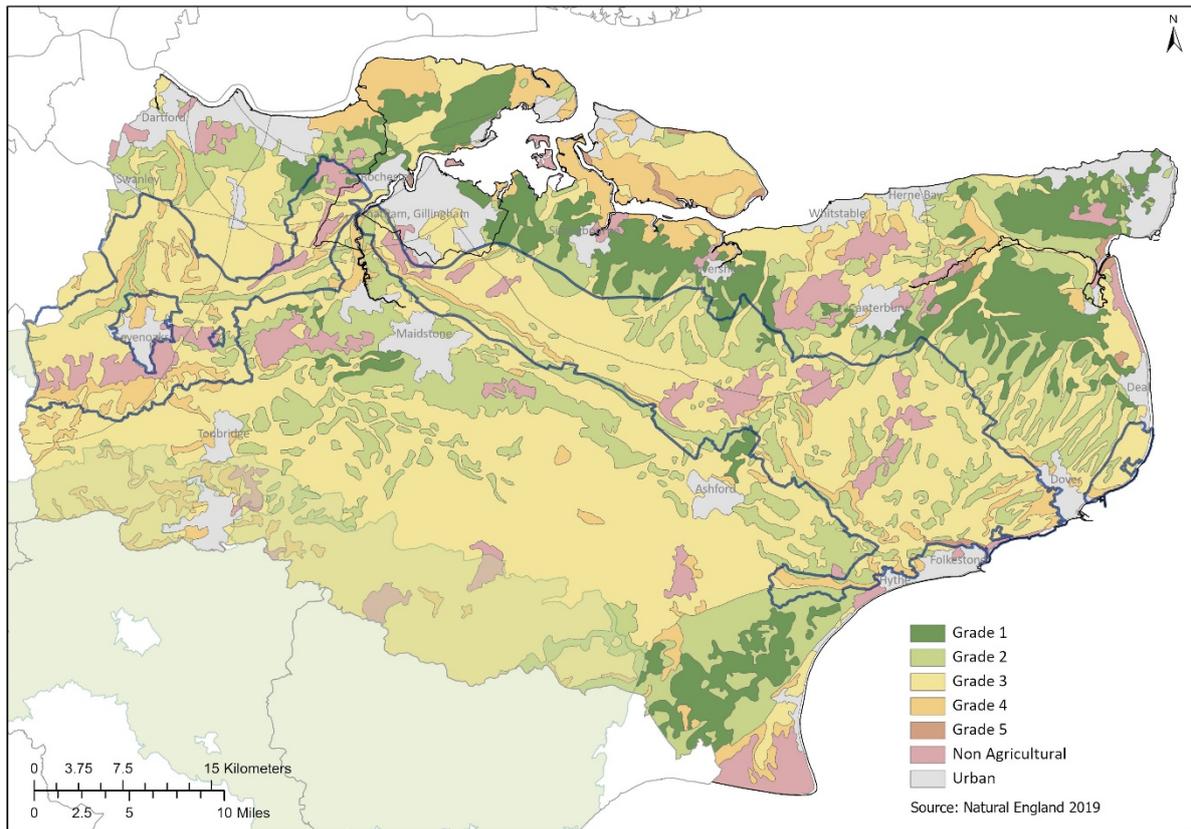


Figure 6.1 Agricultural land classification in Kent

### Orchards and Fruit

Traditional orchards of large trees with understorey grazing are much valued in the landscape and rich in wildlife however they are difficult and uneconomic to manage and many have been grubbed or replaced by more productive and labour-efficient, safer, smaller fruit trees grown in closely spaced rows. Their greater uniformity and more intensive management have reduced the associated wildlife and landscape value of these orchards. They do, however, provide a modern and important link to a valued historic landscape; orchards can be important for biodiversity, carbon storage and the local economy.

Other horticultural activities add variety and interest to the AONB landscape. For example, lavender, as a crop for essential oils has replaced a number of hop gardens, and a rapidly increasing number of vineyards have been planted adding a new hue to the AONB scenery. A further locally distinct landscape feature is the production of cobnuts in the south east corner of the Greensand Ridge, centred around Platt and Plaxtol (a cobnut orchard being called a plat)

The area of orchards and hop gardens in the AONB has decreased by nearly 50% since 1961 (70% nationally). There has however been a recent upturn in orchard planting including

walnuts and new fruit varieties such as apricots which could increase significantly if the predicted climate changes take place. Additionally, the use of polytunnels has increased slightly.

Vineyards are a rapidly increasing component of fruit growing in the Kent Downs Vineyards are often located in prominent positions in the landscape and by their nature tend to be highly visible. Viticulture is a high value, high profile activity, generating relatively high levels of employment when compared with other agricultural uses. Careful vineyard management can present opportunities to create new areas of flower-rich grasslands and species rich hedgerows, however there are often development pressures associated with viticulture, including the establishment of wineries, visitor centres, wire works and provision for workers which can be landscape detractors. The Kent Downs AONB Unit has led a Test and Trial researching best practice in vineyards for Defra's Environmental Land Management scheme; the recommendations will be promoted in the AONB and amongst other National Landscapes.

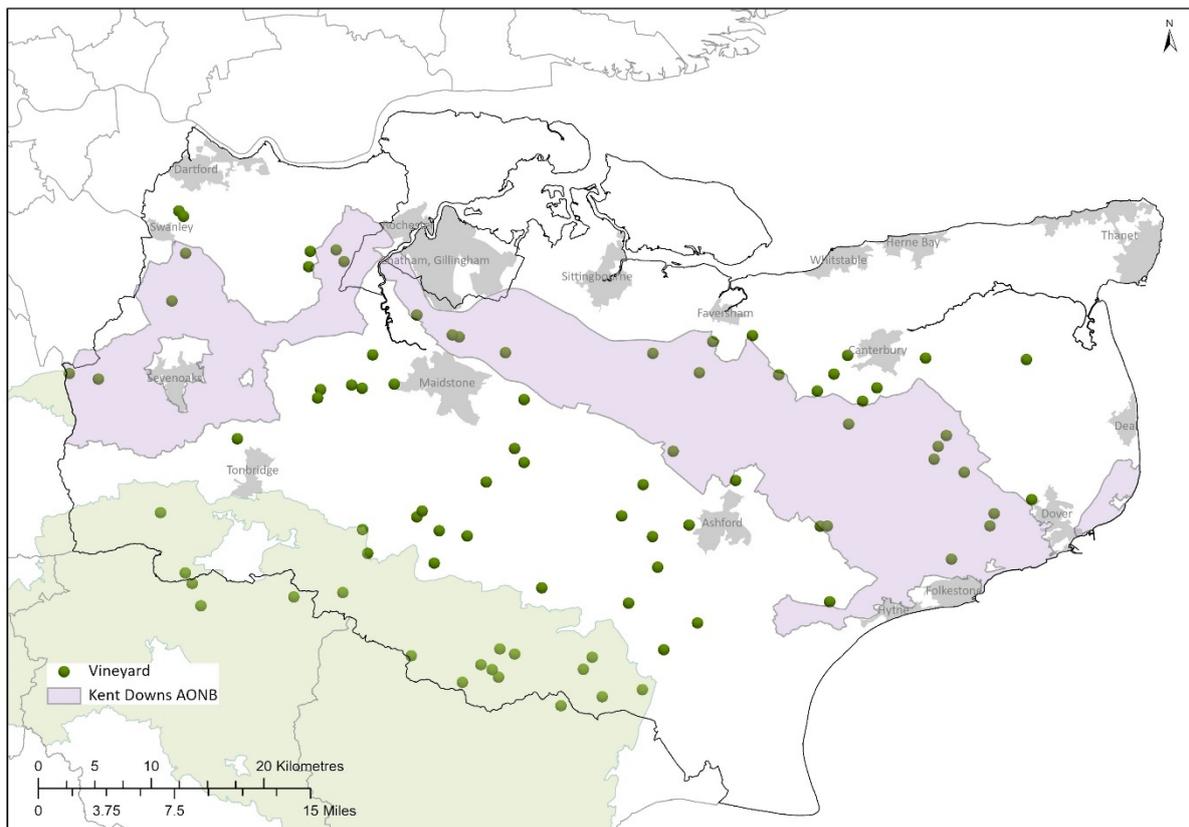


Figure 6.2 Vineyards in the Kent Downs AONB (will be updated in final plan)

While currently covering a small area of the AONB the use of polytunnels and glass houses is anticipated to continue increasing (together with the associated transport and storage infrastructure) in order to meet the needs of post EU exit fresh food supply, quality standards and a longer season as required by customers. Polytunnels can be significant detractors from landscape character and qualities in the Kent Downs and in its setting, poly tunnels and glass houses can create high demands for water and create drainage problems. Poly tunnels are temporary developments and often now use hydroponics meaning that their location is no longer connected to soil type, meaning that less sensitive locations can be chosen. As

temporary developments decommissioning strategies should be established and enforced. The horticultural sector is a small but often prominent feature in the AONB landscape and significant to the rural economy. [Link to guidance](#)

### *Agriculture and Climate Change*

Climate change adds a further powerful influence with agriculture having an important role both in adapting to the changes already in train and mitigating further impacts. The IPCC Special report on Climate Change and Land (2019) brings a special focus on the place land management and agriculture has in responding to climate change. Agriculture has been a significant net contributor to carbon, methane and nitrous oxide emissions globally, at the same time agriculture is extremely sensitive to climate change impacts, in particular changing weather patterns and increasing extremes in weather events.

The IPCC report emphasises that most land-related responses that contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation also combat land degradation and enhance food security, as well as contributing to sustainable development and other societal goals, so called ‘co-benefits’. The Committee on Climate Change report on land use (2020) promotes low carbon farming techniques, a reduction in the most carbon intensive products, more tree planting and increasing agro-forestry and further increases in bioenergy crops.

The National Farmer’s Union (NFU) and Country Land and Business Association (CLA) have both recognised the important risks of climate change and role that farming has in response. The NFU have published a plan to meet net zero carbon from agriculture by 2040 which includes increasing efficiency, enhancing carbon storage in soils and woodlands and coupling bioenergy with carbon capture. Other approaches where agriculture can have an important mitigating effect as well as engendering adaptation include evolving agricultural systems including supporting nature-based solutions to climate change and carbon management, regenerative agriculture and agro-forestry.

There is an important role for agriculture in Kent Downs to adapt to and mitigate the urgent climate impacts.

### *Farmsteads and Historic farm buildings*

Historic farm buildings are an important cultural part of the landscape and are the category of historic building most at risk; farmstead guidance prepared by the Kent Downs AONB Unit in partnership with English Heritage and Kent County Council seeks to secure this important special characteristic in the Kent Downs.

### *Agri-environment schemes and Environmental Land Management*

The public farm payment arrangements are critical to the management of the Kent Downs landscape with agri-environment and cross compliance schemes having made an important contribution to landscape conservation.

Since its inception in 1991, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) which was followed by the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) and subsequently the current Countryside Stewardship (CS) have brought positive changes to the landscape, wildlife and historic features of the AONB and continue to do so. Such schemes have achieved significant enhancements to the landscapes of the Kent Downs, 39,699ha (45%) of the AONB (this equates to 74% of the utilisable agricultural area) is managed under agri-environment schemes, 262 agreements are in place. This includes 5,538ha of managed grassland with 487ha with public access payments. 734ha of unimproved chalk grassland and 250ha of

semi improved chalk grassland.

The eastern part of the Kent Downs AONB has been the focus of a 20-year programme which has applied Countryside Stewardship payments to deliver landscape scale conservation in the farmed environment. A consistent 1:1 approach of advice and support in five focused areas of 50-80km<sup>2</sup> and to groups of 12 to 20 farmers has created large areas of restored and recreated grassland. The figures and outcomes are impressive with over 900Ha of arable and species poor grassland now converted to wild-flower rich meadows 300Ha of which have been sown with native, local wildflower mixes.

The exit of the UK from the EU brings with it an opportunity to look again at how public funding supports farming and land management to enhance landscapes, improve access and respond to the climate emergency and take part in nature recovery. The Environmental Land Management systems are being tested and co-designed with farmers and land managers and pilots of a new scheme which will use public money for public good will run in the mid-term of the plan period and the Farming in Protected Landscapes Scheme will be established. Much remains to be defined but the 'public goods' have been clearly signalled by the 25 Year Environment Plan and the AONB Unit has run three tests and trials for Defra.

#### *Collaborative approaches to farming and the landscape*

Research and pilots in various Nature Improvement Areas, such as the Marlborough and South Downs add to the east Kent work led by Natural England and show the greater potential for landscape and biodiversity gain from wide collaborative management across farm holdings (clusters) rather than at a single farm holding level. This approach can address the issues of managing ecosystem services and seeking payment for them. Given future natural resource management issues and the importance of the farmed landscape to the natural beauty of the Kent Downs, a wide collaborative approach to farming and landscape could form an innovative future approach to landscape management in the Kent Downs. Farmer cooperation is an important theme in the developing Environmental Land Management approach.

#### *Nitrate Vulnerable Zones and catchment sensitive farming*

An important part of the AONB is covered by Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ). The NVZ programme aims to reduce nitrate pollution in water through regulation of how and when nitrogen is applied to land, the management and storage of manure and the use of cover crops. Farmers in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone are required to follow mandatory rules to tackle nitrate loss from agriculture, Countryside Stewardship schemes target areas of the Kent Downs AONB to assist with the management of the water environment.

Catchment Sensitive farming advice (provided by Natural England and Commercial Water Companies) looks to address the diffuse water pollution from agriculture at source, pathway and receptor sites. It provides both 1-2-1 advice and farm cluster workshop and training events for farmers and looks to collaborate, negotiate and influence in a well-informed way to achieve pragmatic outcomes. Relevant to this is the ban on Metaldehyde for outdoor use in agriculture and the recent Farming Rules for Water legislation which protects water from runoff (soil, fertiliser and manures); this has 8 rules based around assessing risk and taking the appropriate steps to avoid or mitigate.

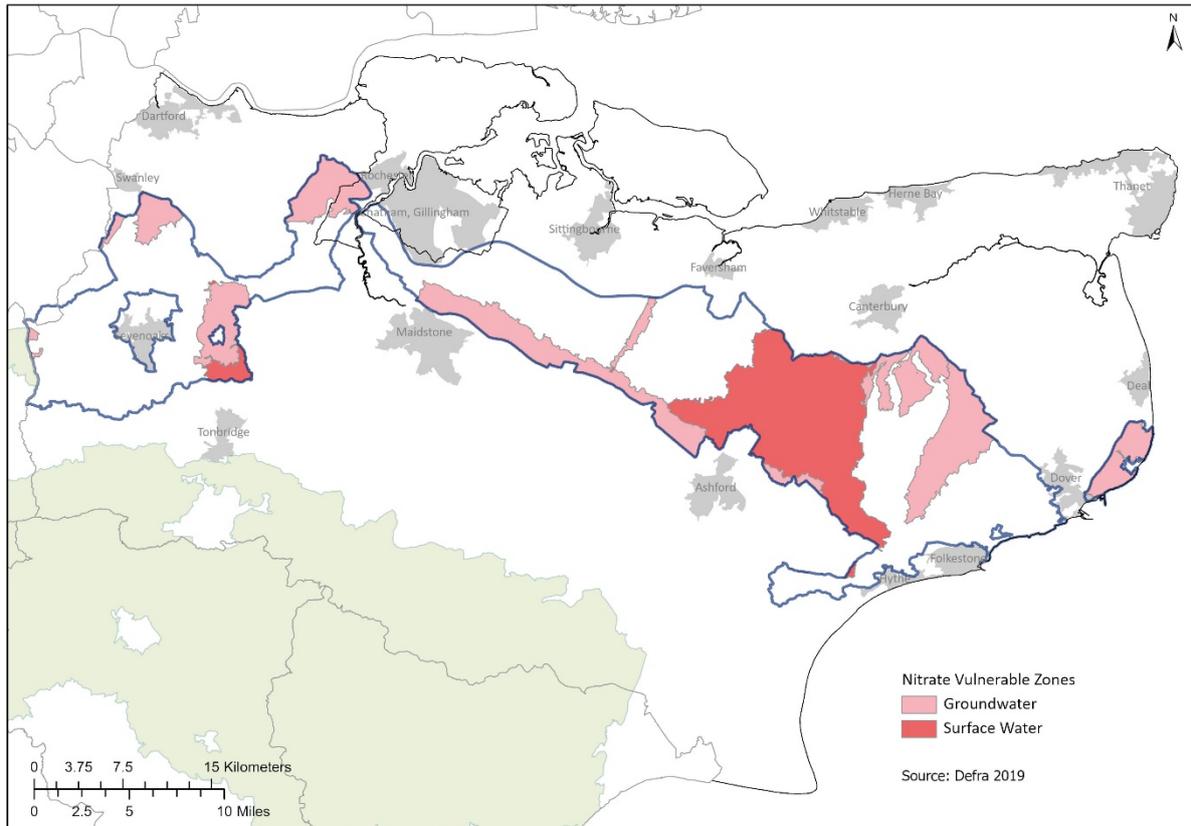


Figure 6.3 Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

### *Farm Diversification Activity*

Farms have been diversifying their businesses for many years; this provides a way to increase returns for the enterprise, stabilise incomes and utilise farm resources effectively. Farm diversification can be carried out in a way which supports the wide objectives of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan. Equally diversification, for instance to some renewable energy technologies or intrusive leisure activities can run counter to the characteristics and qualities which are valued. The Kent Downs AONB partnership promotes an integrated approach to farm diversification, balancing business, planning and environmental issues when considering diversification proposals.

### *Access and Understanding*

Access to the farmed landscape is much valued and important for health and well-being; at the same time the negative impact of access on farm enterprises is an increasing concern of farmers and farm managers. In the context of new arrangements for farm payments carefully managed access could form a diversification opportunity at the same time as providing public good and managing and mitigating impacts on the farm enterprise. The findings of the Kent Downs access Test and Trial clearly set out exciting opportunities to overcome the barriers to access for more and more diverse people in a way that can benefit farmers and land managers.

## **6.2 Farmed landscape - special characteristics and qualities**

## A mixed farm landscape

Kent Downs farmland is characterised by a tradition of mixed farming, with arable crops and grasslands, occasional orchards and platts set among a lattice of ancient woodland, hedgerows, copses and individual in field and hedgerow trees.

A key part of this mixed farm landscape, arable agriculture has always been an important part of the character of this landscape. The area of arable land has fluctuated only slightly over the 50 years since designation. The seasonally changing colours and hues of arable agriculture and grassland typify the rich heritage of mixed farming. The Kent Downs are particularly notable for rare species associated with arable agriculture particularly the rare wildflowers found on reserves such as Ranscombe Farm and farmland birds.

Pastoral landscapes are a particularly valued component of the Kent Downs; permanent, flower rich grassland, including neutral grassland in some valley bottoms, grazed flood meadows but most notably chalk grassland found often on the dramatic chalk scarps and on 'shaves' in the dry valleys. In many cases the chalk grassland is of International importance for its wildlife. More productive grasslands, sometimes form part of farm rotations.

Orchards and horticulture play an important part in the special character of the AONB landscape, the regular striate form enhancing the rise and fall of the land. Teynham (just north of the AONB) became the site of the first 'mother' nursery for commercial fruit orchards in England in the days of Henry VIII, and there is still a concentration of top and stone fruit (tree fruit) and hop growing along the northern fringes of the Mid Kent Downs. In the Kent Downs it is the traditional cherry orchards which are particularly distinctive.

The Kent Downs AONB has, along with the South Downs National Park and Surrey Hills AONB, has become the target for increasingly confident and capable English wine growing and production. There has been a rapid expansion of vineyard areas in the AONB have been planted with vineyards since the publication of the last AONB Management Plan; subject to market conditions this is expected to continue to grow at a rapid rate and is creating a new character. Studies (2020, 2021) prepared by the Kent Downs AONB Unit and South Downs National Park Authority into the impacts and opportunities arising from viticulture conducted in the Kent Downs, Surrey Hills AONBs and the South Downs National Park clearly demonstrate both the potential impacts of viticulture on the landscape and how to draw public good benefits from viticulture as well as other row fruit growing.

### 6.3 Farmed landscape - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Need to balance viable, resilient and competitive farming enterprises with the need for sensitive environmental management in a landscape of national importance.
- b. Decline in farmland area of the Kent Downs, grazing livestock enterprises and loss of skilled graziers.
- c. Substantial uncertainty about the farming and land management economy and its wider context driven by volatility in agricultural commodity prices (both scale and speed), the impact of trade negotiations and future public payment arrangements post EU exit.
- d. Uncertainty and limited funding for agri-environment (Environmental Land

Management) schemes and the incentives they offer, particularly in the face of rising farm gate prices, along with the ending of long run Stewardship schemes. This issue is counter balanced by the considerable opportunities to enhance farming's role in responding to climate change, delivering nature recovery and new access opportunities as well as other 'public goods' identified by ELMs.

- e. Ploughing of permanent grassland and previous stewardship land as a response to uncertainty about the future farm payment environment is an identified risk.
- f. Changes in landholdings and land management practice. Loss or amalgamation of medium-sized mixed farms and growth of large units with 'share' or 'contract' farming often with an associated loss of crop diversity and establishment of small farming units/residential or leisure owners, where farming is not the main source of income and experience and continuity of land management are not guaranteed.
- g. Rationalisation of the farming system and loss of the mixed farming landscape, diversity and distinctiveness and selling off of farmhouse and buildings/cottages from the farmland estate; separating land and accommodation changing the character and landscape setting of former farmhouses; estate cottages and farm buildings.
- h. Given the relatively high proportion of grade 2 and 3 land there is a need to encourage investment in landscape character management in areas of 'productive' agriculture.
- i. Farm diversification and development activities such as increased equine facilities, permitted rights afforded to farm building conversions, shooting and field sports, alternative crops (e.g. lavender, biomass energy crops, vineyards) and non-agricultural enterprises (e.g. self-catering cottages, glamping and new uses for traditional farm buildings) can have important detracting impacts as well as benefits to the characteristics, qualities, and rural economy of the Kent Downs.
- j. Increasing use of polytunnels to provide high quality, low 'food mile' soft and stone fruit and other high value produce but can be important detractors from the landscape.
- k. The need to manage adaptation and mitigation strategies for climate change in a way that supports landscape character and qualities; for instance promote low carbon farming, soil restoration, regenerative agriculture, agro-forestry, natural flood management, sensitive water storage sensitive design in new agricultural buildings.
- l. The opportunity to develop a wide collaborative approach to farmland management in the Kent Downs and build on the long-term strategic approaches and to create a nature recovery network in the Kent Downs.
- m. Lack of public awareness of the links between food and farming and land-based activities, environmental issues, landscape conservation and management is combined with an increasing wish for access to land and the opportunity presented by the development of the ELMs to radically change this position and manage the impacts of access in a positive way.
- n. Historic farm buildings are the category of historic building identified as being most at risk and the historic character of farmsteads is being lost.

- o. Rural crime and antisocial behaviour are an important cost to farm economies making it harder for farmers and land managers to accept further access or manage land sensitively and can make the landscape feel unmanaged and unwelcoming to the public.

## 6.4 Farmed landscape – aims

The Kent Downs remains principally a farmed landscape where the character and qualities of the landscape are supported by strong, viable, resilient and sustainable farming enterprises and where:

1. Public payments support the objectives of the AONB management plan which forms the strategic framework for Environmental Land Management. The conservation of landscape character and diversity, the restoration and enhancement of wildlife habitats, the conservation of historic and cultural features, responses to climate change and the welcoming of people to enjoy the landscape, are all integrated and complementary activities to contemporary, competitive, sustainable and resilient farming.
2. The mixed farming landscape is promoted in a modern collaborative context and at a landscape scale; the benefits of previous public investment in agri-environment and former set aside schemes are retained and good and innovative land management practice which supports and enhances the ecosystem services of the AONB is encouraged to all agricultural enterprises, farm owners and managers.
3. Farm diversification and development activities conserve and strengthen landscape character, qualities and local distinctiveness.
4. Locally produced, high-quality and sustainably produced food is available and environmental quality is a market advantage.
5. There is heightened awareness and understanding by residents and AONB visitors of the importance and fundamental role played by farming, and the connection between landscape conservation, environmentally responsible farming and high-quality food are appreciated by all people.

## 6.5 Farmed landscape - principles

- FL1 The Kent Downs AONB will retain the mixed farming character for which it is valued.
- FL2 The targeting of public agricultural payments to make a positive, landscape scale contribution to conserving and enhancing the special characteristics, qualities and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB and supporting ecosystems services and public wellbeing will be pursued using the AONB Management Plan as the strategic framework.
- FL3 Farming practices that improve the Kent Downs AONB landscape character and qualities, or mitigate damaging impacts, will be supported and pursued through guidance.

- FL4 The use of integrated whole farm and farm cluster planning which includes a business planning, landscape, heritage, biodiversity and habitat assessments and supports ecosystems services will be pursued.
- FL5 Farm diversification activities will be supported if they help achieve the vision, aims and principles of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan.
- FL6 The production, supply and marketing of Kent Downs AONB produce derived from environmentally sensitive management will be encouraged and supported.
- FL7 Proposals for conversion from agricultural land to leisure use and the creation of both agricultural and non-agricultural structures must demonstrate that there will be no individual or cumulative negative impact on the landscape character and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB.
- FL8 A collaborative, long term 'cluster farm' approach to achieving the farmed landscape objectives of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.
- FL9 To meet the green house gas targets for the Kent Downs AONB the adoption of new and modified farming approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation and soil enhancement that produce co-benefits for landscape and biodiversity will be supported where they support the character and qualities of the Kent Downs.
- FL10 Activities will be supported that increase wider public understanding of farming and the benefits that the farmed landscape can bring for high quality food production, recreation, well-being, nature conservation, the historic environment, landscape and a buoyant rural economy will be supported.

# 7. Woodland and Trees

## Our vision for woodland and trees in the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... the characteristic Kent Downs network of woodland and trees is greater in extent and is conserved and enhanced for its landscape, wildlife and historic value as well as its vital role in mitigating climate change and supporting nature recovery. Sustainably managed woodlands and trees are resilient to stressors such as pests, disease, visitor pressure and climate change, they provide inherent mitigation and adaption to that change. Buoyant markets for woodland products support the productive, sustainable management of trees and woodlands; new woodland and tree establishment; high quality multi-functional management provides well-used places for leisure and recreation, health and wellbeing and are rich in characteristic wildlife.

### 7. Overview

The Kent Downs AONB is one of Britain's most wooded landscapes and it contains a nationally significant amount of ancient woodland. The woodland component of the landscape has its roots in the often poor clay with flints soils on valley sides or steep slopes which are difficult to farm, woodlands have been retained in some of the sporting estates. Woodland covers around 23% of the AONB and is the second largest land-use after farming, tree canopy cover which includes trees outside woodlands in the Kent Downs.

### Difference between England National Forest Inventory Map 2012 & England NFI Map 2018

(source: Forestry Commission 2020)

Interpreted Forest Types	Gained 2012-2018 (ha)	Lost 2012-2018 (ha)	Net (ha)
Assumed woodland	4.40	1.69	<b>2.71</b>
Broadleaved	82.48	40.02	<b>42.46</b>
Conifer	10.58	2.22	<b>8.36</b>
Coppice	3.40	0.00	<b>3.40</b>
Felled	0.64	0.00	<b>0.64</b>
Ground prep	1.11	1.59	<b>-0.48</b>
Low density	3.13	0.00	<b>3.13</b>
Mixed mainly broadleaved	1.07	0.00	<b>1.07</b>
Mixed mainly conifer	1.13	0.81	<b>0.32</b>
Young trees	19.91	11.76	<b>8.15</b>
<b>Woodland</b>	<b>127.86</b>	<b>58.09</b>	<b>69.76</b>

The highest woodland concentrations in the AONB are found on the Greensand Ridge between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge; along the chalk escarpment in West Kent; in large blocks in the mid Kent Downs; above the Stour Valley and in areas of the East Kent Downs

plateaux. Much of the AONB's woodland comprises, fragmented sites in disparate ownership, a situation exacerbated by the increase of wood lotting (breaking up woods into multiple small ownerships). Wood lotting research in Kent has found some negative impacts; often woodland management is absent and the ability to manage woodlands as a whole can be compromised. However, new owners are often motivated to improve and understand woodland wildlife and heritage.

The declarations of climate and environmental emergencies has placed a new focus on woodlands and trees and in particular woodland and tree establishment – the Kent Downs AONB landscape can support more woodlands and in particular trees outside woodlands.

Trees and woodlands provide significant amenity and economic value, iTree surveys can assist in quantifying this benefit and in Kent a Natural Capital account is being prepared which will provide more information on the ecosystems services and value of trees and woodlands as well as other natural assets in Kent and the Kent Downs.

### 7.1 Ancient woodland

Whilst all woodland is important to the character and qualities of the AONB almost 70% of the Kent Downs woodland is ancient woodland, around 30% of this is plantation on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) (3,585ha); areas of ancient woodland where non-native species have been planted, generally in the 20th century. The careful, gradual restoration of PAWS sites to native species composition is a current priority for woodland management. The Forestry Commission strategy for ancient woodland is described in the <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-ancient-and-native-woodland-in-england>.

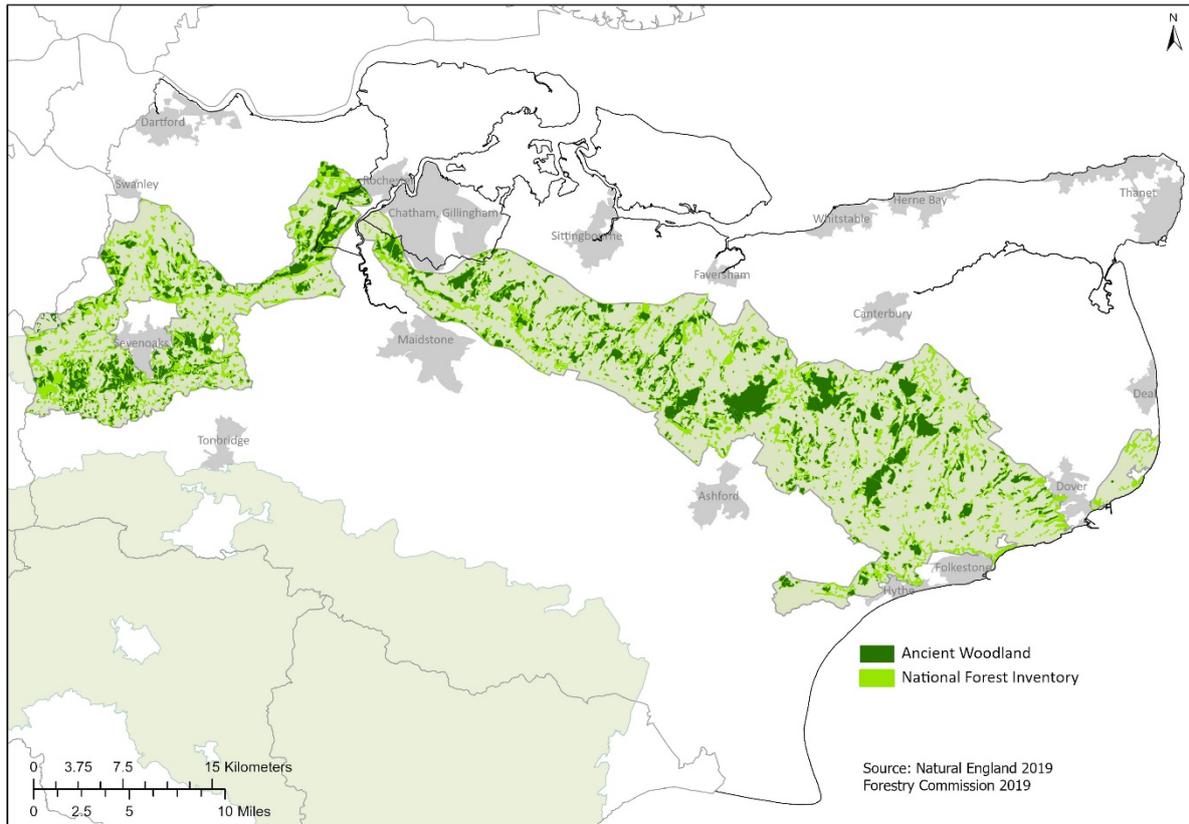


Figure 7.2 Woodland cover in the Kent Downs AONB

## 7.2 Tree pests and diseases

Ash is a particularly prominent tree in the Kent Downs AONB, both in the woodlands and hedgerows ash forms an important component of the landscape and was a major component of regeneration following the 1987 storm. The Kent Downs woodlands were one of the first areas in Britain to experience widespread infection from Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*); the landscape implications are already serious with whole woodlands filled with dead and dying ash trees, trees outside woodlands dying and being felled and clear evidence that the impact is intensifying and spreading across the Downs. There is an increasingly serious risk to the ecosystems services provided woodlands and the health and safety of the public and woodland workers in particular. The Kent Downs has been identified as an Important Ash Area by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), reflecting the prominence of Ash in the landscape and the associated nature conservation interest.

Ash Dieback is only one of many tree diseases and pests which are affecting or expected to affect the Kent Downs landscape; in the period of the last plan sweet chestnut blight and Oriental chestnut gall wasp have been recorded in Kent; *Phytophthora* spp have potential serious tree health implications; oak processionary moth has been extending from London into the Downs and in 2019 infected imported oak trees were intercepted in or near the Kent Downs. An important issue for the commercial woodlands is the eight-toothed spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) which has been recorded in Kent; it is a serious pest of spruce with a potentially significant impact on the British forestry industry. Grey Squirrel have an important impact on the ability to produce high quality timber and various species of deer are reported to be increasing and spreading in the Downs affecting planted and regenerating

trees and the woodland ground flora. The Government has published a Tree Health Resilience Strategy (2018) and Research Strategy for Ash Dieback (2019) along with an Ash Dieback tool kit which was developed by the Tree Council that have informed the drafting of the revised plan and provide a helpful strategic context but do not create a landscape recovery plan. It is important that woodland management to mitigate the impacts of pests and diseases is as carefully conducted as in other circumstances.

Tree planting and woodland establishment is an increasingly important priority nationally, there is a target to establish 30,000Ha of new woodland in England by 2025 and 30,000Ha across the UK every year until 2050. Ensuring the biosecurity of nursery trees is vitally important to ensure that more tree diseases are not established which are likely to vastly outweigh any benefit that new planting might bring; a bio-secure standard for nursery stock (Plant Healthy) was established in 2020. Trees can be very good at establishing themselves, especially where there are nearby appropriate seed sources; new planting is not always the best or most effective way to establish new woods or even trees outside woodlands, tree planting should be used where natural regeneration is not a viable option or the outcome would be detrimental, for instance where unsuitable seed trees are common.

### 7.3 Coppice woodlands

Throughout the AONB coppiced sweet chestnut is common, often planted into ancient woodland over the last two centuries. Historically sweet chestnut coppice was used for pit props in the east Kent coalfields and for fencing and hop poles. Latterly, as these industries declined, chestnut coppice went for hardwood pulp at the nearby paper mills which have now closed. Chestnut is still coppiced for high value fencing and more recently for the supply of wood chip for heat and fuel for Sandwich combined heat and power. Like ash, sweet chestnut is facing several diseases which may seriously affect its productivity and viability in the Kent Downs and there is concern about the future resilience of single species woodlands.

The continuation of coppicing is important for landscape and biodiversity conservation. Much of the AONB's woodland landscape was once characterised by blocks (cants) of coppice stools cut on regular cycles. Many ancient woodland animal and plant species require coppice management which cyclically opens up the woodland floor to light. Coppice with standards creates edges and mosaics of high canopy with taller and shorter coppice stands, providing a diversity of ecosystems within the woodland habitat. Establishing and managing coppicing is difficult where deer populations are high because re-growth can be browsed off. It has been noted that deer populations in Kent woodlands are growing (The Deer Initiative); it is important to maintain deer numbers at a level that does not prejudice the re-establishment of coppicing the regeneration of trees and woodlands and the quality of the woodland ground flora..

The relatively new practice of 'wilding' taken forward to enhance biodiversity may be a way to emulate some of the beneficial effects of coppice for woodland diversity and create open areas in woodland, but is likely to detract from the potential for woodland products to be harvested.

In Kent, Sussex and Surrey there remains a coppice industry which, although small and threatened, is showing signs of resurgence and could provide a basis from which to return the coppice woodland of the Kent Downs to rotational management and thus continue a management tradition with origins in the Neolithic period.

## 7.4 Shooting in woodlands

The Kent Downs landform and landscape character makes its woodlands suitable for shooting, particularly pheasant shooting which is thought to be one of the most important economic drivers for woodland management. Where game bird management is poor the quality of woodland biodiversity is damaged and grey squirrel numbers can increase, at the same time game management can align with conservation aims where not intensive and doesn't restrict woodland management.

## 7.5 Climate change, trees and woodlands

Climate change puts a special focus on the woodlands of the Kent Downs. The Forestry Commission has identified a series of key impacts which include declining tree health and limited mortality in some native species but increasing productivity for others, particularly where water and soil nutrients are available, changes to ground flora, loss of drought sensitive species particularly on shallow soils, damage from extreme events and the expectation that forests and woodland will become increasingly seen as a cool shady refuge for healthy exercise, whilst public access to forests may be interrupted by closures due to storm damage, and roads and paths being washed away. Trees and woodlands are acknowledged to be important carbon sinks through the biomass of trees and in the associated soils. The use of timber in building and for other permanent uses is an effective way of 'locking' carbon dioxide and removing it from the atmosphere; using timber from coppice for heat and heat and power is a low carbon emissions source of energy (compared with fossil fuels), it encourages woodland management which is effective at accelerating carbon sequestration and is a sustainable supply of energy but does not 'lock' carbon. The wood fuelled combined heat and power plant at Sandwich has provided a major new demand point for timber grown in Kent (160K tonnes each year).

The Woodland Trust report 'Adapt or Die' suggests that beech, a feature in parts of the Downs, may no longer be viable in the Kent Downs by as soon as 2050, anecdotal evidence suggests that mature trees are most vulnerable to the climatic changes. Forestry Commission research indicates that the Kent Downs will be a refuge for lowland woodland types as climatic conditions change. Additionally sweet chestnut, being a species of Southern Europe, is likely to be well adapted to the predicted conditions and coppicing is thought to be a way to make the woodland ecosystem more resilient. The relatively single species nature of many chestnut woodlands makes them potentially less resilient to the predicted impacts of climate change as well as disease.

As part of the strategy to reach net carbon zero by 2050 the Committee on Climate change has recommended bringing 80% of woodland into active management by 2030, it has also promoted significant new tree planting across Britain. The Kent Downs AONB can accommodate new woodland, woodland expansion and in particular trees outside wood while, at the same time enhancing landscape character and providing other 'co-benefits' such as flood amelioration, wildlife enhancement, new economic forestry and new access opportunities. During the plan period a tree establishment strategy will be published for the Kent Downs AONB.

## 7.6 Forestry and woodland in public ownership

The Kent Downs AONB contains large areas of Forestry England owned land (1,560ha); much of this is plantation on ancient woodland sites (conifer and broadleaf); the policy position for which is to return to broadleaved woodland over time. Forestry England owned woodlands are popular with visitors and public usage can be high near urban areas. Kings

Wood is home to the Stour Valley Creative Partnership collection of artist's interventions; several notable pieces appear on a sculpture trail albeit there has been limited commissions in recent years. There are several examples of community owned and managed woodlands in the Kent Downs and this enthusiasm is an important opportunity for the future sustainable management of the woodlands and trees of the AONB.

### 7.7 Health and wellbeing from trees and woodlands

Trees and woodlands have been demonstrated as providing many health and well-being benefits, Forest Research, for instance has identified key beneficial characteristics in its publication 'Trees and woodlands: Nature's health service', new approaches to woodland recreation for health and well-being, such as 'forest bathing', are increasingly popular and also have demonstrable benefits for participants. New research identifies the critical function of the vegetation of the Kent Downs, in particular trees and woodlands, in mitigating air pollution.

### 7.8 The canopy approach

The recognition of the importance of the whole tree canopy, not just woodland cover is growing. Woodlands and trees outside woodlands together provide an ecological and landscape network which is much valued for its scenic beauty but also for the functions, or ecosystems services it provides; supporting wildlife diversity, climate mitigation and adaptation, water management and clean air. There are significant challenges to the health and extent of the tree canopy of the Kent Downs in particular from tree disease and pests at the same time farming systems which integrate trees with other farm crops can be a way to extend and connect the canopy.

### 7.9 A Tree Champion and Tree Strategy

The Government has appointed Sir William Worsley as the Tree Champion with an agenda of setting a direction for the country's trees and woodlands over a 25 year period. More tree planting has been an important priority and it is expected that a draft England Tree Strategy will be published early in the plan period.

## 8 Woodland and trees - special characteristics and qualities

Woodlands and trees are a vital part of the Kent Downs' natural beauty, providing a green, tranquil mantle to the upper slopes of the escarpments and valleys. The woodlands emphasise the undulating nature of the dip slopes and scarp and frame the agricultural lower slopes and settlements. Individual, fine and ancient trees along with in field and hedgerow trees are an important, characteristic and sometimes dramatic element of the landscape. The woodlands and trees of the Kent Downs are much valued for the sights, sounds, wildlife, cultural meaning and narrative as well as for recreation, to improve health and well-being they provide.

Almost 70% (12,114 ha) of the Kent Downs woodland resource is ancient woodland (continuously present since at least 1600). The Kent Downs' ancient woodland is nationally significant representing (3.3%) of the total in England and Wales (Natural England, Ancient Woodland (England) Inventory).

Ancient woodland is irreplaceable and valued for its cultural, landscape and biodiversity importance and the products it supplies. Some ancient woodland may represent our only link

with the original post glacial ‘wildwood’ and is more likely to contain vulnerable animal and plant species than any other habitat. Ancient woodlands can also include physical evidence of former landscape management practices. The rich but sensitive ground flora of ancient woodlands – bluebells, wood anemones, ramsons and yellow archangel – and the bird song of warblers, nightingale and nightjar and the rare and beautiful butterflies, even the dank scents of rotting leaves in the winter are part of the natural beauty of the AONB. Much of the valued woodland wildlife, invertebrates, lichens and fungi, are associated with old trees, deadwood or open ground and are restricted to ancient woods and wood pasture. The ancient woodlands of the Kent Downs also preserve the evidence of thousands of years of human activity in earthworks, monuments and place names.

The diversity of woodland types broadly follows the different soil types within the AONB, including clay (with ash, hornbeam and oak); chalk (with ash, beech and yew) and free draining sands (with oak, birch and beech). Lowland beech yew woodland is particularly distinctive in the Kent Downs and is of European importance.

Trees outside woodlands; in field trees, hedgerow trees and individual notable trees are a particularly important and vulnerable part of the landscape of the Kent Downs and are generally unlikely to regenerate under current land management systems; each tree is an ecology and has a story. Often prominent in land and streetscapes, trees outside woodlands are an important quality of the landscape.

## 8.2 Woodland and trees - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. There has been an increase and intensification of the impact of pests and diseases on woodlands and trees and this is expected to continue; the approach to woodland and trees in the landscape should be responsive and secure sustainable management as well as achieve resilience to this significant threat.
- b. There is a need to ensure that markets for woodland products secure sustainable woodland management which support landscape character, wildlife and the local economy.
- c. There is a need to build an appropriately trained and equipped work force with the capacity to both generate and take advantage of new markets.
- d. Restocking on woodland sites, woodland creation and tree planting needs to be resilient to future climates mixing natural regeneration and planting schemes use a diverse range of appropriate species which are certified as bio secure and ideally of local provenance. (NB the use of species found previously in the area, such as lime and elm, and appropriate non-native stock are being considered as a response to the impacts of climate change, pests and disease but this is not conclusive and there is a need to be open to new approaches).
- e. The implications of climate change put a special focus on Kent Downs woodlands for both adaptation and mitigation responses; the resilience of woodlands and trees and a strategic approach to woodland and tree cover expansion are a key consideration.
- f. The diversity of type and motivation of wood owners and the rapidly changing woodland context means there is a need for consistent intervention and advice to

- support sustainable woodland management.
- g. The emphasis on multi-purpose woodland use is supported but can bring challenges for owners and managers and it can be the case that recreation, biodiversity and landscape management are do not bring commercial returns. Woodland recreation provides many benefits but increasing pressure is sometimes considered an increasing issue for woodland management, affecting commercial options, biodiversity and visitor experience.
  - h. Intensive agriculture, infrastructure and building developments and pre-development felling can lead to the loss and fragmentation of woodland and transitional habitats around woods; there has been a reported increase in advance felling on sites where development is being sought.
  - i. Pheasant and other game bird rearing can cause a loss of biodiversity and landscape value but where managed well can support sustainable woodland management.
  - j. There is a need to take a strategic approach and propose long term management solutions to minimise biodiversity loss, to promote woodland regeneration and reduce fragmentation of woodlands and to limit the long term impact of disease and pest species in Kent Downs woodlands.
  - k. There is a need to support the use of the UK Forestry Standard and Grown in Britain certification for woodland products.
  - l. There is a need for the restoration and management of open space in woodlands, particularly woodland rides and glades and to carefully consider the opportunity for a wilding approach and the reintroduction of woodland species in certain circumstances.
  - m. Insufficient understanding of the value, condition and location of ‘veteran’ trees, specimen trees outside woodlands and standing /lying deadwood in woodlands and parkland – for landscape, biodiversity, cultural and historic reasons.
  - n. The need to harness the popular value of woodlands to improve understanding, engage new management arrangements and wider community and individual involvement, health and well-being.
  - o. The historic features contained in woodlands can often be overlooked, there is a need to ensure that they are better understood conserved and protected during woodland management operations and through the application of the UK Forestry Standard.
  - p. The need to continue to promote and secure the restoration of PAWS sites through guidance and management support.

### **8.3 Woodland and trees – aims that support the sustainable management of woodlands and trees**

A landscape in which:

1. The irreplaceable fine tree and ancient woodland characteristics and qualities, cultural heritage and landscape character is restored, conserved and enhanced.
2. The retention and sustainable management of woodlands and trees provides beautiful landscapes, recreation and education, carbon sequestration, timber, a sustainable source of renewable energy, an important wildlife habitat and assists with adaptation to the impacts of climate change.
3. Existing woodland is retained and expanded areas of woodlands and trees form functional ecological networks alongside other key habitats of the AONB in order to encourage resilience to the impacts of climate change and enhance landscape character and quality; the canopy cover of the Kent Downs is increased. A tree establishment strategy is agreed for the AONB
4. Woodland ecology and archaeology is well understood, conserved, enhanced and recognised for its value.
5. There are sustainable levels of access to woodlands for, health, well-being, recreation and leisure with wider, more inclusive opportunities for people to benefit. Careful management ensures the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics and qualities of woodlands and trees.
6. The sustainable production of high-quality timber and valuable underwood is stimulated through sustainable market demand.
7. A collaborative approach is taken to the management, enhancement and establishment of trees and woodlands of the Kent Downs is taken.

#### **8.4 Woodland and trees - principles that support the sustainable management of woodlands and trees**

- WT1 The extent of woodland, transitional habitats around woodland and trees outside woodland in the Kent Downs AONB will be retained, connected and extended.
- WT2 A strategic, collaborative approach will be pursued to secure sustainable multipurpose woodland and tree restoration, management and establishment that reduces fragmentation, responds carefully to the impact of pests and diseases and does not risk further pests and diseases, conserves and enhances the special qualities and character of the landscape, the resilience of woodlands and trees and benefits people's enjoyment, health and well-being.
- WT3 The managed, gradual conversion of plantations on ancient woodland to deciduous woodland will be supported where locally distinct woodland types, tree species and bio-secure principally local provenance tree stock or natural regeneration are used.\*
- WT4 Training, accreditation and wider understanding of woodland management to woodland owners and workers, local people and visitors will be encouraged and supported.

- WT5 The restoration and management of woodland open habitats and spaces, such as rides, glades, and wood pasture, for landscape, biodiversity and archaeology conservation purposes will be supported.
- WT6 The identification, protection, management, planned replacement and reintroduction of trees outside woodlands including fine specimen and 'veteran' trees will be pursued. This will include developing a Kent Downs based ash dieback recovery plan as part of wider woodland and tree establishment plan for the AONB.
- WT7 Positive and strategic management interventions to overcome damage to woodlands, such as from disease, illegal and harmful recreation, an expanding deer population, poorly managed use for game rearing, livestock and development associated with wood lotting, will be pursued.
- WT8 In response to pressures on woodlands and the positive motivations of many new woodland owners, co-ordinated actions and the development and promotion of guidance and support which integrates sound landscape, heritage and biodiversity management will be supported.
- WT9 New markets for sustainably produced, appropriately certified woodland products and marketing initiatives will be supported.
- WT10 Research to understand the ownership patterns and motivations of woodland owners will be encouraged to support a coordinated, strategic approach to the conservation and enhancement of the woodlands and trees of the Kent Downs.
- WT11 The identification and review the extent of ancient woodlands using up to date methodology will be supported.

\* Principle WT3 may be amended only on the basis of sound evidence to reflect the possibility that non-native tree stock of native species could be more resilient to climate change impacts, a position statement will be prepared as part of the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

# 8. Historic, Cultural and Scientific Heritage

## Our vision for the historic, cultural and scientific heritage of the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... the rich heritage of historic landscape, buildings, settlements, sites and their settings that characterise the Kent Downs' historic and cultural fabric are maintained in favourable condition and are enhanced to reflect their local character and significance. The environmental performance of historic buildings is enhanced in a way that is sensitive to their character. They are understood and cherished by local people and visitors alike for their intrinsic value and for their important contribution to quality of life and rural economy. Vibrant and exciting artistic and cultural interpretation and celebration of the Kent Downs is supported and strong partnerships for the arts and cultural development in the Downs is in place and delivering extraordinary, contemporary work enjoyed, created by and inspiring wide and diverse publics.

### 8.1 Overview

The Kent Downs is a significant cultural landscape; the UN definition of cultural heritage encompasses natural heritage which is the understandable focus of much of the plan for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty however the concept of landscape encompasses much more than nature and landform and if we are to conserve and enhance this cultural landscape the plan must encompass wider components of landscape, including tangible and intangible cultural heritage. By affording adequate focus to the historic and cultural heritage of the landscape the fundamental objective of the AONB; being recognised and valued, is more likely to be achieved as is its conservation and enhancement. This approach supports the IUCN objective to provide a framework to underpin active involvement by the community in the management of valued landscapes or seascapes and the natural and cultural heritage that they contain

Virtually every facet of the Kent Downs has been shaped by thousands of years of human activity – in the fields and woods, tracks and lanes and villages and hamlets, an indelible memory of past times has been left to us. At the same time the extraordinary landscapes Kent Downs are particularly closely linked to the lives and inspirations of many of our greatest artists, scientists and leaders. While the landform and geology underlies its beauty, the Kent Downs AONB is very much a cultural landscape.

### 8.2 Historic and cultural heritage - special characteristics

There is a strong 'time depth' to the Kent Downs landscape and in its setting which adds to its distinctive, ancient feel. Glimpses of prehistory can be caught at various places across the AONB. Numerous Palaeolithic flints have been discovered in the AONB taking human activity back to the lower Palaeolithic period. Artefacts found on the higher land of the Kent Downs indicate the, probably occasional, presence of Mesolithic people. Notable traces of Neolithic culture are present in the lower Medway Valley in the form of megalithic burial monuments and structures which include Kit's Coty, Little Kit's Coty and the Coldrum Stones.

There are also earthen long barrows, particularly in the Medway and Stour Valleys. Bronze Age round barrows are dotted across the landscape and the Iron Age saw the development of massive hill-forts like that at Oldbury Hill near Ightham as well as widespread farmsteads and rural settlements.

Kent was probably the scene of the Roman invasion of Britain in AD43 and almost 400 years of Roman occupation have left their mark. The Roman road network, stretching in straight lines across the landscape is still represented by, for example, Stone Street which connected Canterbury with the port at Lympne and sections of Watling Street linking Dover, Canterbury, Rochester and London. Indeed throughout history Kent has been in the front line of exchange and conflict; this role has left an indelible prints on the landscape expressed in routeways and castles, trenches and docks.

The increasing sophistication and landscape impact of agriculture is recorded in the lynchets found throughout the Kent Downs. There is evidence that Roman and Iron Age field and settlement patterns have strongly influenced the landscape we see today.

Estate centres like Wye and Charing were established in the Anglo-Saxon period. From this time on the carving out of fields from woodland, known as assarting, and unenclosed wood pasture commons appeared in the Kent Downs landscape. Churches were also erected which formed the beginnings of the parochial structure that has continued to the present day. Drove ways, connecting estate centres with summer pastures in the Weald have left their mark in the particularly distinctive north-east to south-west orientation of the road network across much of the Downs which provides a 'grain' to the landscape.

The commons or 'minnises' of the high clay caps of the Kent Downs are believed to have been established by the Anglo-Saxon or early medieval period and form distinctive open areas of rough grass, bracken, heather and gorse. Many have now been enclosed but open minnises most notably Ewell Minnis near Dover and Stelling Minnis remain as important remnants of previously more widespread landscape features.

The Norman invasion saw the coming of the castle, varying in scale from that at Dover, the 'key' to England, to smaller structures of local lords, such as the ring-work and bailey at Thurnham. Villages grew into towns and churches were rebuilt in stone, ecclesiastical interest in the countryside is witnessed by monastic houses and the palaces of the Archbishop of Canterbury for example at Otford and Charing, both of which are located on the 'Pilgrims Way' or old road, itself an ancient route linking England to the continent. Local man John Kempe established the medieval college at Wye, in 1447 when he was Archbishop of York.

The character of the Kent Downs landscape was well established by the Tudor period. There were many nucleated villages or hamlets clustered around flint and brick churches and greens, as well as settlements along river valleys and routeways and spring line settlements at the base of the escarpment. Land was cultivated and grazed throughout the AONB and the many isolated farmsteads bear testimony to this agricultural history. It is believed that complex patterns of enclosure, particularly in the more fertile areas, have been created in part by the influence of the Kentish custom of 'Gavelkind' inheritance where property was divided equally rather than being allotted to the oldest heir, producing a multiplicity of holdings.

The selling off of church lands following the Reformation led to the growth of country estates with their parks and gardens which cover an important part of the AONB. Designed

landscapes in the Kent Downs include Godmersham and Chilham in the Stour Valley, Doddington and Belmont Parks in the mid Kent Downs and Bourne Park and Higham Park on the River Nailbourne.

Along the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, facing as it did potential attack from mainland Europe, there is a rich heritage of defence structures, including Dover Castle and the Western Heights, 19th century Martello towers and the concrete and brick remains of anti-invasion structures and colossal gun emplacements of the two World Wars. Valuable but non-designated 20<sup>th</sup> century defensive heritage exist across the Downs but away from the coast, examples include the numerous structures and features at Detling airfield. Other, more contemporary heritage features include the remains of, brick fields, railway arches, lime kilns, chalk pits ranging from small village pits to large sites associated with the Medway cement industry remind us of the various scales of industry found in but mostly around the landscape of the Kent Downs.

Aside from these grand and dominant historic sites and structures, the multitude of smaller cultural and historic features also help characterise the landscape of the AONB. These are the traces of ordinary people who have worked the land for centuries and have shaped its special character. Networks of ancient, often 'laid' hedgerows which still provide enclosure for livestock; wood and field banks which marked boundaries between different manors or estates, picked out with pollarded or 'stubbed' ancient trees; field patterns and lynchets revealing ploughing patterns from centuries ago; hollow ways and sunken lanes, now often byways, carved into the land by millennia of passing feet and hooves; and dene holes (deep excavations into the chalk) and borrow pits where rock and minerals were excavated by hand.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally distinctive architecture in locally derived building materials such as Ragstone, Flint and Chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled crafts workers who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular.

There is still much to discover, for example, the Kent Downs continually reveals archaeological surprises, often of national importance; the significance of the unknown historic heritage, as well as that which is undesignated is felt to be underplayed and more focus should be afforded to it.

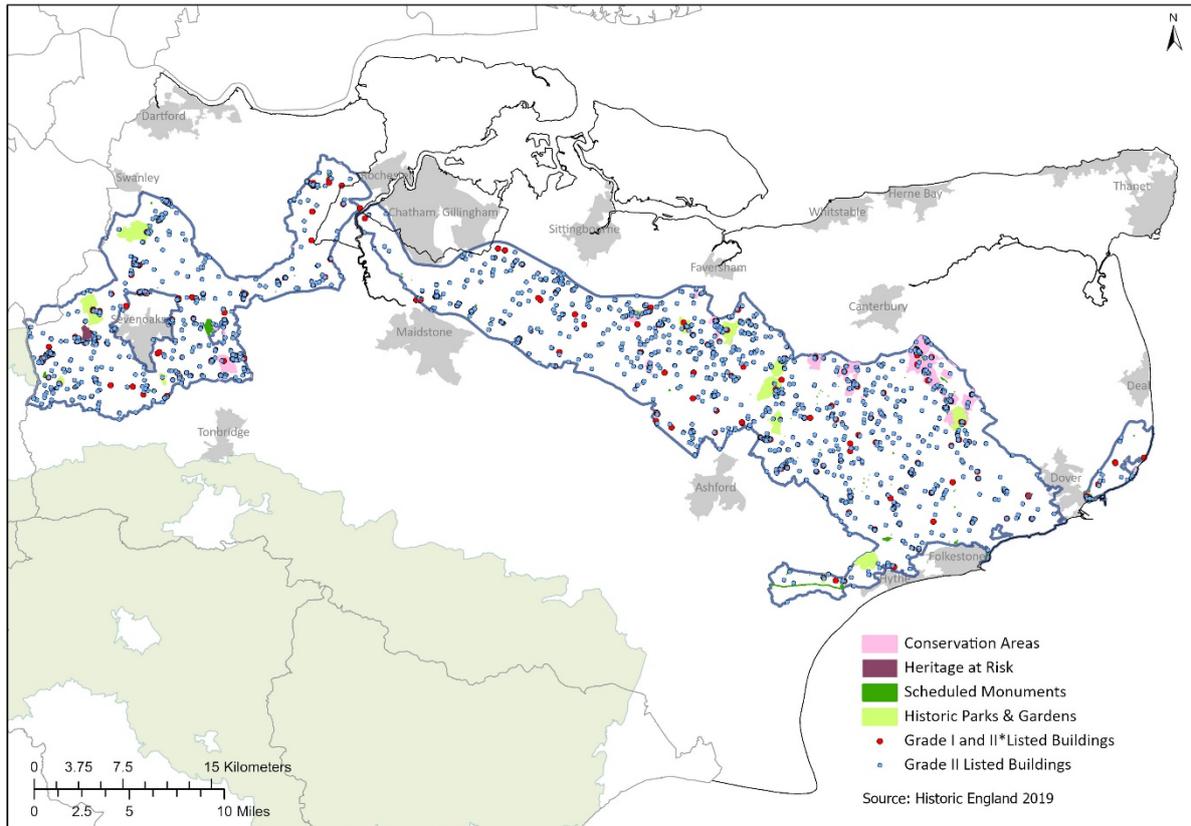


Figure 8.1 Heritage Features in the Kent Downs AONB

### 8.3 Historic Landscape Characterisation and Heritage Strategies

‘Every place, like every person, has its distinctive character, in large measure determined by its inherited features such as streets, hedges, archaeological sites, buildings or place names. Understanding this character is one of the starting points for deciding a place’s future, the first step in working out how places can be made better in the future’ (Historic England).

Historic Landscape Characterisation describes landscape character based on historical attributes surviving in the present landscape. Kent was one of the first counties to prepare a historic landscape character map on a county wide basis. The mapping is intended to provide broad scale and overall assessment of historic character.

The Kent Downs AONB is made up mainly of a ‘field pattern’ historic landscape type, covering approximately 63% of the area. Whilst this historic landscape type is further defined into subcategories, there is no predominant field type. Woodland landscape types also feature heavily with some large tracts being present in the east of the AONB. Also notable are the presence of a large number of areas of parkland, indicating the importance of the managed estates within the landscape.

As part of this review of the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan the Landscape Character Assessment has been revised and updated; closer attention to historic landscape character has been incorporated.

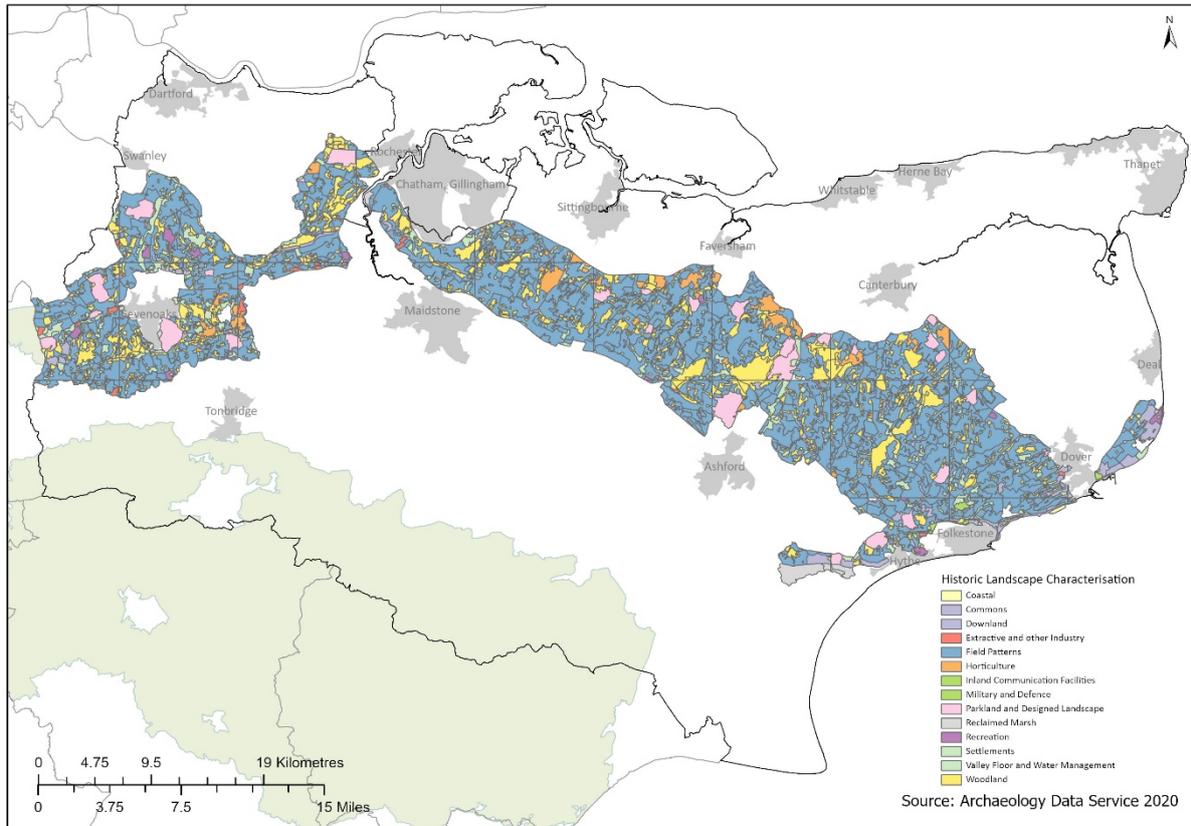


Figure 8.2 Historic Landscape Characterisation of the Kent Downs AONB

Several Local Authorities with land in the Kent Downs AONB have taken forward Heritage Strategies which contain comprehensive assessment of the heritage of the area and recommendations for its conservation and enhancement, such strategies cover the AONB and its wider setting. The NPPF states that plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect and decay. Heritage Strategies are an important source of evidence in support of the vision aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan.

It is recognised that there may be archaeological sites within the AONB that do not relate to the existing landscape. An example is Palaeolithic sites whose landscape of origin was very different from the landscape today. There will be times when the management of the modern landscape conflicts with the needs of such sites and it is important that they are not negatively impacted by modern landscape management needs.

### 8.4 Artistic, cultural and scientific importance

The extraordinary landscapes Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are particularly closely linked to the lives and inspirations of many of our greatest artists, scientists and leaders.

When the nation voted in a BBC poll for our 'greatest Britons' the top vote was, perhaps unsurprisingly, for Sir Winston Churchill and 4<sup>th</sup> was Charles Darwin, both lived in and were inspired by the landscapes of the Kent Downs.

Churchill's early life is described as 'itinerant' but when he did decide to put down roots it was at Chartwell in the western part of the Kent Downs. It is said that the tranquillity of the place captivated him along with the views which stretch far across the Weald. Churchill apparently said that "I bought Chartwell for that view." It was, however, also only 25 miles from the House of Commons, despite this convenience, his view was that "a day away from Chartwell was a day wasted".

The characteristics of Chartwell which so inspired Churchill are also some of those which remain highly valued by people today; the views from the Downs were one of the most important 'targets' when the Kent Downs was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and when we ask people what they most value about the Kent Downs today, it is the scenery and views which always come top. Along with this the tranquillity that the Downs afford in an increasingly busy county is much cherished.

Darwin lived and worked at Downe House just beyond the western edge of the Kent Downs, the chalk landscapes of the Downs were a crucial part of his studies. Dubbed 'Darwin's landscape laboratory' the downland landscape is of critical scientific importance and unique cultural significance as the place in which the theory of evolution by natural selection was developed. When Downe House and the surrounding landscape was placed on the tentative list for World Heritage Status it was the Chalk landscapes that 'provided unique insights into the scientific understanding of natural life and biodiversity. The ideas that were developed from daily observations and experiments at Downe have had a profound influence on the life sciences, medicine, agriculture, philosophy, the creative arts and general views of humankind's relation to other living creatures in the natural world.'

In the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer assembles a motley band of 29 pilgrims at the Tabbard Inn in Southwark. Together, they travel the old pilgrimage route to Canterbury Cathedral to visit the shrine of St Thomas. Famously Chaucer describes: *From every shire's end/Of England, to Canterbury they wend/The holy blissful martyr for to seek/That him hath helped when that they were sick*" There is no certain route that pilgrims followed but certainly the modern day North Downs Way and Pilgrims Way along with old routeways and churches which still punctuate the landscape of the Downs were features of pilgrimage.

Fine houses with their parks and gardens can be found across the Kent Downs, of these Godmersham frequently hosted Jane Austen 'who would spend weeks at a time with her brother Edward, his wife Elizabeth and their children, for whom she was a much loved aunt. Godmersham is believed by many to be the inspiration for her novel Mansfield Park (1814).

Charles Dickens had many connections with the Downs, including the village of Cobham where the Leather Bottle pub is known to many as Charles Dickens' favourite Ale House. According to the pub, 'the great man not only used the inn and often stayed; he also featured it in The Pickwick Papers, for it was here that the lovelorn Mr Tracy Tupman fled after being jilted by his sweetheart Rachel Wardle, where he drowned his sorrows in Mr Pickwick's company.'

Bishopsbourne was sometime home to novelist Joseph Conrad, Ian Fleming referenced the extraordinary views from the White Cliffs in *Moonraker* and much more recently Riddley Walker by Russell Hoban, a post-apocalyptic science fiction novel set in Kent where the Devil's Kneading Trough at Wye features as 'Mr Clevver's Roaling Place'.

Perhaps it is visual artists that draw most from landscape; in the Kent Downs the Darent Valley is especially notable as being 'indelibly associated with one of the greatest of English Romantic artists, Samuel Palmer. For a brief period, the landscape inspired some of the most intense paintings in the history of British art, so original that Palmer's contemporaries laughed; but they are now recognised as uniquely personal expressions of a vision of England much closer to that of William Blake than the more traditional views of J.M.W. Turner and John Constable.

'Few landscapes in England are so closely associated with a single artist. The only comparable example is the Stour Valley in East Anglia, where Constable, who was born at East Bergholt, captured the rivers and farmhouses, the gentle hills and varied vegetation, in a succession of naturalistic paintings from the beginning of his career to the late 1820s.... Palmer ..worked in a wholly individual manner, inspired by Blake's technique, by Old Master prints, and above all, by the possibility of experiencing in the Darent Valley the visions of ideal landscape, of paradise, that he had been seeking. For Palmer, like Blake, believed that the second coming of Christ would take place in England, not in the 'dark Satanic mills' of the north, but in the land of 'mountains green, 'pleasant pastures, and 'clouded hills'. In a sense, Palmer found in the Darent Valley the epitome of 'England's green and pleasant land' as described by Blake.' Colin Harrison Senior Curator of European Art Ashmolean Museum

More recently Thomas Sidney Cooper's painted in the Stour Valley and Henry Moore lived and worked in the Kent Downs at Kingston near Canterbury where again the landscapes of the Kent Downs were seminal in his work; 'It was this landscape that had a profound influence on Moore's work. His time there allowed him the space to carve in the open air and to indulge his life-long preference for a natural setting for his sculptures.'

Moore began filling this rural landscape with wood obtained from a Canterbury timber yard and blocks of Hopton Wood stone that came from Derbyshire. These were erected in the garden and surrounding countryside. He later wrote, "Living at Burcroft was what probably clinched my interest in trying to make sculpture and nature enhance each other."

Ideas for his sculptures were taken directly from natural forms such as stone, pebbles and pieces of wood. Sketchbooks from the 1930s show the artist's constant obsession with nature and the progression from natural forms to sculptural ideas; some of them providing source material for much later sculptures. "Space, distance, landscape, plants, pebbles, rocks, bones, all excite me and give me ideas" explained Moore.

There is strong contemporary interpretation and artistic celebration of the Kent Downs AONB landscapes. In Kings Wood near Ashford a collection of sculptures within the forest respond to the place and the Stour Valley Creative Partnership commissions new and young artists to respond to the beauty of the woods. Along the National Cycle Route 2, a series of commissions forms the Chalk and Channel Way; from sculpture to poetry, artists have been inspired by the dramatic coastline between Folkestone and Dover. Most recently a commission taken forward by the AONB Unit's Ash Project titled 'Ash to Ash' by Ackroyd and Harvey creates a dramatic and fitting artistic response to the urgent issue of Ash dieback.

The Kent Downs landscape continues to be influential and inspirational to contemporary

artists and cultural life, and this quality needs to be celebrated, engagement widened and made more diverse linked to culturally led regeneration activities and promoted more widely.

### 8.3 Historic and cultural heritage - main issues, opportunities and threats identified

- a. The need to increase understanding, engagement, awareness of, and inspiration from, the historic, artistic, built and cultural heritage of the Kent Downs; and to encourage greater opportunities for the historic and cultural heritage to inform contemporary decisions, landscape management, regeneration and place making.
- b. The need to conserve and protect the historic environment, both above and below ground, designated and non-designated. Issues include the effect of deep ploughing, the introduction of (deep rooting) energy crops and arable conversion on sites containing buried archaeological remains, heritage crime, and development affecting or in the setting of historic buildings.
- c. The gradual degradation of the landscape and its historic features caused by localised actions of land managers, permitted developments, infrastructure development, utilities, roads and railways. These might include new or widened accesses, hedgerow damage and vehicle movements.
- d. Climate change also offers an increasing threat to heritage assets through the drying and waterlogging of archaeological sites and the impact of more severe weather events on both archaeological sites and historic buildings.
- e. Recognition and reinforcement of special historic landscape character and the local distinctiveness of settlements, settlement patterns, farmsteads, ancient routeways, buildings and design in the Kent Downs landscape through the planning process as well as in, detailed historic characterisation, Heritage Strategies, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements and Conservation Area Appraisals.
- f. Dearth and loss of skills and local sustainably sourced materials for historic building conservation, informing new developments and sustaining traditional management approaches important to landscape character and qualities.
- g. The recognition of the importance of 20<sup>th</sup> Century heritage in the landscape.
- h. The opportunity to work collaboratively with the Arts Council, Heritage Fund and cultural regeneration programmes such as the Medway City of Culture bid to secure new artistic and cultural activity and an intelligent, innovative curatorial approach to celebrate, understand and interpret the complex landscape components of the Kent Downs, research the dynamics of human experience in the landscape and support rural and urban regeneration.

### 8.4 Historic and cultural heritage - aims

A landscape in which:

- 1 The principal special characteristics and qualities of the historic character of the Kent Downs landscape, the sites and features, field and settlement patterns, villages,

hedgerows, routeways, woodlands and parklands are recognised, valued, conserved and enhanced.

2. The historic environment helps shape new development in the AONB and its setting and contributes to a distinctive sense of place. This will be achieved by ensuring that the heritage is considered from the earliest stages of project development.
3. The economic and 'quality of life' benefits of living, working in and visiting an historically-rich, artistically and culturally inspiring environment is recognised and actively supported.
4. New developments respect and reinforce the traditions of the past, whilst integrating sustainable technologies and sensitive design.
5. The landscape context and setting of historic buildings, features and settlements is protected, conserved and enhanced.
6. Restoration and conversion of the built heritage and new developments reflect local character and will meet high environmental standards, using sustainably sourced, locally derived materials and skilled workers.
7. Communities are engaged and involved in the historic and cultural environment of the Kent Downs through methods such as conservation area management planning, village design, neighbourhood planning, place making and interpretation.
8. Vibrant and contemporary artistic and cultural celebration of the Kent Downs supports the conservation, interpretation, enjoyment, understanding and enhancement of the landscape and engages diverse publics.

## 8.5 Historic and cultural heritage - principles

- HCH1 The conservation and enhancement of the historic character and features of the Kent Downs AONB landscape will be pursued and heritage-led sustainable economic activity and tourism encouraged.
- HCH2 A wider understanding of the historic, cultural, scientific and artistic importance of the Kent Downs landscape and its historic character, including a review of the Historic Landscape Characterisation of the AONB, will be supported in part to inform the interpretation and management of the AONB.
- HCH3 In recognition of the emerging national relationship with the Arts Council and arts and cultural regeneration efforts in Kent an arts and cultural strategy for the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- HCH4 The preparation and use of best practice guidance, promotion of skill acquisition and sourcing suitable sustainable materials for conserving, enhancing and adapting the historic and cultural environment to climate change will be supported.
- HCH5 Opportunities to develop contemporary and innovative artistic, historic, cultural and scientific interpretation and celebration of the landscape and people of the Kent Downs will be pursued.

- HCH6 The application of high standards of design sympathetic to cultural heritage within the AONB, identified in guidance including the AONB Landscape Design Handbook, Kent Downs Farmstead Guidance and any relevant local policy or management plans will be pursued.
- HCH7 The protection, conservation, and enhancement of heritage features under threat will be pursued through policies, projects, training and partnerships.

# 9. The Heritage Coasts

## Our vision for the Heritage Coasts of the Kent Downs

### AONB

In 2031... the special place that the White Cliffs of Dover have in the hearts and minds of millions of people is justified by the reality experienced on the ground. Collaborative effort continues to transform the management of the coasts which meets the needs of the landscape, natural and historic environment and communities, while supporting the Covid recovery and sustainable regeneration of the coastal economy including of the coastal towns.

### 9.1 Overview

The magnificent chalk cliffs between Folkestone and Kingsdown form one of Britain's most evocative and best-known landmarks. For many they are the first sight of Britain while views to France hold a special appeal, where chalk and clay cliffs, also held in great national regard, mirror the landscape drama. The Dover Strait is one of the world's most important, recognised and busiest seascapes.

The Kent Downs has a special place in some of our most renowned literature, the White Cliffs, forever in the hearts and minds of our nation, appear in many well-known songs, stories and poems sometimes as a metaphor for the whole country; they are never so well described as in King Lear as Gloucester entreats Edgar (Tom) to take him to the Dover Cliffs – he describes that;

*'There is a cliff, whose high and bending head,  
Looks fearfully in the confinèd deep.  
Bring me but to the very brim of it,  
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear  
With something rich about me. From that place  
I shall no leading need.'*

*Edgar describes the cliff;*

*'Come on, sir; here's the place: stand still. How fearful  
And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low!  
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
Show scarce so gross as beetles: half way down  
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!  
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:  
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,  
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,  
Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy  
Almost too small for sight: the murmuring surge,  
That on the unnumber'd idle pebbles chafes,  
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more;  
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight  
Topple down headlong.'*

Globally coastal Chalk is scarce, the UK holds 57% of Europe's resource, Kent holds 35% of the UK resource.

The impacts of global climate change, including sea level rise and the greater frequency and intensity of storms, is projected to have a significant effect on the Heritage Coast, making adaptation strategies an important priority for the future management of the coast.

This extraordinary natural and cultural resource can strongly assist the regeneration and recovery of Dover and Folkestone and has been identified as the basis to secure World Heritage Site status for the Dover Strait. Recreation pressure has increased significantly in the plan period with the National Trust reporting over 10% year on year increases in visitor numbers and visitor car parks are regularly closed on account of capacity constraints. Visitor pressure is unevenly spread with Langdon Cliffs recording over 500,000 visitors each year and areas of Lydden Spout (also in National Trust ownership) only 4000 visitor movements.

Defence and invasion is one of the themes of the Heritage Coast and forms an important reference in the landscape. Features in the Kent Downs include the magnificent Dover Castle described as 'the key to England', Napoleonic Martello towers, the 'listening ears' built between the wars and superseded by radar installations some of which are now listed. World War II frontline fortifications, defences, gun emplacements and anti-tank devices are peppered along the coast.

Communication and cultural exchange are important themes. In 1899 the first international wireless transmission was sent from Wimereux to the South Foreland lighthouse. Cross channel trade and cultural exchange continues apace – the Strait of Dover being one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The close proximity of Dover Harbour and views of the Strait's central shipping channel means ferries and large cargo vessels are frequent features.

Arising both from conflict and seagoing exchange and transport there is an extraordinary and outstanding collection of wrecks comprising both air and water-craft, including the Dover Boat, the oldest sea-going boat in the world. Another example is the protected wreck of the Langdon Bay, located on the edge of Dover Harbour. It is thought to be the remains of a Middle Bronze Age vessel carrying a scrap metal cargo from France to Britain, indicating early cross-channel trade.

Navigation marks are often conspicuous in the landscape for example the National Trust-managed South Foreland lighthouse, which stands 21 metres high on the headland, and a white windmill (near to the lighthouse).

## The Heritage Coasts

England's 32 Heritage Coasts have been established in the best areas of undeveloped coast to:

- conserve, protect and enhance:
- the natural beauty of the coastline
- their terrestrial, coastal and marine flora and fauna
- their heritage features
- encourage and help the public to enjoy, understand and appreciate these areas

- maintain and improve the health of inshore waters affecting heritage coasts and their beaches through appropriate environmental management measures
- take account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and fishing and the economic and social needs of the small communities on these coasts

Natural England's Designation Strategy promotes AONB Management Plans incorporating policies for the management of Heritage Coasts at a strategic level. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises the importance of the special character of Heritage Coasts and advises that development should be consistent with that character.

The White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP) has a Heritage Coast management function as part of its purpose. In the previous management plan period, the Kent Downs AONB Unit worked in partnership to secure and then chaired the 'Up on the Downs' Landscape Partnership Scheme funded by the (then) Heritage Lottery Fund, the Scheme made significant and lasting investments in improving the condition of and partnership arrangements affecting the Heritage Coast and a wider inland area.

In the plan period of the last AONB Management Plan the National Trust has made important land purchases in the two Heritage Coasts and invested further in their conservation and enhancement, this new ownership arrangement, along with local partnership working has greatly increased the delivery of the Heritage Coast purposes. As a testament to the value placed by people on this area of coast, a National Trust appeal to purchase land reached its target of £1.2 m in just 19 days.

### **Seascape assessment of the Strait of Dover**

The description of seascape character, like landscape character describes what is distinctive, special and characteristic in an area of sea (and land in coastal areas). Seascape character assessment is a tool and spatial framework to help integrate management decisions. Completed in July 2015 a full seascape character assessment of the Strait of Dover represents an important management resource. The study provides an evidence base to support marine planning and management as well as that of the coastal zone. The seascape character assessment has been used in support of the preparation of this Plan.

The assessment helped confirm the special characteristics and qualities of the Heritage Coasts and the priorities for management. The Strait is described as a cohesive seascape unified by geology, socio-economic functions, biodiversity, history, culture and intervisibility. The Strait is an area of multiple interests and values and the Assessment confirms the need for sensitive and integrated management which is clear in the vision, aims and principles of the plan.

The seascape character assessment has fed into the joint UK/ France Dover Strait Action Plan which while focusing on energy and climate change issues promotes several actions and activities which are coherent with the objectives of this Plan.

### **Marine Management Plans and Marine Conservation Zones.**

Marine plans guide those who use and regulate the marine area to encourage sustainable development while considering the environment, economy and society. As a result marine plan policy topics across environmental sectors, economic sectors and social sectors are

relevant to Kent Downs. Such policy topics can include Seascape, Biodiversity and Land-based infrastructure. AONBs are referenced in many numerous policies.

Heritage Coasts are included in Policy S-HER-1 (Heritage Assets) and Policy S-SCP-1 (Seascape) in the South Marine Plan. It is expected to be in similar policies in the South East Marine Plan.

The Heritage Coast east of Samphire Hoe will be covered by policies within the South East Inshore Marine Plan prepared by the Marine Management Organisation. The south east marine plan area includes tidal waters and extends to the mean high water springs mark. The Kent coast west of Samphire Hoe is covered by policies within the 2018 statutory South Marine Plan.

Described as ‘blue belt’ around the English Coast Marine Conservation Zones are areas designated by the Government to protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. There are three designated MCZs close to or within the Kent Downs Heritage Coasts: Dover to Folkestone; Dover to Deal and the Folkestone Pomerania.

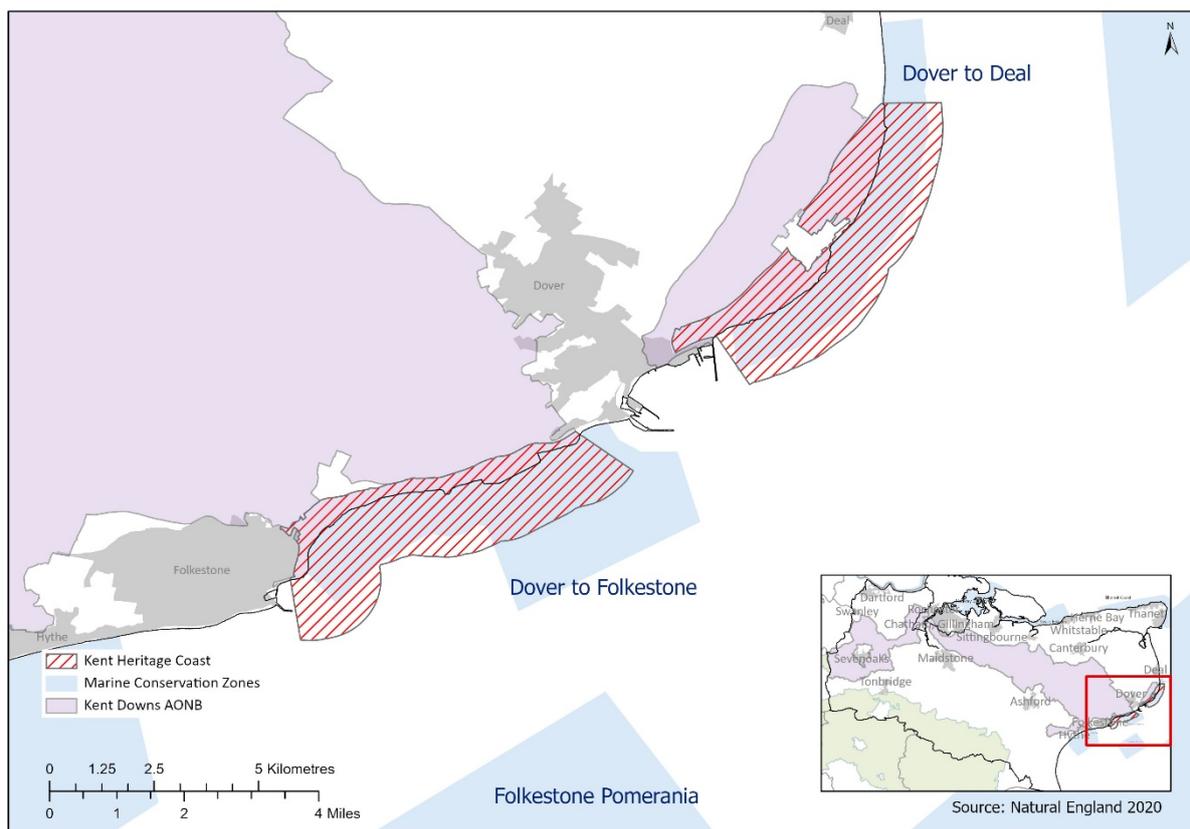


Figure 9.1 Kent Heritage Coast

## 9.2 The Heritage Coasts - special characteristics and qualities

The Heritage Coasts either side of Dover have been defined as some of the best undeveloped coast in England, they include the shoreline, cliffs and adjacent downland. The

White Cliffs form part of the UK's national identity; forming a soaring landscape with a seascape of vast horizons of sea and sky extending westwards to the subtle crumbling Greensand and Clay cliffs of Folkestone.

Behind the rearing cliffs is a landscape of windswept coastal chalk downs, with further undeveloped areas of salt-wind sculpted scrub, open downland, and farmland punctuated by the remnants of thousands of years of exchange and conflict. The Heritage Coasts are one of the few places in south east England which offer a true feeling of 'wildness'. The ever-changing chalk cliffs, foreshore and seabed platform are home to distinctive wildlife influenced by the sea, climate, geology and exposure.

The wildlife of the Heritage Coasts is internationally important, the clifftops consisting of nationally important chalk grassland and scrub, the cliff-faces supporting important breeding sea bird colonies including increasing numbers Fulmars, Rock Pipits, Lesser-black backed Gulls and Peregrines. Seabirds wheeling high in the sky connect the sea and sky.

The cliffs and grassland contain rare plants such as Hoary and Sea Stock, Rock Sea-Lavender, Sea Heath and Wild Cabbage. Most of the area is protected as SSSI, not just for the rich communities of birds, wildflowers but also seaweeds and particularly for the invertebrates. The Heritage Coasts are a vital landing point for migrating birds and insects and are home to many rare species. The proximity to mainland Europe places the Heritage Coasts in a key position as species migrate in response to climate change.

Marine habitats are a key part of the character and qualities of the two Heritage Coasts as is demonstrated by the two Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) which cover broadly the same areas of the seaward extent.

Dover to Folkestone MCZ is an inshore site which includes the wave-cut intertidal chalk platforms that form an almost continuous reef between Kingsdown, Deal in the north east and Folkestone Warren in the south west.

This MCZ is a highly diverse area with a number of habitats and features of interest. The chalk communities on the seashore are one of the best examples in the region, supporting a range of seaweeds and the animals that associate with them. Rocky outcrops, ledges and boulders support intertidal under boulder communities, an important habitat, of which this example is considered to be one of the best examples in the region. Boulders create shaded areas that provide a refuge to sea squirts, sea mats, and sponges. The undersides of the boulder provide a habitat for animals like sea slugs, long-clawed porcelain crabs and brittlestars, which shelter and feed in the damp shaded conditions. Crabs, fish and young lobsters also scavenge for food and seek shelter amongst the boulders. On the seabed, mixed sediment is rich in mobile animals including brittlestars, squat lobsters, crabs, fish and molluscs, and wild native oysters are found scattered across the site.

Dover to Deal MCZ protects a number of habitats and species. The site helps to protect intertidal under boulder communities, where large boulders provide shaded, cave-like conditions for unusual algae to thrive, and mobile animals such as long-clawed porcelain crabs, sea slugs and brittlestars shelter amongst sponges. Crabs, fish and young lobsters also scavenge for food and seek shelter amongst the boulders. This site includes excellent examples of littoral chalk communities which are unique communities of seaweeds and the animals that associate with them. Areas of littoral chalk are small in range and such areas are limited within Britain. The area also includes the best example in the region of wave-cut platforms, flat areas at the base of a cliff formed by wave erosion. Below these platforms lie

gullies and rock pools, which support several types of seaweed. The chalk foreshore at St Margaret's Bay has one of the richest communities of algae in the south east. As well as Ross worm reefs subtidal off Kingsdown, there is a well-developed Ross worm reef between Dover and South Foreland, in the lower shore where sand fringes the edge of a chalk reef. The presence of Ross worm reefs on chalk reefs is extremely rare, and this reef is also thought to seed more vulnerable reefs offshore.

The geological exposures of the cliffs form an internationally important stratigraphic reference site for extensive and near-continuous exposures of Lower, Middle and Upper Chalk, historically important for their contribution to the sciences of geology and coastal geomorphology and are all designated as SSSI. The Chalk cliffs and to the west Gault Clay are rich in fossils. On the seashore at Copt Point the exposed Greensand forms a series of rock pools with important seaweed colonies. The Greensand was also the home of an active quern stone (corn grinding) industry dating to the first century BC.

Like the natural heritage, the historic and cultural heritage of the Heritage Coasts is of national and international significance, there are frequent cultural references in music, drama, literature, poetry and painting and the built heritage ranges from the magnificent Dover Castle to the underground scratches of graffiti in the chalk by a bored, or scared soldier from the Second World War.

The Heritage Coasts are a popular area for quiet countryside recreation; the cliff tops are crossed by the Saxon Shore Way Long Distance Path and the North Downs Way National Trail. The England Coast Path has been created along these sections of coast and there are several areas of open access land. Several areas offer extraordinary, panoramic views across to France. While access to the base of the cliffs can be difficult, it provides a feeling of remote wildness and relative tranquillity with exposure to the elements being a key feature.

### 9.3 The Heritage Coasts - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. Cultivation and coastal erosion have reduced the botanically-rich chalk grassland and associated historic heritage on the cliff tops to a narrow strip, making management difficult and placing the habitat at risk, this has been addressed in several areas and there remains the opportunity to continue this important effort.
- b. High and rapidly increasing visitor pressure, particularly at the Dover to Kingsdown Heritage Coast and parts of the Folkestone Warren is degrading important habitats and placing the historic heritage at risk and reducing the valued sense of tranquillity as well as the visitor experience – key sites such as the National Trust Visitor Centre exceed their capacity for visitor parking on regular occasions.
- c. Arable agriculture can sit uncomfortably with the natural beauty and wild scenery of the cliff tops and can damage the historic heritage, a significant opportunity remains further to expand the valued coastal grassland, it is also thought to be causing diffuse pollution affecting the quality of the marine environment.
- d. Discordant development, for instance caravan parks, visitor resources, and unsympathetic screening attempts occur in the Heritage Coasts.
- e. The enthusiasm for the area brings an opportunity build on the collaborative

- management activity and improve coordination and impact.
- f. Development pressure and traffic growth continues in and in the setting of the Heritage Coast.
  - g. The need to increase understanding of the dynamic nature of the coast, accelerating coastal processes and the impacts of climate change.
  - h. Despite improvements achieved through partnership management but there are remaining areas of inappropriate, antisocial and illegal activities, such as off-roading vehicles, disrespectful wild camping, fly-tipping and vandalism in parts of the Heritage Coasts.
  - i. The safety, interpretation, conservation and potential sensitive re-purposing of remaining military and historic structures, many of which are un-designated is a new heritage priority.
  - j. The very high quality, iconic natural and historic environment can be an important component of a programme to regenerate the coastal towns of Dover and Folkestone, but the Heritage Coasts are in themselves extremely sensitive to development and visitor pressure.
  - k. Marine litter and air pollution are significant detractors from the character and qualities of the Heritage Coast.
  - l. The opportunity identified and supported by Kent County Council and the Pas-de-Calais Department to secure World Heritage Site status for the Strait of Dover has yet to be realised. The UNESCO Sites Across the Channel (USAC) project offers an opportunity to help realise the ambition.
  - m. Marine Conservation Zones identify nationally important areas of the marine environment and afford the opportunity to generate agreed management plans for each Zone.
  - n. The Heritage Coasts are much loved, genuinely iconic national landscapes with partnerships in place to support their management.
  - o. A new partnership has developed to promote the reintroduction of the chough to the Heritage Coasts; this distinctive and charismatic bird could be a trigger for further collaboration amongst land managers and wider improvements in the habitat of the Heritage Coasts. At the same time the once substantial Kittiwake Colony has disappeared, there is a general lack of trend data of the important wildlife features of the Heritage Coast.

## 9.4 The Heritage Coasts - aims

A landscape in which:

- 1. A wide, collaborative approach achieves careful, appropriate management of as well as respect and international recognition for the Heritage Coasts which reflects the

extremely high national esteem in which they are held.

2. The extreme importance and sensitivity of the Heritage Coasts are recognised publicly, through appropriate international status and in policy, projects and programmes.
3. The importance and value placed on these iconic landscapes delivers resources and partnerships to ensure their future management and which supports the regeneration of the nearby coastal towns.
4. Lost or damaged marine and coastal habitats and species are recovered and the wildness of our Heritage Coasts is protected and restored.

## 9.5 The Heritage Coasts - principles

- HC1 Coastal defence policies and approaches will respect the special character and qualities of the Heritage Coasts, allowing, where practicable, a naturally functioning coastline.
- HC2 The opportunity to support economic regeneration and recovery through the sustainable and integrated management of the Heritage Coasts in accordance with their defined purposes and those of the AONB will be pursued.
- HC3 Threats to the qualities and character of the Heritage Coasts will be resisted and managed.
- HC4 A collaborative approach, such as that employed by the WCCP and the Up on the Downs Landscape Partnership, will continue to be pursued to secure the objectives for Heritage Coast strategy and management and address the specific threats and opportunities identified.
- HC5 Achieving World Heritage Site status or other appropriate international recognition for the Strait of Dover will be supported.
- HC6 The conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the Heritage Coasts and Strait of Dover will be pursued through the Marine Plan making process, the development of new Heritage Coast Management Plans and the preparation of Marine Conservation Zone Management Plans.
- HC7 The England Coast Path National Trail will be managed in a manner that is sensitive to the landscape character and qualities and in partnership to meet and retain National Trail standards. The conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the corridor of the National Coastal Trail in the Heritage Coasts will be pursued.
- HC8 A collaborative strategic approach to manage visitor pressure to benefit the visitor experience, reduce impact, conserve the character and qualities of the area and support sustainable regeneration will be supported.
- HC9 New opportunities to secure 'protective ownership' of areas of the Heritage Coasts and partnerships to enhance management with existing private and public owners will

be supported.

HC10 The extension of the definition of Heritage Coast/ AONB into the marine environment and inclusion of areas currently defined as Heritage Coast within the AONB will be supported.

# 10. Geology and Natural Resources

## Our vision for the geology and natural resources of the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... great care is taken to conserve and manage the natural resources of the Kent Downs particularly soil, air, ground and river water. New and innovative ways to both reduce resource use and enhance the existing natural capital have been adopted which support landscape character and qualities, the economy and communities. The need to conserve and enhance natural beauty means mineral resource winning occurs away from the AONB, except in exceptional circumstances, and worked out quarry sites have been restored to enhance local landscape character.

### 10.1 Overview

The natural and cultural features that create the Kent Downs' sense of place and special character have in large part been governed by the physical environment. Kent Downs natural resources provide vital ecosystem services to the population of Kent and beyond and underpin the quality of the landscape. With significant changes predicted in the natural environment along with substantial new demands placed on our natural resources, positive action and management is an important priority for the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs.

### Natural Capital and the provision of ecosystem services

This plan is strongly informed by a 'natural capital' approach; natural capital includes the air, water, soil and ecosystems that support all forms of life, as this approach is overarching for the plan more details are included in section 3.

#### *Geology*

The AONB encompasses several geological layers each following the broad east-west sweep of Kent. The folded and undulating Chalk, Greensand, Gault Clay and Ragstone have intricate overlying layers of Clay with Flint, sand, river gravels and alluvium together these determine the nature and pattern of the land and soil, and the plants and animals they support.

The geology of the Kent Downs means that mineral winning has been a long run activity, from historic dene holes used to source chalk used to dress acid soils to sand and gravel extraction particularly on the northern edge of the Greensand. Some previous workings have revealed exposures which have been left uncovered and reveal strata of important rocks, minerals and fossils. The Kent Downs AONB and its setting contain important remaining resources of sharp sand, gravels and building sands, many of the less constrained sites across Kent containing these resources have been exploited in the past, are currently being worked or have been allocated in the Kent Mineral Sites Plan, meaning that pressure to exploit the resources in or in the setting of the Kent Downs is expected to potentially increase, where justified by policy, in the future.

The approach of the National Planning Policy Framework to mineral winning is reflected in the Kent Minerals and Waste Strategy Local Plan 2013-30 which in-turn recognises the importance and sensitivity of the landscapes of the AONB and its setting in its narrative and policies.

### *Soil*

Soil is an irreplaceable and often overlooked natural resource, a vital component of our natural capital and an ecology in its own right. The pattern and quality of soil is a key determinant of the AONB's natural vegetation and is fundamental to land uses choices. In semi-natural habitats, an undisturbed soil structure is a vital ecosystem component.

On cultivated land, careful soil management is a primary principle of good farming and carbon management but overall soil quality has been declining at a UK level. Soil erosion can occur on ploughed steeper slopes of the AONB and where crops are harvested in wet conditions, for instance maize, the soil eventually being washed into adjacent watercourses – adding to the flooding risk. Innovations in farming practice including minimal and zero tillage and regenerative farming provides opportunities to increase soil fertility, carbon storage and reduce emissions.

Pollution or contamination of soil can occur through pesticide and other chemical misuse, which can accumulate over time, and can leach into surface and groundwater supplies. Soil husbandry is increasingly understood to be important for carbon management. The UK Climate Risk Assessment has identified that drier summers leading to increased soil moisture deficits may result in the increased release of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane. Heavy rainfall, especially following a dry period, may increase soil erosion. Improving and restoring soil health is a high priority in Governments 25 Year Environment Plan.

### *Water*

The quality and quantity of the ground water aquifer, surface, river and coastal water is determined in no small part by landscape management and other activities. The quantity and quality of ground and surface water is becoming a more critical issue as Kent is set to accommodate very significant population growth (see sections 2 and 3). Abstraction already occurs throughout the AONB and has been linked to low summer river flows particularly of the Rivers Darent and Little Stour. This situation will be exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Not only will these factors have a profound effect on Kent's potable water supply, but also may impact on the AONB's physical and ecological character over time.

Nutrients are a continued risk to our important groundwater sources and also to our surface water systems. The Environment Agency estimates that only about 50% of applied Nitrate is used by crops, of the rest, half goes into our aquifers and half goes into our air as Nitrous Oxide – a significant contributor to greenhouse gases. Nitrate can take over 40 years to penetrate our aquifers so we have a long-term legacy to deal with. Phosphate is often a reason that surface waters in the Kent Downs do not meet Water Framework Directive standards. Poor soil management can also result in increased silt in our chalk streams.

Water supply is at the forefront of issues being addressed by water companies through Water Resource Management Planning. There is an increasing coherence of interests between the needs of sustainable landscape management and water resource management providing the opportunity for collaboration between landscape and water resource managers.

The prevalence of fruit farming in Kent and the Kent Downs AONB, along with increasingly uncertain climatic conditions creates a strong demand for irrigation; this creates an additional significant pressure in an already stressed water environment. The creation of water storage reservoirs can be at odds to the character of the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB. Abstraction licence reforms are expected to help manage and mitigate the pressures on stressed water environments in the Kent Downs.

The Government is promoting locally focussed decision making and action at the heart of the debate about the future direction of improvements to the water environment. The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) aims to generate more effective stakeholder engagement in order to tackle environmental problems at a more local scale. It is thought that this will particularly help tackle pollution from diffuse sources, by their diffuse nature, local. The collaborative ways of working to consider the needs of the water environment fit comfortably with the AONB management approach.

Within the Chalk and Greensand domes, percolated water forms the groundwater aquifer, which provides 75% of Kent's drinking water, there is an increasing concern about increased demand for ground-water, over-abstraction, levels of aquifer re-charge and the emergence of nitrates (applied historically) emerging in the aquifer-based water supply. Water quality and availability is one of the biggest issues facing the UK water sector with pressures on availability already evident, especially in southern and eastern England; there are particular pressures in Kent given the substantial growth trajectory and high levels of water usage.

The Kent Downs AONB partnership has led on developing new, landscape-based approaches to the management of flood and drought in a way that supports landscape character and qualities, particularly in the Darent Valley. At the same time, the PROWATER project will report during the plan period; this will provide new information covering the sustainable management of landscapes to support aquifer recharge and water quality in the AONB and elsewhere in Kent. Preliminary findings clearly show that climate changes are expected to decrease aquifer recharge in the coming years. At the same time the conservation-based landscape management highlighted in this plan (e.g. regenerative farming, creation of chalk grassland habitat, slowing overland flow, careful siting of woodland establishment sites and re-establishment of hedgerow patterns) not only increase landscape quality but can enhance aquifer recharge bringing positive co-benefits for the management of natural resources.

#### *The Water Framework Directive and Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies*

Currently the Management Plan operates within the context of the Water Framework Directive's (WFD), and it is expected that the provisions of the framework will remain in place for some time following the UK exit from the EU. The main objectives of the WFD are to protect and enhance the water environment and ensure sustainable water resource use for economic and social development.

The scope of the framework is wide, covering lakes, streams, rivers, groundwater, groundwater dependent ecosystems, estuaries and coastal waters out to one mile from the low-water mark. The Environment Agency is the lead authority for implementing the WFD. Whilst the Agency will focus on the appropriate application of regulations and using an evidence-based approach to ensure the most cost-effective actions are taken; improving the health of our natural water environment will require collaborative working across many sectors and making use of local knowledge.

Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS) set out how catchment water resource management can contribute to WFD implementation. From the context of the AONB landscape it is essential that investments in achieving the WFD and (CAMS) and their successors are taken forward in ways that supports the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB landscape.

The Kent Downs AONB is covered by two River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs): the Thames and the South East. The RBMPs set out how organisations, stakeholders and communities will work together to improve the water environment. RBMPs are reviewed and revised every 6 years with the next RBMPs expected in 2021.

### *Air*

Clean air is one of the top priorities of the 25 Year Environment Plan and important to the health and well-being of us all as well as the ecosystems around us. It has become increasingly apparent that agriculture, transport and industry are important contributors to air pollution, agriculture being responsible for ammonia and nitrogen emissions as well as carbon dioxide. The Kent Downs is close geographically to several highly trafficked motorways, some pass through the AONB. The Office for National Statistics working with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology researched the extent of removal of harmful pollutants; the findings show that the vegetation of Mid Kent is the 4<sup>th</sup> highest area in Britain in removing pollution; this particularly significant given the proximity of nearby urban (beneficiary) populations.

## **10.2 Geology and natural resources - special characteristics**

### **Geology**

The Kent Downs are valued as a place of spectacular views, dramatic scenery and landscape character and quality. The underlying geology is quite literally the foundation of this natural beauty; the, quality pattern and hues of the landscape. The Chalk in particular is an ever-present component of much of the Kent Downs.

The AONB contains a number of special nationally and regionally important geological or physiographical features, eight of which have been designated as geological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – including the full extent of the Chalk cliffs of the Heritage Coasts, where the exposures are of international significance. Where they are not statutorily designated, some sites have been selected as Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) which are sometimes referred to as Local Geological Sites.

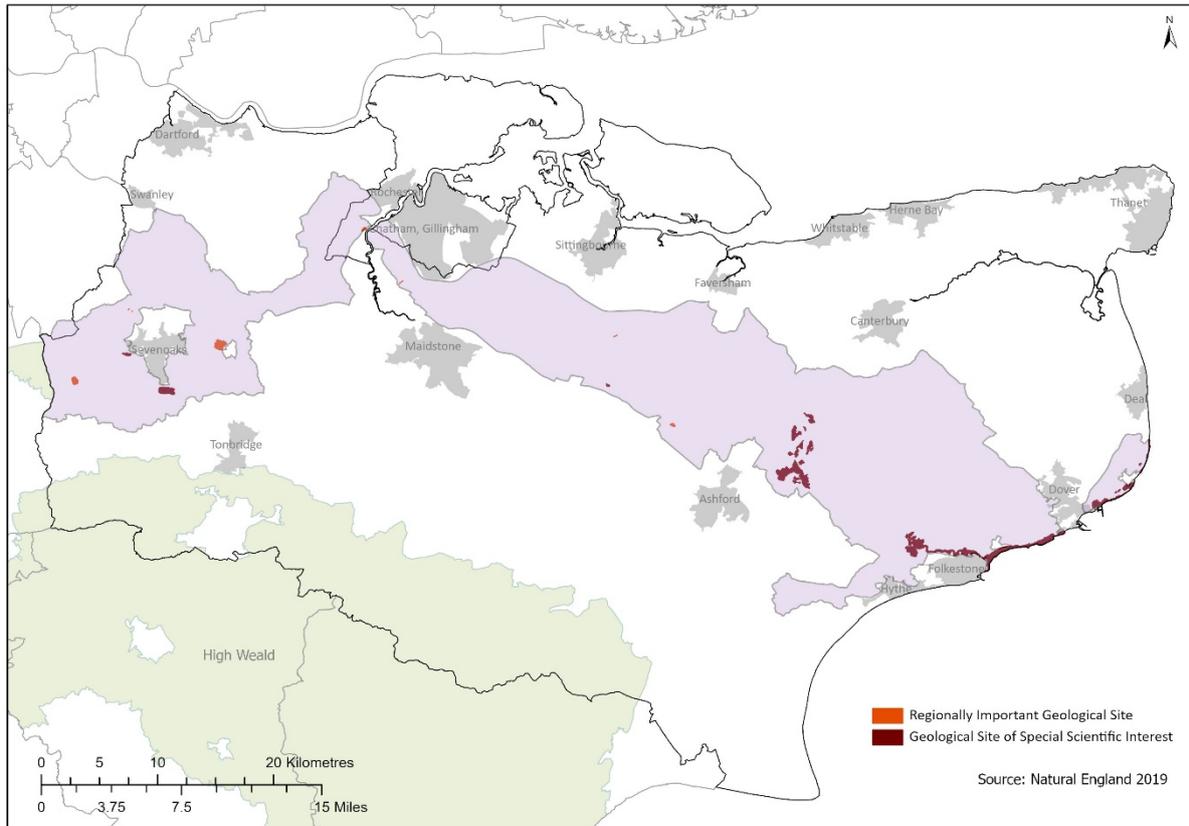


Figure 10.1 Important geological sites in the Kent Downs AONB

### Soil

The irreplaceable nature of soils, their colour, scents and texture as well as their connection with the pattern of natural vegetation, settlement and land use is a fundamental determinant of the character and qualities of the AONB. An undisturbed soil structure is a vital ecosystem component in woodlands and other semi-natural habitats and soil function is crucial in the Kent Downs AONB landscape contribution to biodiversity loss climate mitigation and adaptation.

### Water

Water helps define the landscape we see today, the pattern of settlement, landform, agriculture and wildlife are in part determined by the water environment. The Kent Downs AONB is a comparatively dry landscape; rainwater permeates easily through the porous Chalk and Greensand bedrock with generally few areas of standing water, except where Clay-lined dew ponds are present. Where the permeable Chalk and Greensand layers meet impermeable Gault Clay, water seeps out in spring lines. The lower scarp slopes are characterised by historic settlements that have developed around these water sources (e.g. Postling, Hollingbourne and Underriver). These springs flow into the main river catchments, flowing out of and sometimes through the AONB including in the three main river valleys of the Darent, Medway and Stour. Our chalk streams and rivers are of international importance because of their nature, beauty and rarity.

### Air

The Kent Downs offers the opportunity to experience the ‘open air’ clean, fresh air is an

important natural and perceptual quality of the Downs; it adds to the health and wellbeing that the AONB provides to residents and visitors. The landscape and vegetation pattern of the Kent Downs is particularly important in the air pollution reduction it achieves close to beneficiary populations.

### 10.3 Geology and natural resources - main issues, opportunities and threats

#### Geology

- a. Lack of awareness about the importance of AONB geology and landform.
- b. There are important mineral resources in the Kent Downs and its setting which are expected to come under further pressure for development as less constrained sites are worked out and as a result of the UK leaving the EU. Future development will be decided within the framework of the NPPF and Kent Minerals and Waste Plan. Mineral workings can have a serious impact on landscape quality. Restoration plans may be affected by the deficit of inert materials which were once more easily obtainable.
- c. The importance of geological sites and features tends to be overlooked due to lack of information, interpretation, poor management, development, landfill and dumping.

#### Soils

- d. Soil erosion, especially on the steeper slopes and under 'open' arable crops, such as maize and potentially some biomass crops; climate change enhances this risk.
- e. Maintaining and improving soil quality is an important priority, for instance through minimal and zero tillage and regenerative agricultural methods, cover and spring crops (with winter stubble) and promoting the relationship between good soil management and climate change mitigation.

#### Water

- f. Pollution of rivers and springs from point sources, including public and private sewerage systems, agriculture and fish farms.
- g. Diffuse pollution from agricultural sources leading to nutrient enrichment, reduced water and elevated levels of silt and pesticides.
- h. The expected increase in water demand for public use and irrigation in already over abstracted catchments presents major challenges for water resource management and potentially the installation of significant new water infrastructure in or affecting the landscape.
- i. Predicted increase and volume of flooding and drought events. River flooding in the Kent Downs affects localised areas, there is an opportunity to adopt natural flood and drought management approaches which support landscape character and reduce risk.

- j. Need to understand the relationship between landscape management, aquifer recharge and water quality.
- k. The water companies' Water Resources Management Plans process provides an opportunity for collaborative working to secure a more resilient water supply at the same time as landscape management which supports landscape character.
- l. The opportunity to collaborate with the Catchment Based Approach to secure the conservation and enhancement of landscape character as well as delivery of Water Framework Directive (or its successors) objectives – and also ensuring that AONB principles and projects support the WFD.

### **Air**

- m. The important benefits of clean air are increasingly understood whereas the role of the Kent Downs landscape in providing these services is not well understood and at risk, for instance from tree disease.
- n. There is a need to reduce air pollution from transport and agriculture in the Kent Downs.

### **Ecosystems services and green infrastructure**

- o. The significant benefits of Kent Downs ecosystem services are insufficiently recognised and valued and the opportunities to secure payment for them is not yet developed.
- p. The need to establish and secure the Kent Downs as a vital component of Kent's green infrastructure provision.

## **10.4 Geology and natural resources - aims**

A landscape in which:

1. A safe, clean environment is protected, conserved and enhanced, where residents, visitors and nearby populations benefit from essential ecosystem services and increased well-being and quality of life.
2. Important geological sites and exposures of the Kent Downs are recognised, conserved and enhanced.
3. The natural capital resources of soil, water and air will be conserved, enhanced and managed in a way which enhances landscape character and quality as well as delivering co-benefits for carbon and nature management.
4. Local sources of pollution indigenous to the AONB are minimised, reduced or controlled.
5. The Kent Downs AONB landscape provides vital ecosystems services, functioning ecosystems and green infrastructure for Kent and the south east.

## **10.5 Geology and natural resources - principles**

GNR1 Activities designed to protect, conserve and enhance the important geological exposures of the Kent Downs will be encouraged. To recognise the importance of the

geology of the Kent Downs the opportunity to secure Geopark status for the Kent Downs will be explored.

GNR2 Careful management and sensitive restoration of existing minerals and waste sites in or affecting the Kent Downs will be pursued.

GNR3 In the light of potential planning for future mineral supplies a careful approach will be taken to reduce the likely pressure for new minerals sites in or affecting the Kent Downs AONB including promoting re-use and recycling and ensuring the support for the further provision and safeguarding of existing mineral importation wharfs and rail depots to enable alternative sources, from less sensitive areas, to be provided to meet identified needs in Kent.

GNR4 Advice to farmers and land managers which seeks integrated environmental land and natural resource management in the Kent Downs will be encouraged.

GNR5 A strategic collaborative Catchment Based Approach will be taken to the management of the water environment in the Kent Downs AONB to secure a more resilient water supply, achieve good ecological status in the water bodies, use natural solutions to mitigate flooding and secure the conservation and enhancement of the landscape.

GNR6 Additional water abstraction particularly in the Darent and Great Stour river catchments will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that there will not be any harmful impacts upon the special character and qualities of the Kent Downs. Support for Water Resource Management Planning which seeks to secure the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB landscape will be pursued through collaboration with water companies, authorities and regulators.

GNR7 A collaborative approach will be pursued to secure the provision of appropriate ecosystems services and green infrastructure, which supports the special character and qualities of the Kent Downs, for the benefit of the community and economy, effort will be pursued to secure new Payments for Ecosystems Services (PES) that might benefit the conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB.

GNR 8 Ensure that projects, proposals and plans as well as future public agricultural payments recognise and seek to protect, conserve enhance the extent, quality and functions of the soil.

GNR 9 Ensure that landscape management practice, plans and policies seek to enhance the clean air benefits that the Kent Downs AONB offers recipient populations.

# 11. Quality of Life and Vibrant Communities

## Quality of life

### Secondary purposes of AONB designation

The landscape comes first. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape'; this is the focus of the Management Plan.

The secondary purposes of AONB designation are to take account of the needs of land-based and rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. The demand for recreation should be met in a way that is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses. These needs came into clear focus during the Covid pandemic are expected to come into ever greater focus in the lifetime of this management plan.

The following sections set out how the secondary purposes of AONB designation will be addressed, it recognises that, without the support of a wide range of people the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape will not be achievable. A principal consideration is how secondary purposes relate back to the primary purpose of designation. The challenge for this Management Plan is to find ways in which social and economic well-being, inclusion, public understanding and enjoyment, can be complementary to, and can further support, the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

## 11. Vibrant communities

*'Any attempt to create a division between what visitors need and what locals want will always be arbitrary: lots of people who live in national landscapes love their natural beauty, and lots of people who visit want to be in places which are real communities. It is a shared interest.'*  
Government's Landscape Review 2019

### Our vision for quality of life and community benefit afforded by the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... a wide diversity of people and communities are central to the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the Kent Downs; they value this special place and feel welcome and are able to enjoy, experience and benefit from the AONB. People and communities have a strong, positive influence over change through being engaged and active participants. Communities' work and voluntary activity marries social and economic well-being with landscape conservation and enhancement. Individuals and organisations choose to buy goods and services that in themselves benefit the Kent Downs landscape and economy.

The health and well-being benefits of contact with nature and beauty for all have become central to the purposes and management of the landscape and the Kent Downs partnership.

## 11.1 Overview

The Kent Downs AONB is a 'living part of modern England, not isolated from the forces which shape the rest of society' the beautiful Downs are located close to millions of people. One aim of this Management Plan must be to find ways of achieving thriving, vibrant communities and a sustainable and prosperous local economy that conserves and enhances this nationally important area. This is why the IUCN Category V definition (see section 2) is so important and why combining both people and nature is a particular challenge for this plan.

While an AONB Management Plan is not the primary means for tackling social and economic needs, without the right social and economic conditions, it is difficult to conserve and enhance the valued landscape. In recognition of the importance of vibrant communities to supporting the purposes of the AONBs the Landscape Review has recommended a new purpose for AONBs and National Parks which would be to 'Foster the economic and community vitality of their area in support of the first two purposes'.

## 11.2 Vibrant communities

"Rural communities and the economies in them have been ignored and underrated for too long. We must act now to reverse this trend, but we can no longer allow the clear inequalities between the urban and rural to continue unchecked. A rural strategy would address challenges and realise potential in struggling and under-performing areas and allow vibrant and thriving areas to develop further. Doing nothing is not an option." Lord Foster of Bath – Chair of the House of Lords Select Committee for the Rural Economy.

The findings of the House of Lords Select Committee (April 2019) for the rural economy and the context, issues and opportunities identified in this plan are largely coherent, but the plan also looks to the important communities beyond the boundary of the AONB seeking a welcoming and inclusive approach.

The population of the Kent Downs AONB in 2011 (most recent census information) is estimated to be approx. 96,000 or around 5.5% of Kent's population.

Social and economic information is difficult to establish at an AONB level but the most recent information available shows an AONB population which is generally older, with fewer minority ethnic groups than the rest of the county. This is supported by information provided to the independent Landscape Review. The population of the Kent Downs has more white-collar and professional workers than the county as a whole, with higher owner-occupancy and car ownership per household. A higher percentage of people are self-employed, probably resulting in more home-working and indicative of an increasing knowledge-based economy within the AONB, a trend that is thought likely to be accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The ease of access to main urban areas, including Greater London, and the attractiveness of the villages and countryside places great demand on most parts of the AONB as a place to live and work and from which to commute. House prices are high and the percentage increase has been higher than the regional average.

There is a lack of affordable and/or rented housing within or adjacent to the AONB particularly for young people and families, and people on lower incomes (including public sector workers and those employed in the land-based industries). This creates 'hidden households' where young adults continue to live with parents rather than establishing themselves independently.

Incomes are higher than the regional average and are around the average for people living in a protected landscape.

Not surprisingly, the percentage of people employed in land-based economic activities is double that for the county as a whole, although this figure is a small part of the overall AONB workforce (3.8%). However AONB residents from other industry sectors are in similar proportion to the county as a whole; hotels and restaurants have been important employers in the Kent Downs AONB but the hospitality industry has been very severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Kent Rural Delivery Framework evidence base described Kent's rural communities as active and entrepreneurial; they are a considerable asset which can be harnessed to secure the future of the AONB. Rural poverty and exclusion is regarded as a hidden but real issue in a number of communities particularly for isolated elderly people, people with disabilities, migrant workers and some young families. While lower than the regional average the Index of Multiple Deprivation is higher than for other South East National Landscapes. Added to this, there are five wards on or immediately adjacent to the AONB boundary with high social and economic needs.

The importance of traditional land-based economic activities to the AONB's rural income is small and declining. However, a number of other employment sectors and industries (such as transportation, distribution, tourism and retail) depend on land-based activities and landscape to some extent. The diversification of the employment base in a way which supports the landscape character and special characteristics of the AONB needs to be encouraged and developed. The community heritage knowledge which resides with older generations of residents is a valuable resource for the celebration of the landscape and community vibrancy.

Some of the challenges for communities of the Kent Downs are to maintain balance and diversity given limited housing availability and high house prices, an aging population and sometimes difficult access to services. The provision of affordable local needs housing which is of sensitive design and location is a high priority identified by Action with Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) through their community engagement, and this has been supported by the Landscapes Review evidence.

Evidence from the Kent Downs partnership and other Protected Landscapes shows that to be 'thriving and vibrant' communities need good access to services, social and community links, places to meet and interact, places for recreation and work, links beyond the immediate community, access to jobs, good digital connectivity and community activities and engagement. Rural deprivation issues also require close attention and support. In the context of a protected landscape these community needs should be met in ways which support the qualities and characteristics of the landscape; indeed landscape and environmental conservation and design can be a good focus for community development.

The Kent Downs AONB has benefitted from substantial investment supporting sustainable

rural development through various EU programmes including Interreg and LEADER. The exit from the EU places these at risk and there is concern that the Shared Prosperity Fund may not provide a comparable or improved replacement.

*'One thing stood out, talking to people in the course of this review and examining the responses to our call for evidence. They worry that longstanding communities feel under great pressure, and point in particular to house prices and jobs.'* Government's Landscape Review 2019

### **Community, parish planning and neighbourhood plans**

There has been long running support for community and parish planning in the Kent Downs AONB. Community engagement in understanding the built and cultural heritage can be important to community identity and activity. There are a variety of community planning approaches including Village Design Statements, Parish Plans; neighbourhood planning and Conservation Plans.

The Localism Act introduced the neighbourhood planning system, Neighbourhood planning gives communities the opportunity to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and help shape the development and growth of their local area. Neighbourhood plans can influence where communities propose new homes, shops and offices are built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided. Neighbourhood Plans have to be in conformity with relevant development plans.

### **Community services and enterprises**

There has been long run concern about the decline in community and village services such as village shops, post offices, churches and pubs and a fear that the Covid Pandemic will accelerate this. Consequently the loss of such assets can trigger the creation of community run enterprises which in themselves are a community development catalyst and can be a vehicle to support a sustainable local economy which supports landscape character there are several examples across the AONB of successful community run facilities working alongside more 'traditional' businesses.

### **Volunteering**

There is already a strong voluntary ethic in and around the Kent Downs; Parish Councils, conservation volunteers, charities, tree and river wardens, footpath volunteers, walks leaders, religious groups, village and community enterprises and the Countryside Partnerships all rely on voluntary efforts and often this supports landscape conservation and the enhancement of communities. Participating in volunteering can provide healthy exercise and social interaction and is known to benefit health and well-being; even life expectancy is greater for those who participate in volunteering. Given the wide and established volunteer groups the AONB Partnership has deliberately sought not to 'compete' with existing volunteer organisations but to support them.

The Government's Landscape Review strongly promotes expanding volunteering in our national landscapes through the support of a National Landscape Service, as this emerges the Kent Downs AONB response should be positive but should not undermine but strengthen existing volunteer groups.

Much of the volunteer 'force' benefiting the Kent Downs AONB is made up of actively retired individuals; there is a concern that as work and life patterns change this resource may reduce substantively.

## Our neighbours

The Kent Downs AONB is in a unique position of being so close to major urban and growth areas and London. There are well over 1 million people living within one kilometre of the Kent Downs AONB boundary, many are areas of high social and economic need and the growth trajectory for Kent is unprecedented (see sections 2). The AONB offers a place for recreation, health and well-being to these communities, but the relationship needs to be carefully developed so that all benefit and landscape qualities and community life are not compromised. We know from the Landscape Review and Kent Downs AONB led research that there are considerable barriers to many people and communities to accessing and enjoying the Kent Downs landscape, these are covered in more detail in section 12.

## Sustainable rural leisure and tourism

Sustainable rural leisure and tourism has been identified as a key way to support the socio-economic well-being of rural areas. Providing jobs and supporting community services, sustainable rural tourism of itself can be a catalyst for community development.

Sustainable tourism has been defined as “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and the environment and host communities.” Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers, UNEP World Tourism Organization.

Perception research taken forward by Visit Kent in 2017 show that the main perceptions of Kent are to do with the coast, scenic countryside, the culture, gardens and historic buildings, food and festivals. The countryside is referred to frequently. In particular there are mentions of a variety of scenery, ‘quiet countryside’, the garden of England, orchards, hops, oast houses. Kent sustains a leadership position when it comes to tourist perceptions. Even amongst those who have never visited Kent, the region is seen more positively than its neighbours on the most motivating imagery dimensions including, Coastal, Rural, Historic, Nature, Food & Drink and Seaside.’ Visit Kent 2018 Many of these features are provided ‘in spades’ by the landscapes of the Kent Downs

As part of the evidence gathering for this Management Plan review it became clear that ‘over visiting’ has rapidly become an issue across the AONB particularly on countryside with heritage sites. Visitor site car parks are often full by mid-morning on a sunny weekend and the visitor experience at risk of declining, along with erosion to paths, damage to the historic, natural and cultural heritage as well as loss of tranquillity. Making tourism and recreation more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts, tourism and recreation are in a special position to benefit local communities economically and socially, and to raise awareness and support for environmental conservation.

In recognising the importance of sustainable rural tourism, the Kent Downs AONB Unit has taken a lead, the EXPERIENCE project a £3m E.U. funded project which seeks to improve facilities to promote off season visiting, encourage sustainable tourism and promote new sites and visitor resources so reducing pressure on ‘honey pots’. In support the Kent Downs AONB, Visit Kent and Produced in Kent have agreed a Joint Statement and Action Plan.

*‘There are lots of benefits to communities from designation – pubs and village shops are kept busy, and more visitors means more people who might support bus services. Studies, which are largely based on surveys of businesses in national landscapes, provide strong evidence that environmental quality in general, and in national landscapes in particular, help to support a significant proportion of local economic activity.’* Government Landscape Review

### **Community health and well-being**

The evidence is clear that there are multiple physical and mental health benefits from access and contact with beautiful places; these range from just feeling enlivened after a walk in the open air to significant therapeutic interventions with those with dementia, have experienced trauma or, for instance, suffer from cardio-vascular disease. The desire to visit the countryside was made incredibly apparent after the first national 'Lock Down' during the Covid-19 pandemic. The NHS recruitment of link workers along with local authority and primary care social prescribers to boost social prescribing demonstrates that the evidence has effected change in practice. The AONB landscape and partnership has a significant opportunity to collaborate with local authorities, charities, Public Health and the NHS to support social prescribing and to develop partnership projects and strategic programmes that can change lives including for seriously affected families and individuals.

The Government's Landscape Review promotes a new statutory duty for AONBs and National Parks; one of the 27 proposals specifically supports the landscapes catering for and improving the nation's health and wellbeing and promotes a new statutory purpose, to: 'actively connect all parts of society with these special places to support understanding, enjoyment and the nation's health and wellbeing'. The Kent Downs AONB partnership strongly supports this ambition.

### **11.3 Vibrant communities - main issues, opportunities and threats identified**

#### **Social exclusion, deprivation and access to services**

- a. A number of areas and wards around and within the AONB have high levels of social deprivation, health inequality and communities experience substantial barriers to experiencing and benefiting from the AONB. Within the AONB community diversity is low, rural poverty, social exclusion and isolation can be 'hidden' and is an issue for some elderly people, minority ethnic groups, migrant workers, people with disabilities and those on low incomes.
- b. Retaining and improving access to, and provision of, local services and facilities including super-fast and gigabit capable broadband, post offices, village shops, public houses and community infrastructure.
- c. Community facilities and services, such as schools, libraries, public transport, social care and doctors' surgeries, are unevenly available and accessible.
- d. There is limited up-to-date specific data on the social and economic profile of the Kent Downs.

#### **The availability of affordable housing**

- e. Housing prices have continued to rise, in some parts, well above and faster than the national average.
- f. Considerable demand for affordable and local needs housing in many parishes in the AONB

### **Maintaining and diversifying the employment base**

- g. Decline in farming and forestry employment, although both industries are still important economically in terms of maintaining Kent Downs character.
- h. Skills gap for some local employers, such as locally based skilled forestry and farm workers as well as heritage skills.
- i. There are opportunities to widen the employment base in ways that can support the purposes of the AONB which should be pursued as part of the 'green recovery'.

### **Sense of community and belonging**

- j. The need to attach people to place and landscape heritage where an increasing proportion of the population are not directly involved in landscape management.
- k. The need to overcome barriers to accessing and enjoying the landscape for a more diverse range of people
- l. The need to improve community recognition and value of the special characteristics of the AONB to secure its future conservation and enhancement.
- m. The need for support to achieve greater and a more diverse community capacity and involvement in decisions affecting the AONB.

### **Sustainable leisure and tourism**

- n. There is an opportunity and demonstrable need to sustainably manage the numbers, impact and income from visitors to benefit local people, local services and support the conservation and enhancement of the AONB landscape.
- o. Some areas within the AONB suffer either from over capacity or overuse, leading to a detrimental impact on both the landscape character and qualities, visitor experience and host communities, the advent of E.L.M. funding provides an opportunity to invest in better provision
- p. The departure of the UK from the EU raises concerns about how sustainable rural development will be supported.

## **11.4 Vibrant communities - aims**

A landscape in which:

1. Thriving, diverse, vibrant, welcoming communities understand, recognise and value the special qualities of the AONB and play an active role in its conservation and enhancement while reducing their environmental impact.
2. A strong and sustainable rural economy supports the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB and is supported by residents and visitors, who value and use

sustainable local produce and services.

3. There is well designed, sustainable and affordable housing, particularly for workers employed in the land-based economy and conservation of the AONB's landscape, social and economic vitality.
4. Accessible, affordable local services and facilities are available to all and are well-used throughout the AONB.
5. The high quality environment and landscape of the AONB is seen as an asset to local businesses, which in turn contribute to the conservation of the landscape through the use of local sustainable goods and labour and through active conservation and enhancement.
6. The area is recognised by both local communities and visitors as a premier sustainable tourism destination.
7. The environmental impact of AONB communities is stabilised and reduced.
8. The health and wellbeing benefits offered to communities and individuals are actively pursued.
9. Barriers to more and more diverse communities benefitting from the inspiration and beauty afforded by the landscapes of the AONB are overcome.

### 11.5 Vibrant communities - principles

- VC1 Community and business initiatives that improve the recognition, engagement in and conservation of the Kent Downs AONB and encourage community life will be pursued.
- VC2 Positive and sustainable links between the Kent Downs AONB (landscape, communities and partnership) and nearby communities, particularly from excluded groups and from neighbouring deprived areas will be pursued.
- VC3 Initiatives which are in line with existing policies of the Local Planning Authority that increase and improve the supply of affordable housing for (i) those with proven local needs, and (ii) workers whose activities directly contribute to the purposes of the AONB designation, will be supported where it is demonstrated that the proposals are suitably located, of high-quality design, limited quantity and scale and are built to the best current environmental standards.
- VC4 The retention and development of local services, facilities and employment opportunities in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB and reduce the need to travel by car and maintain viable rural communities will be supported.
- VC5 Skills training and business development assistance will be encouraged where they contribute to the viability of communities and meet the purposes and principles of the AONB designation and partnership.

- VC6 The development of sustainable visitor and tourism facilities will be pursued where they enhance people's enjoyment and understanding of the AONB without detracting from its special characteristics and qualities. The Kent Downs AONB partnership will pursue sustainable tourism zone status.
- VC7 Tourism and leisure businesses in the Kent Downs AONB will be encouraged to adopt the principles of sustainable tourism and to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.
- VC8 Local communities will be encouraged to prepare and promote Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Plans (in conformity with relevant development plans) as appropriate to assist in the conservation and enhancement of local distinctiveness as settlements evolve.
- VC9 Opportunities to better understand the social and economic profile of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.
- VC10 Support will be given to groups that encourage volunteering in the Kent Downs. In the event of the recommendations of the Landscapes Review regarding AONBs roles in volunteering being supported by Government an approach with continues to support local groups will be established.
- VC 11 Opportunities to enhance the health and wellbeing of communities and individuals both within and around the Kent Downs AONB will be actively pursued to increase provision and better bring together and coordinate provision of health and wellbeing 'assets' in local settings within the AONB.

# 12. Access, Enjoyment and Understanding

## Our vision for access, enjoyment and understanding in the Kent Downs AONB

In 2031... the Kent Downs AONB is a place of natural beauty with opportunity and access for all people; they feel welcome to participate in quiet recreation for health, relaxation, enjoyment and for cultural and artistic expression.

Improved management ensures that the Public Rights of Way and much of the highway network is safe, quiet and convenient for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and public transport along with active travel is an attractive option to reach and enjoy the landscape. Maintenance and enhancement of the Public Rights of Way and highway network is sympathetic to biodiversity and landscape character.

The Kent Downs AONB is recognised, valued and celebrated by residents, visitors and by those who simply delight in the fact that it is there.

### 12.1 Overview and context

The Kent Downs AONB offers some of England's most captivating and accessible countryside. The AONB has a resident population of over 96,000 people, however a further in excess of one million live within one kilometre and over 2 million within 10km of the boundary.

The AONB has 1876km/1166miles of Public Rights of Way network which is four times the density of the national average. The Kent Downs accommodates 40% of Kent's bridleways and 50% of Kent's byways on 23% of the county land area. For this important resource to be used there is clear evidence from the Public Rights of Way improvement plan evidence base that its maintenance, connection and promotion are key.

The AONB is crossed by or adjacent to four motorways, many trunk and 'A' roads, and hundreds of smaller roads. It is served by five railway lines with 27 railway stations and numerous bus routes and services. The Port of Dover, the UK's busiest ferry terminal, as well as the Channel Tunnel terminal are both immediately adjacent to the AONB. Ashford and Ebbsfleet International stations are in easy reach.

While there is often concern about the impact of recreation, carefully managed access to attractive countryside, particularly walking, cycling and horse riding can bring physical and mental health benefits, enable people to enjoy a great landscape, reconnect with nature and provide support to the local economy. The review of payments for land management which will follow the UK's exit from the EU provides a major opportunity to invest in new, well managed access which enables and encourages a diversity of users to access the landscape as part of a package Environmental Land Management (E.L.M.) payments which will use 'public money for public good'.

### **Managing access in the Kent Downs**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act (2000), Countryside Access Forums for Kent as well as Medway have been established. The role of the Forums is to advise on the improvement of public access to land within Kent for the purpose of open-air recreation and enjoyment. The Countryside Access Forums also responds to Government consultations, contributes to the Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan and steer and monitor access and recreation policy in Kent and Medway.

### **The Kent and Medway Rights of Way Improvement Plans**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), Highway Authorities have a duty to develop a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). Kent's ROWIP was adopted as county policy in 2018 its vision is *"To provide a high quality, well-maintained Public Rights of Way network, that is well used and enjoyed. The use of the network will support the Kent economy, encourage active lifestyles and sustainable travel choices that support health and wellbeing, and contribute to making Kent a great place to live, work and visit"*.

The Kent ROWIP identified 6 key priorities for action; to encourage active lifestyles and utilisation of the Rights of Way for all of the many benefits these bring people, to evolve the network to meet future demand, to have good knowledge of use of the network and barriers to the use, to ensure a well maintained network of public Rights of Way, ensure that statutory responsibilities are taken forward and stator compliance is delivered and to work efficiently and enhanced our understanding of when and why people use the Rights of Way network and what the barriers are to use. In Medway a revised ROWIP was adopted in April 2020, the plan sets out priorities and actions to improve Medway's public rights of way over a 10 year period. The actions, focused around four themes, target the provision of a high quality, well maintained public rights of way network which is aimed to should then help everyone to have the chance to visit Medway's outstanding countryside, including the Kent Downs. The plan is also intended to help people make active lifestyles and sustainable travel choices.

### **Open access land**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act around 0.6% of Kent and Medway has been dedicated for open access; the majority of this is chalk downland, along with registered common land and parkland within the AONB. 46% of open access land in Kent is within the Kent Downs AONB (23% of the County). Open access land is managed by Kent County Council as the Access Authority, additionally the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust has dedicated their land for open access. In many cases access land was already available through time limited agreements. However where large tracts of land have been mapped, for instance around Dover, there are significant access opportunities.

### **Coastal access**

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 placed a duty on Natural England to improve access to the English coast through the creation of a continuous long-distance walking route, the 'England Coast Path National Trail'. The England Coast Path has been defined along the two Heritage Coasts of the Kent Downs AONB. The path provides a Coastal Access Margin on the seaward side of the new path, similar to open access land, providing significantly more access than the path itself. The North Downs Way National Trail and the new England Coast Path National Trail are increasingly building partnership working arrangements to share experience and enhance the potential benefits of the Coast Path.

### **Visitors to the Kent Downs**

Limited visitor information is available for the AONB as a whole; Visit Kent's research (2019) shows 66.5 million visitors for Kent, generating a total tourism value of £4.1 billion (up 7.3% compared to 2017) and supporting more than 81,000 jobs. It is also clear from Visit Kent research that visits to the countryside and heritage sites are important motivators for many visits to Kent. The current estimates for Kent Downs AONB visitor numbers is approximately 20 million visits a year, which is similar to the Cotswolds AONB.

Evidence from the Landscapes Review shows that there are around 100m visits to National Parks each year; and around 170m visits to AONBs but the benefit is not shared amongst all sections of society.

The Landscape Review states that 'statistics show certain groups especially disconnected. Most visits are made by the same (better off, less diverse) people repeatedly, and those who miss out are the older, the young – especially adolescents – and those from lower socio-economic groups and black, Asian and minority ethnic communities:

- 13% of children (under 16) and 5% of young people (aged 16-24) typically never visit the natural environment or even spend any of their leisure time outdoors.
- Children are spending less time unsupervised outside and children from black, Asian and minority ethnic, and low income, communities are even less likely to do so.
- 18% of children living in the most deprived areas never visit the natural environment at all.
- 20% fewer Visibly Minority Ethnic (VME) children go out into green spaces weekly compared to white, middleclass children.
- Children from deprived backgrounds visit 10% more than VME children.
- The numbers of children going on school visits to the countryside is shockingly low at just 6-7%.
- The groups which visit the countryside least are those aged 65 and over, members of the black, Asian and minority ethnic population and residents living in the most deprived areas of England.'

In 2020 the Kent Downs AONB Unit conducted research into the barriers to making access to the landscape more inclusive and diverse, with a particular focus on the opportunities presented by post EU agricultural support – Environmental Land Management. While detailed and considering all of the protected characteristics of the Equalities Act the findings presented some clear messages:

- There are many barriers to access including physical, economic, societal and perceptual barriers. Some of the barriers to greater diversity and inclusion are built into the language, systems and governance of National Landscapes and countryside management; they are institutional and this should be recognised in order to effect change.
- Investments in new access need to be intelligently targeted to where they will achieve real benefit
- There is an opportunity to think differently about paying to provide access, this will include improving the physical infrastructure of access but must also include non-typical investments such as paying for community engagement champions, facilitators, transport and training.
- Investment in enhancing access should not only be for areas of land or length of path but for the intensity of benefit to the recipients, for instance small areas of land can provide transformational benefit for very troubled or traumatised people. In other areas simple changes (like short connections between public rights of way) can have a high level of benefit for low investment.
- Recipients or intended beneficiaries should be involved in the design of new access schemes.

- Investments need to be long term, it can be more damaging to have short run ‘projects’ that achieve some benefit then drop away; this is as true for farmers and land managers as it is for those experiencing new access.
- Providing new access should not be mandatory for farmers and land managers – it should be taken up where it makes sense to do so and farmers and land managers are willing to engage. Advisors and convenors should encourage farmers and land managers to become involved in target areas.
- Improving access can be good for everyone –farmers and land managers might benefit at least equally to those enjoying the access this might be through new payments, diversification opportunities, overcoming problematic access and overcoming social exclusion are examples.
- Land management plans should include opportunities to divert access from ecologically sensitive sites. This could be either by providing alternative routes or improving the quality of surfacing to encourage footfall along certain less sensitive routes
- Better recognition, connection and management of the public rights of way network is an important priority – which links to the findings of the ROWIPs

While it is clear that there are many people who are not benefiting from access to the beautiful landscapes of the Kent Downs, evidence from the engagement stage of this Management Plan review shows clearly that many visitor sites are now experiencing ‘over visiting’ such that parking facilities are often overwhelmed at weekends and the visitor experience can be harmed as well as the landscape character and qualities of the areas that people are seeking to visit.

While visitor numbers are already growing rapidly the population of Kent is destined to grow at an unprecedented pace; in the period to 2031 the population of Kent is expected to increase by about ¼ placing increasing pressure on already pressurised sites.

Investing in new sustainable and inclusive access arrangements is an important, indeed vital priority.

## Walking

There is strong policy support at a national and local level to promote walking and cycling, this ranges from the National Planning Policy Framework to the Kent Active Travel Plan. The density of Public Rights of Way in the Kent Downs is four times higher than the national average. This is an invaluable asset and enables access to and enjoyment of virtually all parts of the AONB and can provide good links between the Downs and local towns and villages. The use of footpaths in the AONB is unevenly distributed with greater usage in the west and around ‘honey pot’ attractions.

The evidence base for the Kent Rights of Way improvement Plan identifies key priorities for the improvement and enhancement of the network which would support better use, a common theme is the enhancement of the quality of paths and bridleways including better surfaces, fewer barriers, clear signing and more accessible information. The need for clear signing is supported by research by Cycling UK as well as the Kent Downs Test and Trial.

Of national importance is the North Downs Way National Trail which starts at Farnham in Surrey and follows the North Downs through Surrey and Kent to Dover with a loop via Canterbury. Of the 153 mile trail, 70 miles lie within the AONB. Based on data from people counters on the Trail management estimates 550,000 users on the trail in 2016 based on a 5% year on year rise in use over the last 10 years which included a 14% increase in 2015.

National Trails are promoted as long-distance routes, although user surveys show that the majority of use on the North Downs Way tends to be for shorter walks. The opportunity to upgrade appropriate sections of the North Downs Way to include cyclists and horse riders is being considered and is supported. Two regional routes, the Saxon Shore Way and Greensand Way also pass through the Kent Downs, and there are a number of county recreational routes.

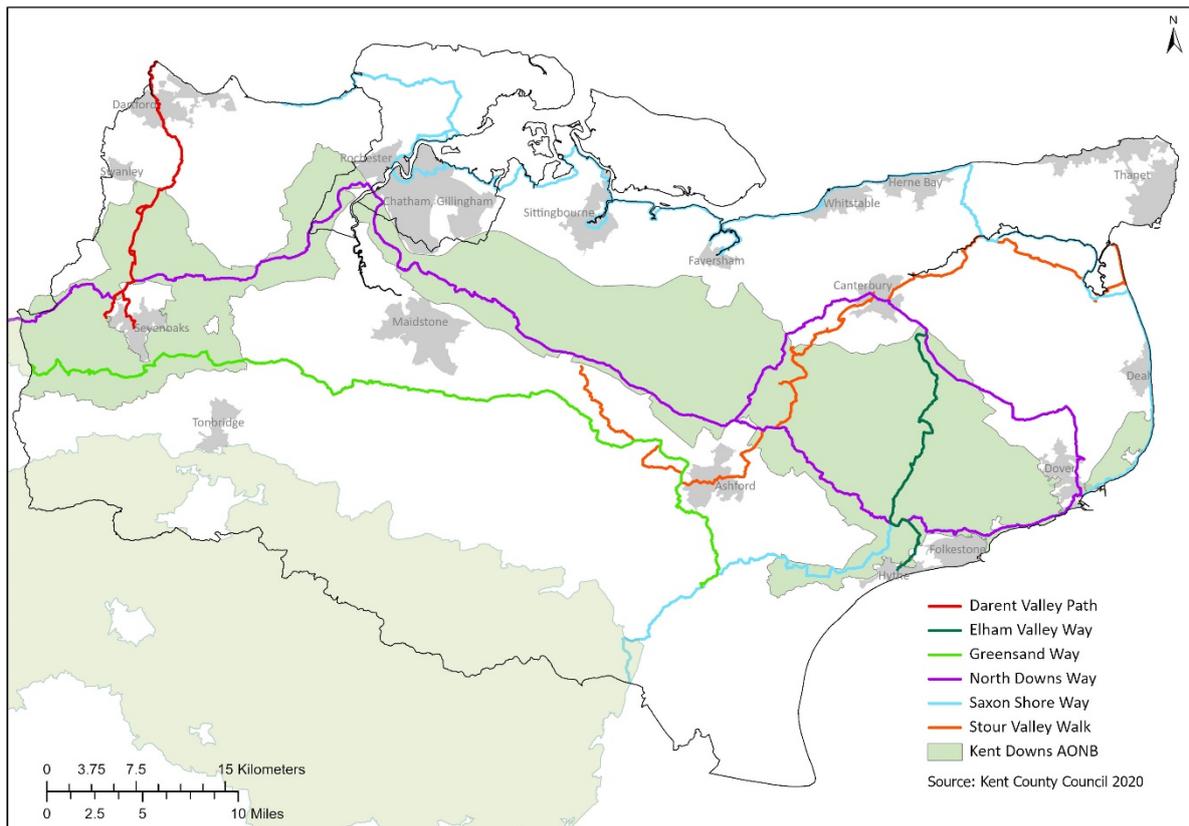


Figure 12.1 Promoted walking routes in Kent

## Cycling

Cycling is increasingly popular and can be a sustainable means of transport and recreation and is generally a quiet activity with low impact on the countryside. The increased prevalence of e-cycles makes the sometimes very steep hills of the Kent Downs now much more accessible to a greater number of people on cycles. Opportunities for off-road cycling in the AONB have been developed by Sustrans and Cycle UK however in certain circumstances the increasing popularity of off road cycling is putting pressure on the Public Rights of Way network, at the same time some cyclists and other users stray from permitted routes and cause damage to paths, farmland and sensitive habitats or historic sites. Sections of two National Cycle Routes and two regional routes pass through the AONB and the Pilgrims Cycle Trail, from Rochester to Canterbury, provides an arterial route through the Kent Downs. There are also a number of locally promoted on and off-road cycle routes. Dedicated cycling routes are proposed as an effective and low impact link between the Kent Downs and nearby urban and growth areas.

Following a significant increase in requests for cycling information along the North Downs Way, a partnership with Cycling UK and Sustrans has been established to create a linear multi user route to allow cyclists, horse riders and mobility vehicles to explore the Trail and AONB. A combination of proximity to large urban populations, the advance of cycle technology (mountain bikes/ e-bikes) and the rapid rise of cycling is driving the need to provide infrastructure and information for these purposes.

### **Horse riding and driving**

Although the network is limited, 40% of Kent's bridleways are in the AONB, making the Kent Downs a significant area for horse riding in Kent. The latest information (provided for the previous AONB Management Plan) estimates 100,000 riders in Kent, 50,000 regular riders, and horse numbers between 30 and 40,000 (Land Use Consultants/KCC). Evidence from the British Horse Society (BHS) and the Public Rights of Way teams (from maintenance spend) indicates that the increasing use of bridleways is damaging the route fabric. The BHS in Kent estimates a population of 90 horses per kilometre of bridleway, creating significant pressure on the network. Horse riding, driving and equine events provide important opportunities for access, exercise, health and wellbeing and can provide access opportunities for those with disabilities and mental health therapeutic needs.

Horse riding, like cycling and walking is increasingly difficult and dangerous on rural roads because of the volume and speed of traffic and the bridleway network in Kent is limited.

Other opportunities for informal countryside recreation are generally provided on the many open access sites, picnic sites and facilities across the AONB. These include 12 Country Parks and picnic sites, 44 Village Greens (44.9ha) and 48 areas of Registered Common Land (442.7ha). Access for informal recreation is also available at a number of National Trust properties concentrated on the Greensand Ridge south of Sevenoaks, parts of the White Cliffs Heritage Coast, Forestry Commission-owned woodland and sites owned and managed by Kent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.

### **Organised events**

The continued strong growth in organised events for a range of outdoor activities including cycling sportives on-road and trail (cross-country), running, duathlons, triathlons, sponsored walks, orienteering and geocaching has increased substantively. Events are led by a range of organisations including charitable bodies, sports clubs, and increasingly local events companies specialising in running and cycling events, such as Nice Work based in East Sussex which operate several events in and around Kent. Local running clubs are also active in this area, such as Istead and Ifield Harriers (North Downs Run) and Centurion Running (North Downs 50 and 100). In 2017 Pilgrims Hospice ran a walking challenge from Wye to Dover. In its second year of running in 2019 the event attracted 500 walkers with plans to develop this further. The North Downs Way alone sees over 10,000 people/ year take part in these events with new events appearing at around 4 new events each year. Inevitably this leads to an increase in users training for these events and training for other similar events in other locations. Transport connections to large populations make the landscape and trail attractive assets for event organisers.

### **Access for Artistic and Cultural expression**

The Kent Downs has long provided an important location for the creation and research of many creative projects. In recent years this activity has increased with artists and cultural practitioners focussed on outcomes that are more sustainable and connect to environmental concerns. There are several areas of the AONB where people can access and enjoy great

art; there is an opportunity for the partnership to provide infrastructure and partnerships that can support this work. New opportunities arise from the National Association for AONBs Arts Strategy and the bid for a Medway City of Culture in 2025.

### **Field sports**

The Kent Downs landscape lends itself to pheasant shooting and hunting with extensive areas of woodland and tree cover and arable and mixed farm use. It is estimated that game bird shooting generates at least £10 million per annum for the local economy and is one of the most economically important uses for Kent Downs woodlands. However, conflicts arise because of overstocking with pheasants; woodland management for game birds; the impact of the stocked bird populations on wild plant and animal communities and the landscape impact of game bird cover crops. A collaborative project with the Game Conservancy Trust has produced best practice guidance for game bird management in the Kent Downs.

Fishing is also popular although the Kent Downs offers limited scope for coarse and freshwater fishing, such as along the river and gravel pits of the Great Stour valley. Sea fishing is also popular off parts of the Heritage Coast, such as St Margaret's Bay and Samphire Hoe where national competitions are held.

### **Country motor sports**

Country motor sports are growing in popularity and are of special relevance in the AONB as the Kent Downs (23% of Kent's land area) accommodates 53% of the byways. Activities include events on public roads such as car tours, treasure hunts and road rallies along with green-laneing and trail riding on byways. While responsible users promote good practice and respect for others, the use of byways and unmetalled roads by 4x4 vehicles and motorbikes, although legal, can lead to significant conflicts with other users because of disturbance, safety issues and damage to the Rights of Way surface. There remains illegal use of footpaths and bridleways by motorised vehicles, and the use of byways to access the wider landscape. These and other recreational activities can negatively affect the tranquillity of the AONB which is a much-valued component of natural beauty.

### **Road users**

The rural road network of the Kent Downs is often of ancient origin and its pattern is an important part of the special character and qualities of the landscape. The Kent Growth and Infrastructure Framework identifies traffic growth and congestion as an important issue in Kent and the Kent Downs is not immune; the roads of the Kent Downs provide well used north south links through the county and are also used as an important way to access the landscape and the main UK Europe transport routes pass partly through or very close by the AONB. A series of major infrastructure and development proposals, such as the Lower Thames Crossing, London Resort and 'garden' towns outside the AONB have the potential of increasing traffic through the AONB. Greater reliance on the car is partly thought to be because people perceive roads to be dangerous to walk or cycle. The KCC road safety rural campaign states that rural roads account for 3/5 of road fatalities, which are focused on roads to and from urban areas.

The historic and ancient routeways and paths are susceptible to damage by modern vehicular use, detracting from the enjoyment of the area by walkers and cyclists and damaging the fabric of the lane.

### Access for people with restricted mobility

Greater recognition of the needs of socially excluded groups, and legislation including the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005, and subsequently the Equalities Act are leading to enhanced efforts to meet the needs of all, including people with disabilities, on low incomes or without access to private transport.

Research from the Kent Countryside Access Improvement Plan has shown that 18% of people with a disability never visit the natural environment, compared with 8% of the non-disabled population. Research found that disabled people visited the countryside to enjoy views, the landscape and to relax and they perceived the countryside as inherently rewarding and beneficial to the same degree as the wider population, especially for the psychological benefits. In addition, accessing the natural environment gave people with disabilities a sense of continuity between their disabled and non-disabled selves, and a sense of achievement.

For people with mobility restrictions there are a growing number of promoted routes and sites and user groups are taking active and welcome steps to support wider access for all.

### Health and well-being

There is compelling evidence for the health and well-being benefits of contact with nature and access to the countryside. With a rapidly increasing urban population in Kent and London along with the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a special focus on the role of the Kent Downs landscape in providing these significant multiple benefits. The evidence base for the Rights of Way Improvement plan added to this saying *'Our research showed that the clear majority of PROW users experienced only positive feelings relating to vitality and happiness when using the network, showing how valuable the network is in improving people's quality of life through health and wellbeing benefits.'* This evidence base is being recognised in the NHS and in the early years of the plan the NHS will be recruiting 'link workers' to connect prescribers with local agencies which can provide support for a wide range of people for instance with long-term conditions, need support with their mental health, are lonely or isolated or have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing.

### Education and children

Over the next 20 years, today's children and young people will become tomorrow's decision makers. If we are to secure a future for this precious landscape, and our environment more generally, we should actively encourage understanding and education for young people. The close proximity of substantial urban areas to the Kent Downs AONB offers a special opportunity to promote exciting and engaging activities for schools and families. The disconnection between children and the natural environment has been described as 'Nature Deficit Disorder' and its consequences and the opportunities to address it have been documented in a National Trust report. One of the 'stand out' recommendations of the Government's Landscape Review was to offer all children a night under the stars.

There are many opportunities to reconnect children with nature (and dark night skies), link education activities to the national curriculum and to strengthen the understanding, enjoyment and celebration of the AONB landscape.

### Information and interpretation

At the heart of enjoyable countryside recreation is high quality accessible information that

helps visitors plan their use of the Kent Downs and increases the understanding and satisfaction of their experience. Information is currently available in a variety of forms but tends not to be coordinated and may display unconscious bias. The Landscape Review as well as the Rights of Way Improvement Plan have identified the need for better information and clearer signing as a priority for the future management of National Landscapes to benefit visitors and local people alike.

No specific AONB visitor centres exist, although many of the existing centres do provide information about the Kent Downs.

## 12.2 Access, enjoyment and understanding - main issues, opportunities and threats

- a. There is a structural inequality in the access and enjoyment of the beauty of the Kent Downs, a variety of groups and individuals experience significant barriers to enjoying the landscape, research has shown many ways to help overcome these barriers.
- b. The very rapid growth trajectory for Kent will generate new opportunities for and pressures from access for enjoyment, health and well-being.
- c. There is a need to identify how the CRoW Act open access sites can bring wider benefits and links to education and information provision.
- d. Differences in requirements and uses between rightful PRoW users (horse riders, cyclists, motorbikes, 4x4s and walkers, those with dogs) can result in conflicts.
- e. Conflicts between rightful PRoW users and illegal users, fly-tipping, dumping and path obstruction.
- f. The increasing popularity of horse riding and off road cycling which is focused particularly on the AONB, putting pressure on the rights of way network farm land and wildlife sites. The need to enhance, extend, connect and improve fragmented Public Rights of Way network and secure higher rights on PRoW without harming the characteristics and qualities of the AONB.
- g. Estimated day visitor numbers are high and increasing and peaked during the Covid pandemic. Pressure on the special characteristics and qualities of the AONB as well as particular countryside routes, sites and areas can be very high but unevenly distributed, concern about 'over visiting' has been reported by farmers and land managers, managers of wildlife sites and managers of visitor attractions.
- h. Need to ensure that the PRoW network is accessible and welcoming, well signposted, way-marked, connected and maintained using materials and equipment appropriate in design and sustainably sourced.
- i. Improving the rural road network for its landscape quality, connectedness and safety in order to promote active travel and quiet countryside recreation is an important opportunity.
- j. Need to increase and enhance people's understanding of and access opportunities to the AONB, its landscape and countryside practices and to provide coordinated

support and information in a number of formats appropriate to their setting.

- k. Need to maximise coastal access opportunities through the newly defined England Coast Path National Trail and support the enhanced management of the coastal corridor.
- l. Need to promote exciting and engaging education and interpretation schemes for children and young people both in and out of the school context.
- m. The opportunity to promote the availability and use of safe non-car based countryside transport and recreation opportunities and seek integrated public transport initiatives.
- n. The opportunity to secure health and well-being benefits through diverse and inclusive social and green prescribing in the Kent Downs.

### 12.3 Access, enjoyment and understanding - aims

A landscape that provides:

1. Sustainable opportunities and facilities to enable everyone to safely and sustainably enjoy and understand the AONB countryside without detracting from it; where structural, perceptual and physical barriers to access are removed and minimised.
2. A legally defined, well maintained, connected and promoted Rights of Way and permissive path network that provides safe, welcoming, well designed connected and satisfying routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders where conflicts between rightful uses are minimised.
3. New, safe and attractive routes and connections between public rights of way and a highway network which is increasingly available and safe for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
4. Access where illegal or damaging recreational activities are actively controlled.
5. Special places, events, media and appropriate support available throughout the year for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn about their environment, enjoy and benefit from the AONB landscape, know they are there and celebrate its diversity and richness.
6. Innovative and stimulating opportunities for all people to be involved artistically and culturally and to exercise and improve their health and well-being, in tranquil and inspiring surroundings.

### 12.5 Access, enjoyment and understanding - principles

- AEU1 Co-ordinated investment in making access more diverse and inclusive for recreation, access, education, and health and well-being across the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.
- AEU2 Investment to secure sustainable, high quality, low impact and easy access, multi-user routes, safer highways and high-quality public transport options from towns and

growth areas to the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.

- AEU3 Diversions and stopping up of PRoWs will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that they will not have a detrimental impact on opportunities for access and quiet enjoyment of the Kent Downs AONB landscape and historic character.
- AEU4 The sustainable and enhanced management and promotion of Public Rights of Way, permissive paths and open access sites will be pursued.
- AEU5 Mechanisms will be supported to resolve conflicts between rightful users of Public Rights of Way. Where there are irreconcilable conflicts from legal but damaging activities, quiet recreation will be supported above other activities.
- AEU6 Robust mechanisms to resist and overcome illegal use and poor maintenance which harm the opportunity to explore and enjoy the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued where design is in accordance with the Landscape Design Handbook.
- AEU7 Improvements to the Rights of Way Network to overcome barriers provide and improve countryside access, health and well-being opportunities, including, connecting with NHS social prescribing, enhanced way-marking, signposting and maintenance, new routes and establishment of higher rights which conforms with Kent Downs AONB policies and design guidance, will be pursued. Support for investment in access from the new Environmental Land Management payments will be pursued.
- AEU8 High standards of landscape and recreational management including the management of 'over visiting', provision of accessible visitor facilities, new accessible access opportunities and increased opportunities for learning and health enhancement, artistic and cultural expression through a coordinated strategy and programme of training, community support, events, guided walks, cycle rides and gateway routes and sites will be pursued.
- AEU9 Initiatives for children, schools and youth groups which encourage interest in and learning about the AONB and reconnection with nature will be pursued.
- AEU10 Support will be given to the North Downs Way and England Coast Path National Trails as the main promoted routes in the Kent Downs, the establishment of a North Downs Way multiuser route will be supported.
- AEU11 A reduction in the need to travel by car will be supported through new and improved measures to provide integrated, attractive and affordable public transport and through promoting and supporting safe active travel to and within the Kent Downs. New business, community and other initiatives in support of the vision, aims and policies of the Management Plan will seek to relate to existing public transport and active travel links.
- AEU12 Sustainable solutions to problems of rural traffic will be supported, particularly in rural settlements or where there is a conflict with landscape quality or walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- AEU13 A strategic approach to the use of road signage, furniture, design and maintenance that conserves and enhances the local character and distinctiveness and encourages

non-motorised access will be pursued through the adoption and implementation of the Kent Downs AONB Rural Streets and Lanes Design Handbook.

AEU 14 Proposals which detract from the amenity and enjoyment of users of the Public Rights of Way network will be resisted.

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# The High Weald AONB

An outstandingly beautiful Medieval landscape



# Management Plan 2019–2024

A statutory plan setting out local authority policies for the management of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

# The High Weald

## *AONB Management Plan*

### *2019-2024*

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

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# Foreword

## *from the Secretary of State*

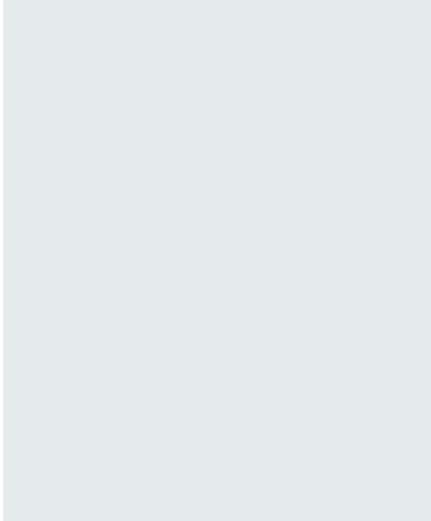
I am fortunate that England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are part of my Ministerial responsibilities. Whether it be rolling hills, sweeping coastline or a tranquil village, spending time in an AONB can stir the heart and lift the spirit.

This is a pivotal moment for all AONBs. The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy. Leaving the EU brings with it an opportunity to develop a better system for supporting our farmers and land managers, who play such a vital role as stewards of the landscape. And the Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty led by Julian Glover – the first of its kind for generations – will make recommendations to make sure our designated landscapes can flourish in the years ahead.

In my visits to AONBs around the country, I have been struck by the passion of many people – farmers, volunteers, and hard-working staff – for the beautiful places they live and work. In this spirit I am delighted to welcome publication of this Statutory Management Plan for the High Weald AONB. It is significant that this plan will be delivered in partnership by those who value the High Weald AONB. I would like to thank all those involved in preparation of this document, and wish you the best of success in bringing it to fruition.

**The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**

Secretary of State for the Environment,  
Food and Rural Affairs



*'The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy.'*

**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 1500 km<sup>2</sup> and close to London, this extensive area offers millions of people opportunity to experience the beauty of nature within a working countryside. It was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983.

***‘A landscape not yet bulldozed for speed’***

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

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# Message

## *from the Chairman*

This year sees the 70th anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act which paved the way for AONB designation. The vision and ambition embodied in this Act ensured a wonderful legacy, securing the protection of outstandingly beautiful landscapes, such as the High Weald, for the nation.

The third review of the AONB Management Plan takes place in a rapidly changing context when the beauty of the High Weald is under threat from inappropriate development, decline in traditional land management and loss of biodiversity. AONBs are facing considerable challenges. Most striking is our need to cut carbon emissions by nearly 50% over the next 12 years to help ensure global warming is kept to a maximum of 1.5C. Achieving this will entail a shift to regenerative land management that protects soil carbon and a strict focus on development, where it is appropriate, that supports low carbon living and provides ultra-low carbon buildings suitable to our residents' needs.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan published in March 2018 recognises AONBs as some of our most unique, cherished and valuable natural assets, and makes a commitment to their continued conservation and enhancement. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) welcomes the Glover Review of designated landscapes and looks forward to playing a strengthened role in protecting the High Weald's landscape character and restoring its wildlife. The AONB Management Plan helps guide our actions to meet this ambition.

In 2019 we celebrate the 30th birthday of the High Weald partnership. Set up in 1989 to champion the High Weald's interests and coordinate action to conserve it. The Partnership became a JAC in 1996 and has gone from strength to strength. Our 15 local authority partners and Natural England will continue to work together alongside representatives of land owners, land managers and local communities, to coordinate policy and action to ensure the High Weald landscape is protected and enhanced for the future, offering us all the opportunity to enjoy, and be uplifted by, the beauty of nature on our doorstep.

### **Councillor Sylvia Tidy**

Chairman, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee



*‘The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) welcomes the Glover Review of designated landscapes and looks forward to playing a strengthened role in protecting the High Weald’s landscape character and restoring its wildlife.’*

**Members of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee:** Action in Rural Sussex, 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, Natural England, The Ramblers, 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.

# The High Weald

## *Joint Advisory Committee*

### Our commitment

#### The Joint Advisory Committee partners will:

- Continue to work together towards sound and consistent planning policies across the AONB.
- Use the Plan as a ‘checklist’ against which to assess the impact of policies and other activities on AONB purpose to fulfil the requirements of CROW 2000, S85.
- Use the Plan and underpinning data to focus support for agriculture, land management and rural development on activities that conserve and enhance the AONB, including actions to protect sites of local, national and international conservation importance.
- Use the Plan to identify detrimental effects of proposed development on the AONB helping ensure development is ‘landscape-led’ and contributes to conserving and enhancing natural beauty
- Use the Plan and underpinning data to assist with green infrastructure planning across the AONB and wider South East.
- Use the Plan to assess whether activities in the ‘setting’ of the High Weald affect land in the AONB.
- Use the Plan, and supporting research, to contribute to criteria for judging what might count as sustainable development within the AONB.

### Our Vision

#### The High Weald JAC’s vision for the future of the High Weald is a landscape which:

- Retains its distinctive historic landscape character and beauty, and has halted the erosion of natural beauty avoiding poor development and incremental change.
- Is maintained by sustainable land management practices, such as regenerative agriculture, wilding, small-scale woodland management and agro-forestry, and sees land managed by different people through diverse activities that are supported and nurtured where they deliver public benefits.
- Displays thriving wildlife and improving ecological quality in its highly interconnected and biodiverse landscape.
- Is embracing a low-carbon future with green technologies and non-fossil fuel transport underpinning a strong rural economy and thriving communities.
- Engages people with nature and contributes to the health and wellbeing of people within and outside the area.
- Demonstrates a consistent approach to planning across the AONB, allowing for appropriate housing and economic needs of thriving communities and the land-based sector without compromising the characteristic historic settlement pattern.
- Displays healthy natural systems including clean air and water providing benefits across the South East.
- Celebrates woodland history and nurtures a woodland economy whose timber products are highly valued.
- Facilitates active participation by people, their communities and businesses, in conserving the area and managing change.
- Provides a warm welcome and high quality experience for residents and visitors seeking inspiration and enjoyment of its landscape and rich, well understood and celebrated cultural heritage.
- Is valued and understood by people, businesses and communities landscape championed by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

# The High Weald's *facts and figures*



**The High Weald AONB** was designated in 1983

**One of 46 AONBs** in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

**One of 34 AONBs** in England covering 15% of the land

**Land cover – 1,461km<sup>2</sup>** (4th largest AONB)

**127,000** people live in the AONB (density 87 people per sq. km.)

**70,000 live in towns** excluded from the designation but wholly surrounded by it

**Over 1 million people** live within 5km of the AONB boundary

**The AONB covers 4 counties**, 11 districts and 11 parliamentary constituencies

**100 parishes** wholly or partly in the AONB

**The JAC partnership** has represented the interests of the High Weald since 1989

**3500** historic farmsteads

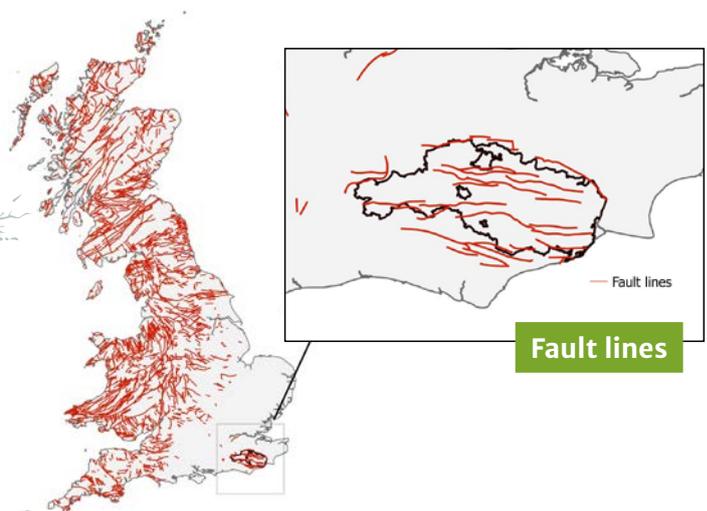
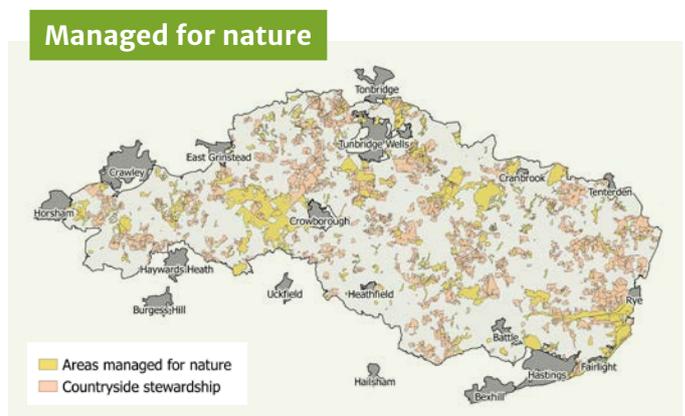
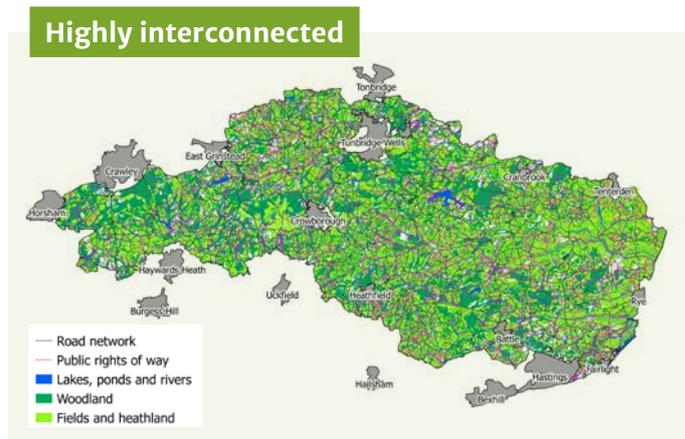
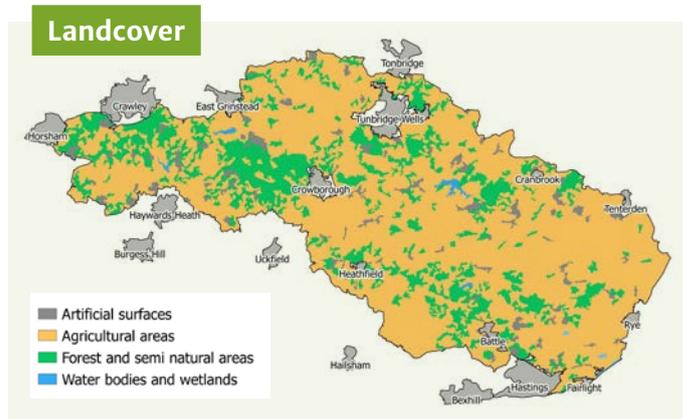
**17 market towns** and larger villages

Local authority	% of AONB in local authority	% of local authority in AONB
East Sussex	60.19	50.99
Hastings	0.37	17.63
Rother	29.29	82.60
Wealden	30.53	53.36
West Sussex	13.68	9.87
Crawley	0.03	1.05
Horsham	2.46	6.77
Mid Sussex	11.19	48.96
Kent	25.41	10.21
Ashford	5.69	14.34
Sevenoaks	4.05	16.00
Tonbridge & Malling	0.07	0.39
Tunbridge Wells	15.61	68.88
Surrey	0.70	0.61
Tandridge	0.70	4.11

**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**



# The High Weald's *landscape*<sup>1</sup>

**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 now considered to represent a quintessentially English landscape, yet for many years, until the advent of turnpikes, it was better known for the terrible state of its roads.

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 Hasting

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, Waterdown (Broadwater) Forest and St Leonard's Forest. 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 due 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, buildings and to fuel the iron, glass and cloth industries. Woods were enclosed and managed as coppice with standards, producing underwood and construction timber. Large, widely – spaced trees in hedgerows and parklands produced the crooked boughs 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, intermingling woodland, wetland and open habitats, with 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 her classic children's book *The Secret Garden*. Such accents stand out against a 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 on 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.

*97% of people find the High Weald's scenery, tranquility and proximity to nature appealing*  
**High Weald Public Survey, 2018**

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

# A brief history of the High Weald<sup>2</sup>

The High Weald lies within one of the largest tracts of woodland remaining in early Medieval England.

Termed *Anderida silva* by the Romans, it was referred to as *Andredesleah* ('leah' suggesting wood pasture)<sup>3</sup> 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)<sup>4</sup>. The Weald is one of the longest lasting regional names in Britain.

## Prehistory

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 Paleolithic 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)

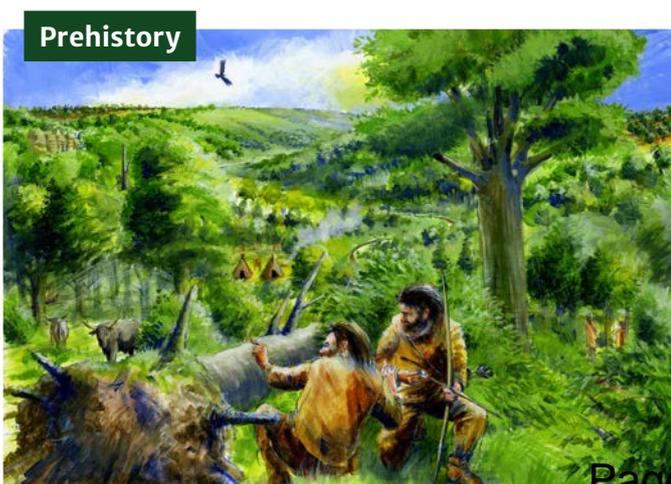
The High Weald was the premier iron producing district in Britannia during the Roman occupation, with up to 2,000 bloomeries scattered across the area and nine

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.

## 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 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 forstals within farming settlements.

### The Medieval period (1066–1540)

The practice of temporary grazing from outlying manors had declined by the 11th century, probably due 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

*‘Unless a man understands the Weald, he cannot write about the beginnings of England...’*

Hilaire Belloc

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.

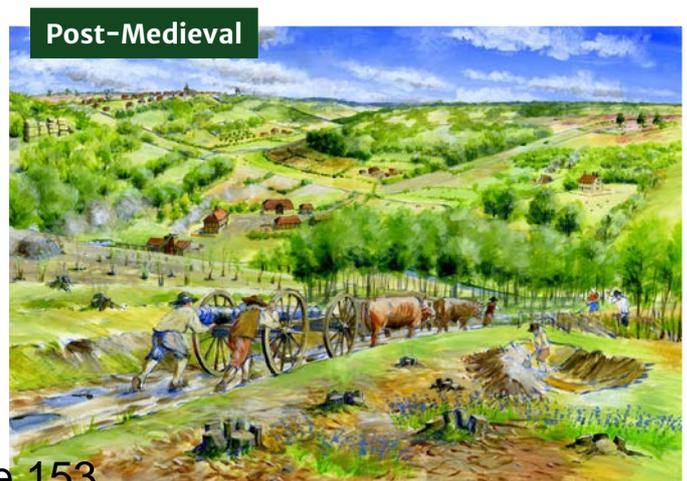
Villages, such as Goudhurst, Burwash (planned along a ridgeway), Wadhurst and Ticehurst, with market places for trading local products (iron, livestock, cattle hides and woodland products) developed in the 13th century along and at the meeting point of routeways. Fine Medieval houses attest to their 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 sea ports of Winchelsea and Rye, which after the storms of 1285 and in 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

2. Edited and adapted from Harris, R.B. (2004). Making of the High Weald, & Lake, J. (2018). Routeways of the High Weald. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
3. Della Hooke, ‘The Woodland Landscape of Medieval England’ in N.J Higham and Martin J Ryan, Place-Names, Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape, 2011, p.150.
4. Robert Furley (1871). A History of the Weald of Kent, p.88.



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 Shoemiths. 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 cannon.

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 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 'purpusture' 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 approached through new ornamental landscapes.

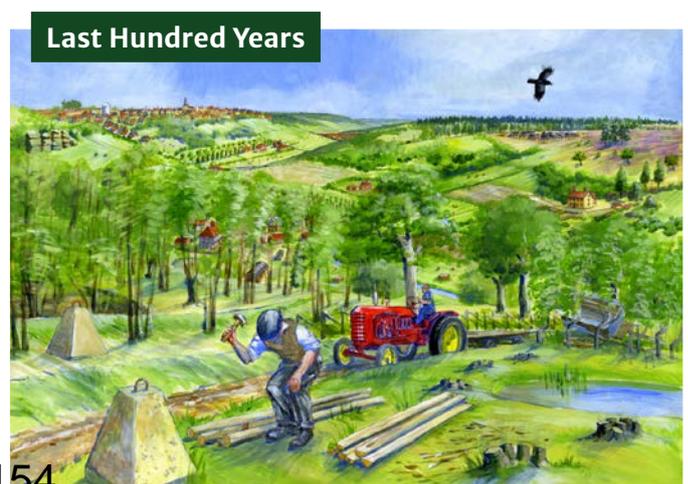
Farmland was reorganised with enlarged fields, existing or straightened hedgerows dotted with trees. Farmsteads were also reorganised often around courtyards to help produce more manure for fields yielding more corn for export.

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.



# About the Plan

## What is an AONB?

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an area of countryside designated by the Government to protect the outstanding beauty of its landscape for people now and in the future, and for the wildlife that depends on its distinctive character. A large proportion of the land in an AONB is privately owned and the actions of all land owners, land managers and land users are critical to AONB conservation.

## Who prepares the AONB Management 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 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'**<sup>5</sup>. Where AONBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the plan<sup>6</sup>. In the High Weald this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership which includes all 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 joint Plan to individual local authorities who each adopt the Plan. The Plan is reviewed every five years.

5. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S89 (2).  
 6. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S89 (11)(b).

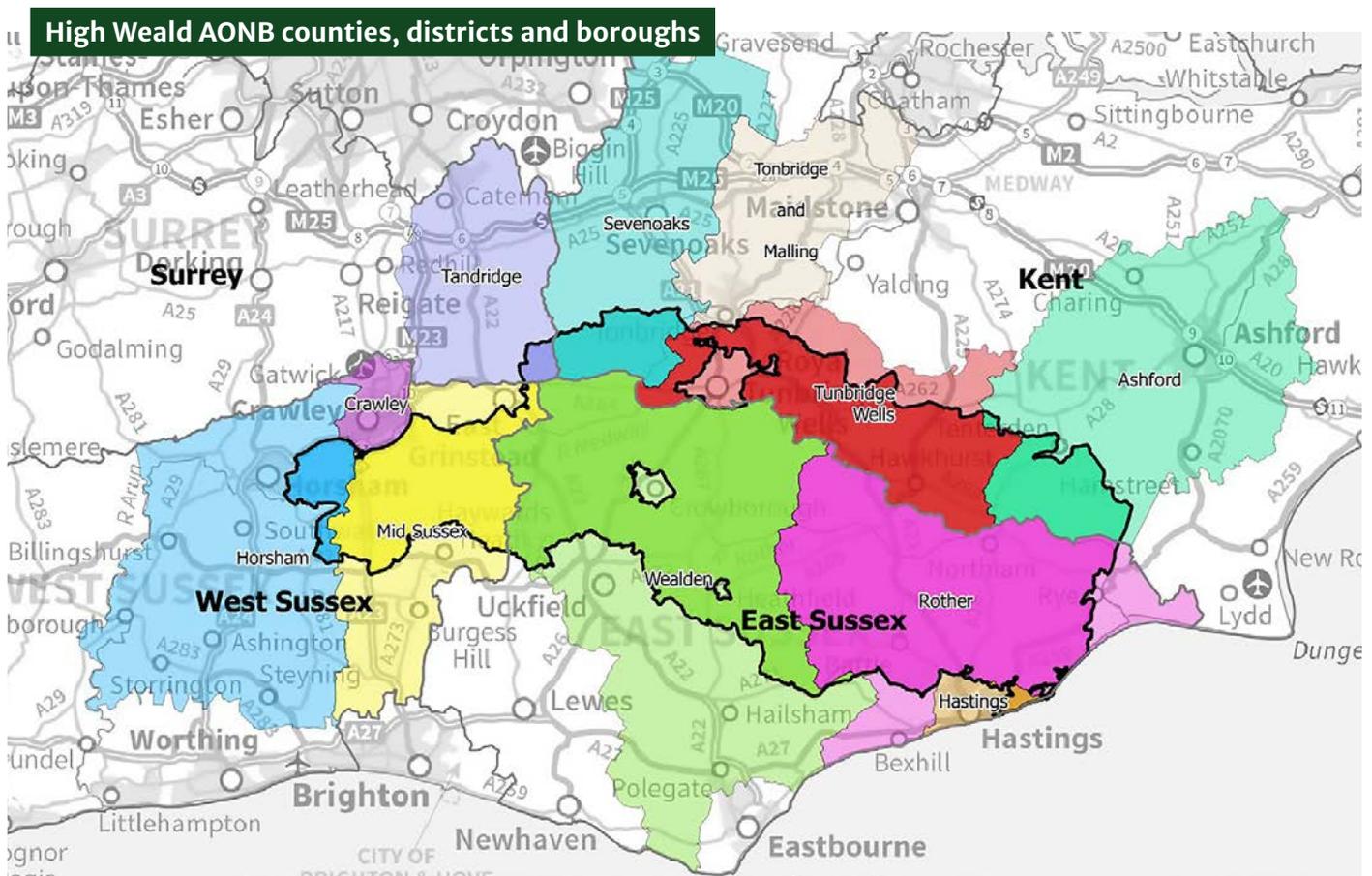


Fig 1. Fifteen local authorities have adopted the Plan as their policy for the AONB



- Character statements, including a list of key characteristics, describing the components of natural beauty that policy and actions should aim to conserve and enhance.
- Data and information about the High Weald’s natural and cultural assets.
- A set of management policies (‘Objectives’) for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB together with a monitoring framework for judging success.
- Proposed Actions which indicate the ambitions of partners for themselves, and for others, and which guide resources and effort to where they are most needed.
- References to evidence and supporting information.

Research reports, data sets and maps for each component of natural beauty and for selected aspects of the area’s natural and cultural capital, are held by the High Weald JAC and available to support Plan delivery.

### How was the Plan prepared?

This Plan is the fourth edition of the AONB Management Plan first published in 2004. Local authorities are required to review the AONB Management Plan every five years, make any amendments they consider appropriate, and publish a report on the review<sup>10</sup>. The review follows national guidance<sup>11</sup>.

It is a formal process requiring preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and other appropriate assessments to comply with English and European Union law. It reflects consideration of current and forthcoming policy changes, new data and analysis, and draws on local opinion gathered through participative engagement events and public consultation.

*An AONB is ‘[Countryside of] distinctive character whose nature and value depend partly on the physical structure of the rocks of which it is composed and the sculpturing of hill and valley, partly on local climate, partly on the natural and semi-natural vegetation that may be present and partly on the crops that are grown and the agricultural regimes. All these elements blend into a whole which possess both singular beauty and high scientific interest, and the defacement or disappearance of the distinctive characters of such an [area] involves an irreparable loss which it is hard to overestimate.’*

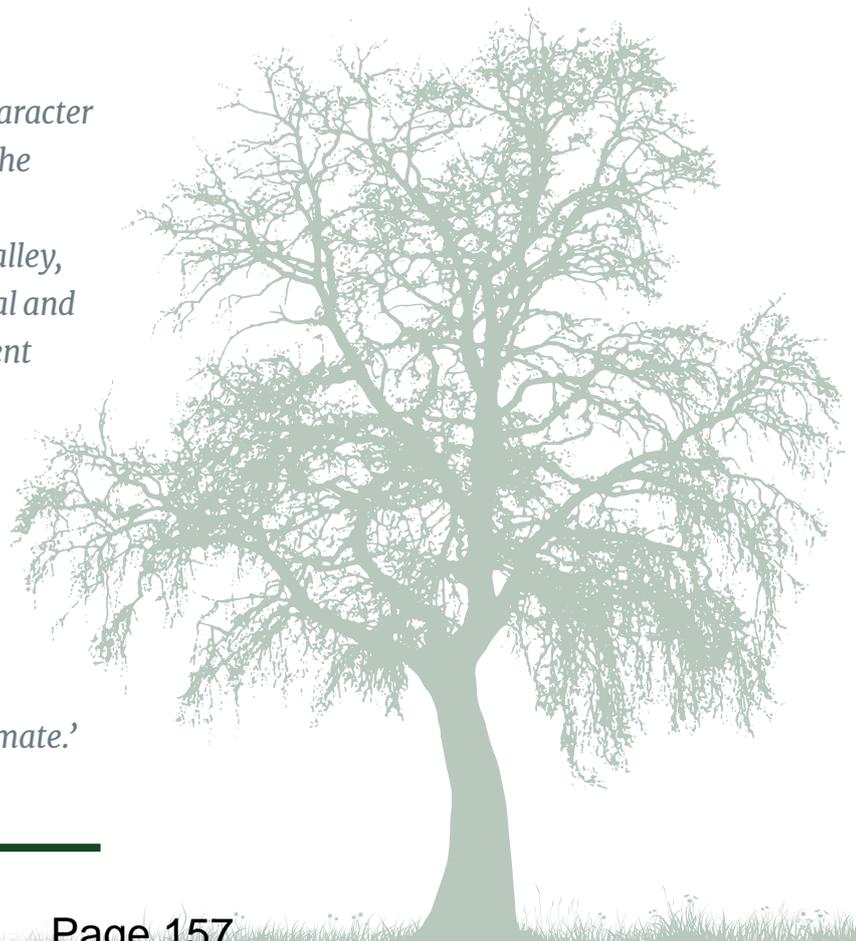
**Wild Life Conservation Special Committee  
describing proposed AONBs, 1947**

A full list of documents prepared in support of this Plan can be found on page 16.

### How to use the Plan

The Plan can be used to guide environmental land management and assess the impact of development or other changes on the AONB. Where the ambition is to achieve environmental net gain, or assess potential harm, the Plan provides a framework for identifying actions that may enhance or damage the AONB’s natural and cultural assets. Key characteristics for each component of natural beauty identify what is special about the High Weald’s landscape and beauty that should be afforded ‘great weight’ in planning decisions. Data held by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for many of these characteristics indicates their geographical extent and can assist decision-making. The Plan, and the objectives for each component in particular, acts as a checklist or set of criteria against which policy and actions can be assessed for compliance with Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000.

7. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S82 (1).
8. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S85 (1) and (2).
9. NCA Profile: 122 High Weald (2013), Natural England (NE508).
10. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S 89 (9) and (10).
11. Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans, Countryside Agency CA221 2006 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140605121642/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40023>, & Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A Guide, Countryside Agency, CA 23 2001 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140605121241/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40024>



Proposed Actions for each Plan objective are ordered in two categories – ‘Public bodies’ and ‘Others’. Public bodies include all bodies subject to the statutory duty ‘to have regard to’ conservation and enhancement of the AONB – county, borough, district, parish and town councils; government departments and their arm’s length bodies, such as NHS England; statutory undertakers; highway authorities, and statutory committees. ‘Others’ include any other organisation or individual whose actions impact on the High Weald, and who can help conserve and enhance it.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring of Plan progress and of the condition of the AONB will be carried out by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee. Headline indicators will not be used due to the absence of relevant, consistent and repeatable AONB-wide data; rather

condition and threat level will be assessed using available data, expert knowledge and informed judgement. Data sources will include data gathered for each ‘Indicator of Success’ together with Natural England environmental monitoring information and any other relevant data sets.

*The Plan sets out the key characteristics of this nationally-important landscape and the ‘public goods’ it provides in order to help new environmental land management schemes achieve the ambitions of the Governments 25 year environment plan.*

## Implementation

Where the Plan is used to guide policy or action on the ground the following principles should be applied:

**Landscape-scale targeting** – using the best available evidence to identify urgent challenges and achieve multiple objectives; with local knowledge used to match these areas with willing partners on the ground.

**Landscape-scale collaboration** – working with a range of partners (public, private and community), connected through geography or interest, to support strong joint initiatives (such as Farm Clusters or community land trusts).

**Tailored to local circumstances** – cognisant of local character and recognising the different aspirations, motivations, knowledge and capacity of land managers, businesses and communities.

**Trusted advisors** – recognising the value of technical experts and of experienced practitioners; bringing together specialists across landscape disciplines (such as species and habitat specialists, landscape archaeologists, rural economists) to develop integrated solutions.

**Long term commitment** – investing in partnerships, projects and activities that deliver lasting benefits.

**Knowledge transfer** – valuing long-held practical knowledge and experience of the areas’ rural heritage and seeking opportunities to share this with others.

**Payment for public benefit** – recognising the wide range of health and wellbeing benefits provided by accessible countryside, but also the importance of a biodiverse and well-functioning ecosystem, and the contribution made by local healthy food production and forestry.

**Natural systems** – using natural processes where possible to restore naturally functioning habitat mosaics within which all characteristic wildlife can thrive.

**Empowering people** – engaging people with nature; building skills and capacity, supporting volunteering and providing support to enable everyone to contribute positively to conserving the High Weald.

**Measureable biodiversity net gain** – positive action to improve diversity and biomass of characteristic species supported by base line evidence and monitoring.

## Documents prepared in support of this Plan

All documents prepared in support of this Plan can be found at [www.highweald.org/public-consultation-2018](http://www.highweald.org/public-consultation-2018)

- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Engagement and Consultation Report, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Strategic Environmental Assessment, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Habitats Regulations Assessment, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Equality Impact Assessment Screening Report, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Health Impact Assessment Screening Report, Joint Advisory Committee
- Monitoring the Condition of the AONB and the Performance of the AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, August 2017
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Context and Issues, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, March 2017.

# AONB Policy

## *and Legal Framework*

There are 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England, a further four AONBs wholly in Wales and eight in Northern Ireland. The 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland cover approximately 18 per cent of the land surface. Together with National Parks, AONBs 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 natural beauty of AONBs make them some of the most special and loved places in the UK. AONBs are living, working landscapes that contribute some £16bn every year to the national economy. England's AONBs are home to a million people and more than two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of an AONB. Around 150 million visits to English AONBs take place every year, resulting in spending of more than £2bn.<sup>12</sup>

### Purpose of designation

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to **conserve and enhance natural beauty** 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.

These subsidiary purposes – in effect, qualifications of the primary purpose – are those defined in the Countryside Commission statement 1991<sup>13</sup>, restated in 2006<sup>14</sup> (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.

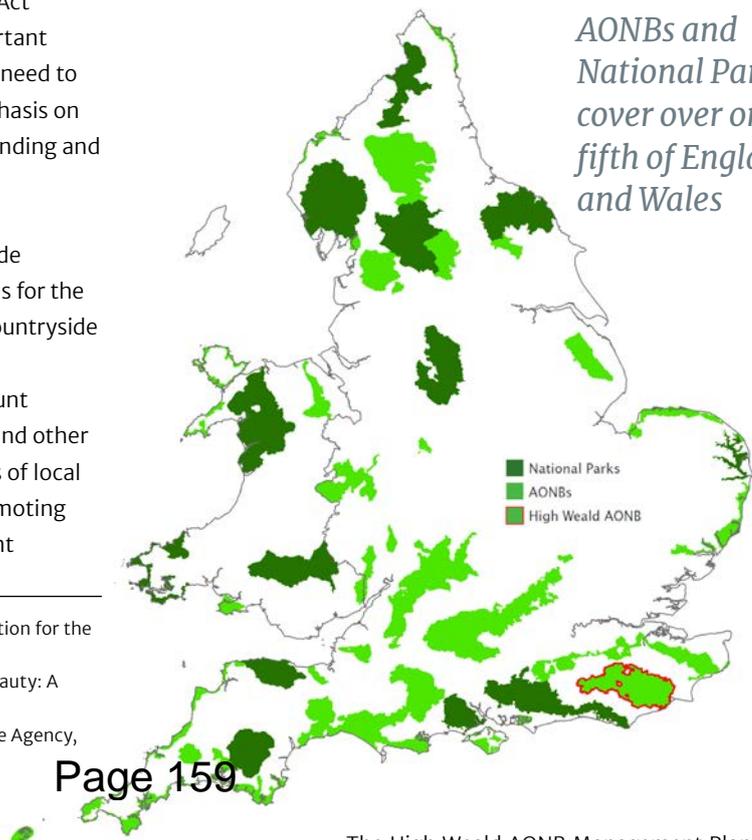
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

### Responsibility for conservation and enhancement of AONBs

The formal legal responsibility for both development control and for management of AONBs (including the duty to prepare an AONB Management Plan) lies with the local authorities in whose area(s) the AONB exists, except in two instances (the Chilterns and the Cotswolds AONB) where this is the responsibility of a statutory Conservation Board.

In addition, local authorities and all public bodies have a statutory duty under CROW Act 2000, Section 85, to '...have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty...'. To 'conserve and enhance' is a single duty, therefore exercising the duty requires that both elements be addressed. This duty places an obligation on a wide range of organisations

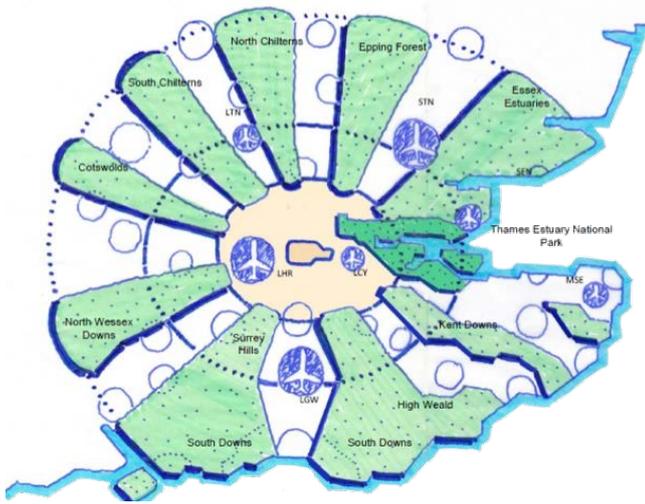
*AONBs and National Parks cover over one-fifth of England and Wales*



12. NAAONB (2018). Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A designation for the 21st Century. [www.landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk)

13. Countryside Commission (1991). Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Policy Statement (CCP 356).

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



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**A schematic envisaging the future of London as a green global region intimately interconnected to AONBs, National Parks, and other green areas**

*The National Parks Commission set up by the 1949 Act warmed to the designation of AONBs, observing that they were important because of their proximity to populated areas in the lowlands.*

not just to consider any detrimental impacts on AONBs of their policies and activities (both outside as well as within the boundary), but positively to consider how they might enhance the AONBs' natural beauty. Ministers of the Crown, statutory undertakers, Government agencies and any public body or person

## 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.

holding public office, including Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through their accountable body (local authority) are subject to the Section 85 duty.

The duty requires public bodies to have regard for AONBs at all stages of their decision making and Defra expects that they should be able to 'demonstrate that they have fulfilled' the duty and 'clearly show' how they have considered the AONB purpose in their decision making<sup>15</sup>.

Preparation of AONB Management Plans is mostly delegated by the local authority to a representative committee on which a variety of AONB 'stakeholders' are represented. Where an AONB overlaps several different local authority areas this is usually termed a 'Joint Advisory Committee' or JAC. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee was formally established in 1996 with its predecessor, the High Weald Forum, operating since 1989.

At a national level, a collective voice for the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is provided by the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB)<sup>16</sup>. First formed in 1998, the NAAONB is a charity whose objectives are to promote the conservation and enhancement of AONBs; advance understanding and appreciation by the public, and promote effective partnerships for their management.

## History of AONB designation and policy

AONBs emerged from the mood of civic renewal which characterised the decades following the end of the Second World War. The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was one of many – including health, education, agriculture and development planning – which established the basis for a 'new Britain'.

- The **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000** (CROW) 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. 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 a 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] to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty...**' 'Relevant authorities' include all public

*‘The Government is engaged on a Health Campaign. ...But it is no less essential, for any national health scheme, to preserve for the national walking grounds and regions where young and old can enjoy the sight of unspoilt nature. And it is not a question of physical exercise only, it is a question of spiritual exercise and enjoyment’*

**The Standing Committee on National Parks, 1938**

The need to designate special areas of the countryside against inappropriate development, protect wildlife, celebrate and conserve their distinctive features, encourage sustainable agriculture and foster local economic well-being was recognised well before the Dower (1945) and Hobhouse (1947) reports which led to the establishment of AONBs and National Parks.

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)

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 of regard’.

- **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 well-being 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**

- 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)

Seventy years after the 1949 Act and in a rapidly changing modern world, the production and implementation of revised AONB Management Plans help ensure that AONB partnerships are leaders in delivering the intentions of the 1949 Act, alongside the aspirations of the Government’s 25 year Environment Plan<sup>17</sup>.

### The designation process<sup>18</sup>

Natural England can make orders to designate AONBs or vary the boundaries of existing ones within England. AONBs are designated in law<sup>19</sup> following a prescribed process which includes an appraisal of landscape quality, in particular the technical criteria of sufficient natural beauty, and a wide consultation with

15. Defra (2005), Duties on Relevant Authorities to have regard to the purposes of National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads. London: Defra publications. Available from: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402204840/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/protected/npaonb-duties-guide.pdf>
16. [www.landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk)
17. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. (2018). A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment. London: HM Government.
18. Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England. Natural England 2011 pp. 11–14.

**‘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 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.

local authorities, landowners, residents and businesses.

It is the AONB as a whole that must satisfy the technical criteria of natural beauty. The weight and importance of factors indicating natural beauty may vary across the designation. The presence of incongruous features or degraded landscapes does not, in itself, detract from the value of the area as an AONB. The emphasis in these cases is on the second part of the designation purpose, that of enhancement of natural beauty. Government has confirmed that the landscape quality of AONBs and National Parks are equivalent<sup>20</sup>.

### High Weald designation history<sup>21</sup>

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.

The first AONB to be designated was the Gower Peninsular

## Planning and AONBs

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<sup>22</sup>. AONB Management Plans may also be material considerations for making decisions on planning applications within AONBs and their setting.

The planning system provides Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, alongside National Parks, with high levels of protection from development. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Paragraph 172, requires that:

- '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 these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development<sup>55</sup> other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest (reflecting the long-established 'Silkin test' for development in National Parks and AONBs<sup>23</sup>). 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 recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.'

#### Footnote 55 says:

*'For the purposes of paragraphs 172 and 173, 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.'*

#### NPPF paragraph 11 states that:

*'Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.'*

#### For plan-making this means that:

- a. Plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change;
- b. Strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas<sup>5</sup>, unless:
  - i. The application of policies in this 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<sup>6</sup>; or
  - ii. Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

#### For decision-taking this means:

- a. Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
- b. Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date<sup>7</sup>, granting permission unless:
  - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed<sup>6</sup>; or
  - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

#### Footnote 6 says:

*'The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 176) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 63); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.'*

## >90% people find the High Weald's traditional buildings appealing

High Weald Public Survey, 2018

in 1956. 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.

### AONB 'setting'

The term 'setting' is used to refer to areas outside the AONB where development and other activities may affect land within an AONB. Its extent will vary depending upon the issues considered but some can be mapped, for example, the impact of development on views into and out of the AONB. Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000 requires public bodies to consider whether any activities outside the AONB may affect land in an AONB, and Planning Practice Guidance (Natural Environment: 003) emphasises that this duty is relevant in considering development proposals that are situated outside the AONB boundary. Not all activities will be detrimental; conservation practices and economic ties outside the AONB can support AONB purpose.

### The international context

English AONBs 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) as 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 particular 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.'**

IUCN emphasises their importance as cultural landscapes – as distinct from Category I (Strict Nature Reserves and Wilderness Areas) and Category II National Parks (which for IUCN are large natural or near-natural areas, unlike UK national parks). Until

recently, the AONB designation (together with that of UK national parks) was regarded as an anomaly in the international protected area system which prioritised 'naturalness' as a criterion of value. In the last quarter-century, however, they have come to be recognised as leaders in the move towards area-based sustainable development.

The new multidisciplinary, multifunctional concept of landscape is encapsulated in the European Landscape Convention (ELC), adopted by the Council of Europe in 2000 and ratified by the UK government in 2006 (it is not an EU directive and will remain unaffected by Brexit).

**The ELC promotes a definition of landscape which usefully underpins the rationale for AONBs:**

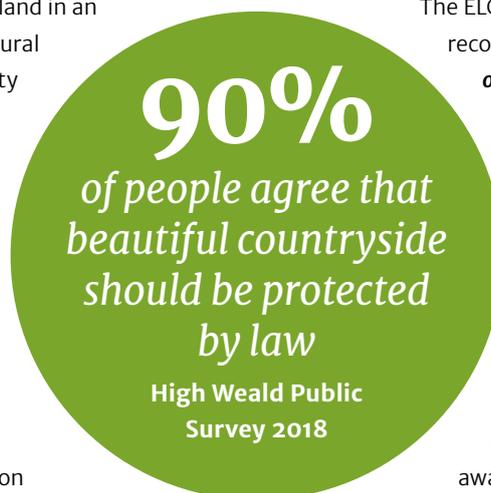
**'An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.'**

This is a rich concept that encompasses, but goes beyond, sectoral (geomorphological, ecological, archaeological, historical or aesthetic) approaches. ELC makes it clear that people are at the heart of all landscapes (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.

The ELC places obligations on signatory states to recognise landscape '**as an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity**'. Obligations include a requirement to identify the diversity and range of landscapes, implement landscape policies aimed at landscape protection, and to engage with local communities, private bodies and public authorities in their planning and management. This includes raising awareness and understanding of the character, value and functions of landscape and the way these

are changing. AONBs and their managing organisations are a significant contributor to delivering on the UK's obligations under ELC.

The AONB Management Plan in its characterisation of the landscape at an AONB scale is supported by a wealth of local landscape character assessments carried out by county, district and parish councils that provide more fine grained information about the local landscape. In addition, Natural England's High Weald National Character Area profile provides a description of the area's environmental character.



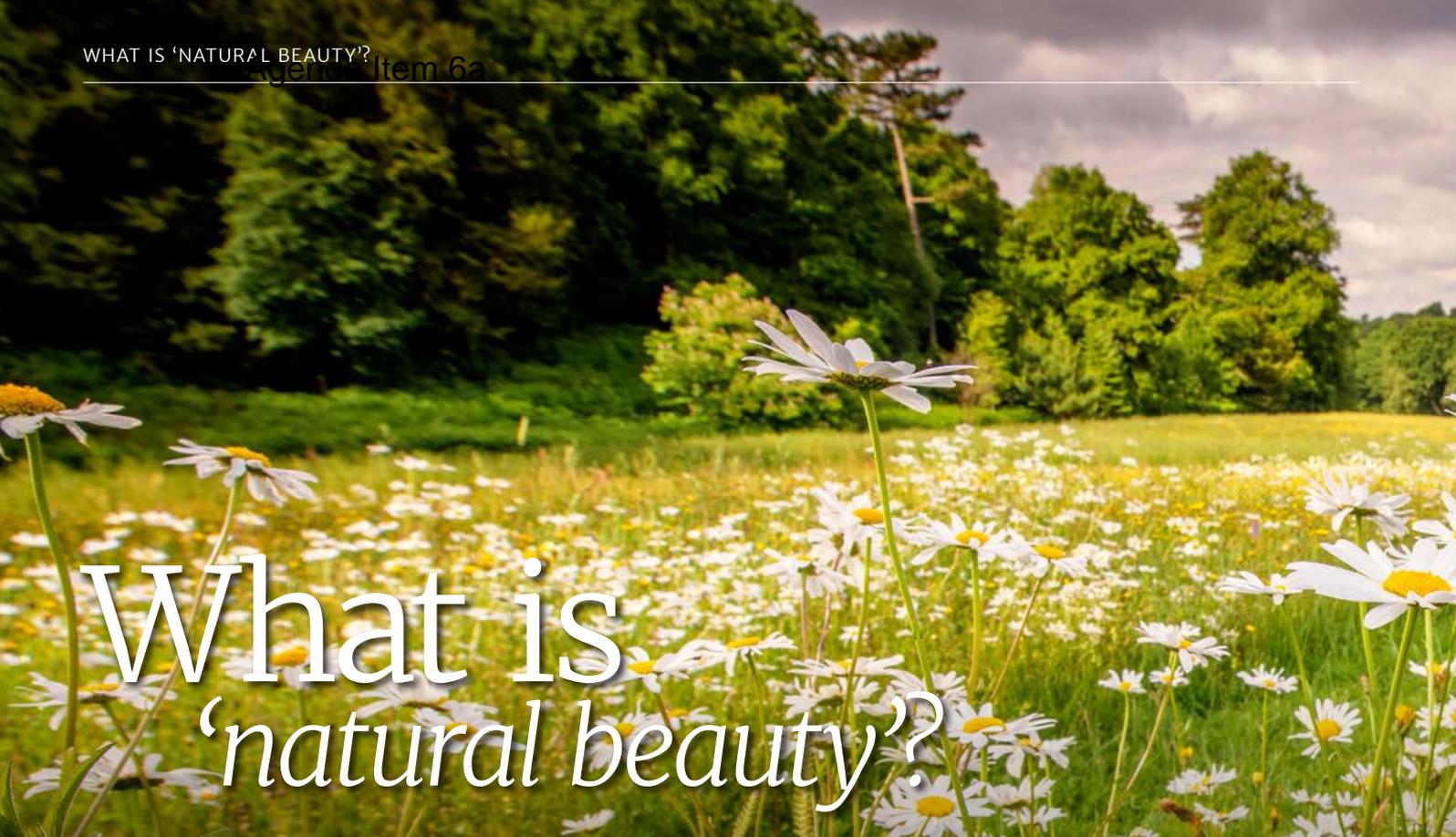
19. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S82-84.

20. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018). National Planning Policy Framework, Paragraph 172 and English National Parks and the Broads Circular, 2010, Paragraph 20.

21. Woolmore, R. (2013). Designation History Series: High Weald. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

22. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2016). Planning Practice Guidance: Natural Environment, Paragraph 004.

23. Hansard, HC Deb 31 March 1949, vol. 463.



# What is 'natural beauty'?

## AONBs are designated for the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

The term 'natural beauty' first gained currency in a legislative context in the 1907 Act which gave legal status to the National Trust ('for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty'). It has been the basis for the designation of both AONBs and National Parks since the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, but has never been exhaustively defined in legislation<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup>. 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<sup>26</sup>. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 clarified that land used for agriculture, woodlands, parkland or with physiographical features partly the product of human intervention in the landscape, is not prevented from being treated as an area of 'natural beauty'.

In the 1949 Act 'natural beauty' replaced other phrases such as 'landscape beauty' and 'characteristic landscape beauty'<sup>27</sup>. These provide a clue to the importance of landscape character and beauty as an aesthetic experience bringing people a sense of pleasure, wellbeing and connectedness with nature. Character is interpreted in different ways with the Landscape Institute

focusing on the pattern of landscape elements<sup>28</sup>, landscape archaeologists seeing the human process of a landscape 'coming into being' and ecologists also considering the quality of the natural processes and ecological systems which underpin patterns of vegetation. Natural beauty encompasses all of these views.

Our perceptions of the landscape and the value we place on its qualities rely on our senses and emotions, and are shaped by many factors including taste, background, culture and understanding. These values may change over time even if the intrinsic character of the landscape does not.

For AONBs it is not enough just to possess natural beauty; their natural beauty should have the potential to be 'outstanding' both in terms of the quality of the components of character (including their biodiversity) and the human aesthetic experience of the landscape.

For the purposes of this Plan, natural beauty is defined by the Statement of Significance.

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

25. A draft statement on natural beauty, The University of Sheffield, January 2006.

26. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB Partnership members, Countryside Commission, CA24, November 2001, p.6.

27. Holdaway, E. (2007). Origins and Intentions of the 1949 Act Natural Beauty. Report to Countryside Council for Wales.

28. Landscape Institute and IEEM (2013). Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

**John Dower, one of the main architects of the 1949 Act recognised the overlap between natural and man-made elements in the landscape.**

*'Most natural features have some man-made or man-controlled tincture, and man-made features derive an integral part of their beauty and interest from their natural surroundings.'*

Report on National Parks, 1945

# High Weald AONB

## Statement of Significance

The High Weald is one of the best preserved Medieval landscapes in North West Europe.

Despite its large size (1,500km sq.) and proximity to London, its landscape has remained relatively unchanged since the 14th century, surviving major historical events and social and technological changes. Its outstanding beauty stems from its essentially rural and human scale character, with a high proportion of natural surfaces and 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 semi-natural habitat in a structurally diverse, permeable and complex mosaic supporting a rich diversity of wildlife.

### The natural beauty of the High Weald comprises

- **Five defining components of character** that have made the High Weald a recognisably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years.

1. **Geology, landform and water systems** – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with numerous gill streams.
2. **Settlement** – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads 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** – abundance of ancient woodland, highly interconnected and in smallholdings.
5. **Field and Heath** – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths, and inned river valleys.

- **Land-based economy and related rural life** bound up with, and underpinning, the observable character of the landscape with roots extending deep into history. An increasingly

broad-based economy but with a significant land-based sector and related community life focused on mixed farming (particularly family farms and smallholdings), woodland management and rural crafts.

- **Other qualities** and features that are connected to the interaction between the landscape and people and which enrich character components. Such qualities and features enhance health and wellbeing, and foster enjoyment and appreciation of the beauty of nature. These include locally distinctive features which enrich the character components such as historic parks and gardens, orchards, hop gardens, veteran trees, along with their rich and varied biodiversity, and a wide range of appealing and locally distinctive historic buildings including oast houses, farm buildings, Wealden Hall houses and their associated features such as clay-tile catslide roofs.

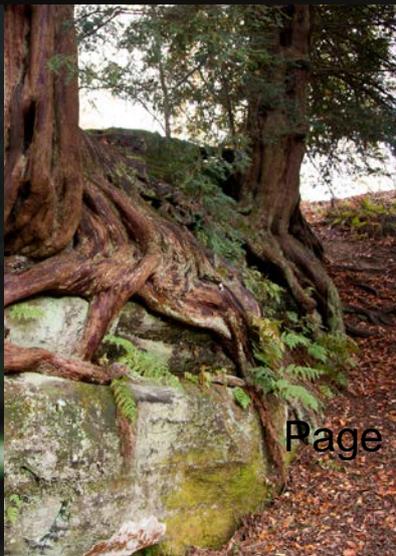
People value the wonderful views and scenic beauty of the High Weald with its relative tranquillity. They appreciate the area's ancientness and sense of history, its intrinsically dark landscape with the opportunity to see our own galaxy – the Milky Way – and the ability to get close to nature through the myriad public rights of way.



Natural Beauty

# Geology, landform, water systems and climate

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



## 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 and 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 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.
- ✓ **Soils** that are distinguished by their variability over short distances – mostly heavy and poorly drained with some coarse-grained, light and free draining.
- ✓ **Heavily channelised and intensively managed river valleys** in the eastern High Weald (Rother, Brede and Tillingham) originating from tidal and freshwater drowning 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.

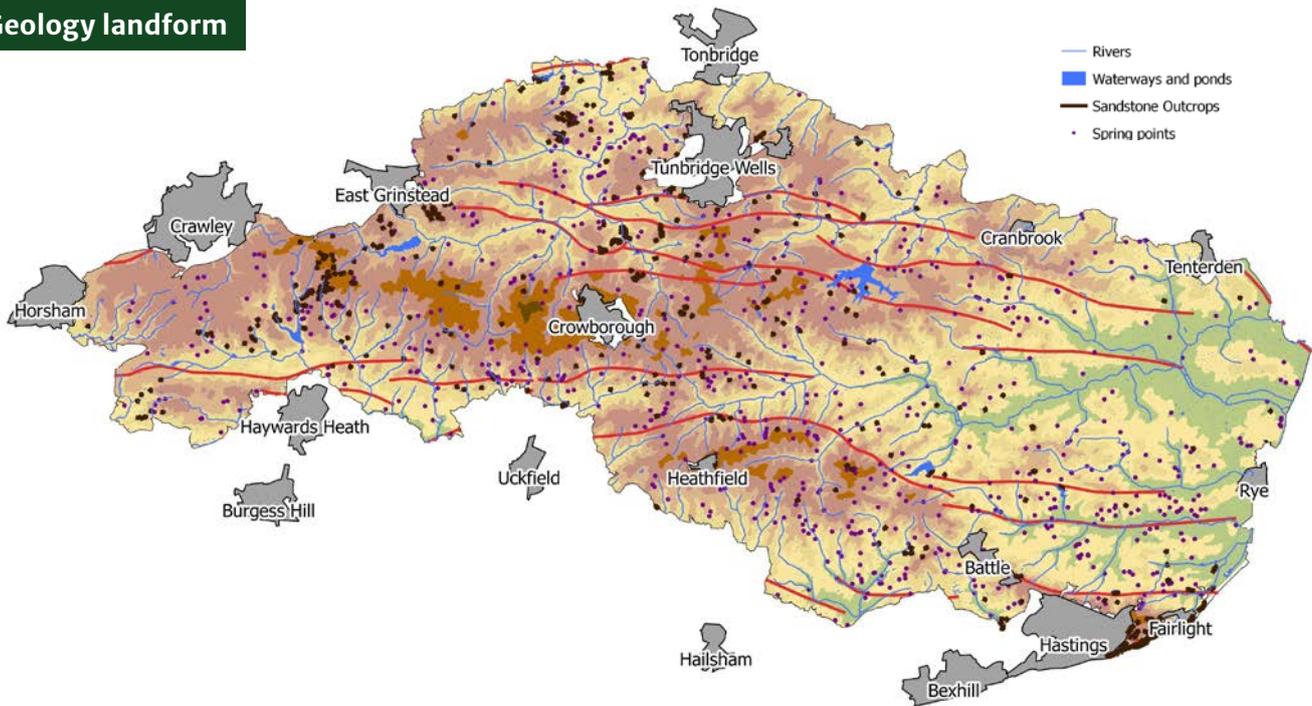
## Vision

*A landscape in which sustainable land management and action to reduce carbon emissions takes care of the natural resources of geology, soil, landform, and water systems along with their associated heritage assets and biodiversity, whilst delivering a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits. The approach to land management will take account of, and be partly stimulated by, climate change and rising sea levels.*



# Agenda Item 6a

## Geology landform



### Top five issues

1. Climate change; the impact of rising temperatures and extreme weather events.
2. Pressure on sensitive geological features from invasive species and recreation.
3. Soil erosion and the need for soil conservation.
4. Diffuse pollution – nutrient, pesticide and fine sediment run-off into ponds, streams and rivers.
5. Non-native invasive species in rivers, water bodies and bankside vegetation.

### Natural and cultural capital – facts 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.

**>315km<sup>2</sup>** of undisturbed soils.

**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.

**4,613km** of water courses in total, including tributaries and streams.

**13,401** ponds (9/km<sup>2</sup> compared with a national average of 1.8/km<sup>2</sup>) 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.

**20km<sup>2</sup>** 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.

**Reserves** of onshore hydrocarbons.

**A European** hotspot for gills.

**Objective G1**

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

**Rationale**

In order to enhance the role of rivers, water courses and water bodies in increasing biodiversity, improving water quality, protecting people and communities from flooding and promoting enjoyment of the wetland environment.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. increased extent of floodplain woodland and wetland features (Forestry Commission: hectares of new woodland created/ HWJAC: wetland features count)
- ii. All water bodies with either a 'good' or 'high' ecological and chemical status (Environment Agency: Ecological and chemical classification data)

**Objective G2**

**To protect and enhance soils, sandstone outcrops, and other important landform and geological features.**

**Rationale**

In order to conserve soil health, landform and geology 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.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. 100 per cent geological SSSIs in favourable condition (Natural England: SSSI condition)
- ii. Earthworm numbers consistently high across the High Weald (HWJAC: Citizen Science earthworm count)



**Objective G3**

**To help secure climatic conditions and rates of change which support continued conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's valued landscape and habitats.**

**Rationale**

In order to reduce locally arising greenhouse gas emissions and allow the High Weald to play its role in mitigating climate change.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. Increase in proportion of total energy demand met by renewable energy generated in the High Weald (HWJAC: compiled, kWh)

**Evidence and further reading**

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- Pond Conservation (2012). *The national context for the conservation of ponds in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Rother and Romney Catchment Plan: *Research Synthesis* (2015). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- TV Energy Ltd (2011). *High Weald AONB: Energy Use and Generation Audit*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Unconventional hydrocarbon resources in the Weald Basin* (2014). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

*'The oldest task in human history: to live on a piece of land without spoiling it.'*

**Engineering and Conservation, Aldo Leopold, 1938**

**Objective G1**

**To restore the natural function of river catchments.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Restore and create a range of wetland features including ponds, floodplain and wet woodland, bogs and water meadows, targeting support for vulnerable species such as water vole	x	x
Integrate water catchment and land management strategies applying to the High Weald	x	
Consider landscape archaeology in any activities affecting river catchments	x	x
Promote landowner awareness and support dedicated advisors for water and soils management, including identification and eradication of invasive non-native species such as Himalayan balsam and Signal crayfish	x	
Understand flood risk issues, and identify priority areas for natural flood management, supporting demonstration sites for High Weald best practice in Natural Flood Management	x	
Choose solutions (such as clear-span bridges) for footpaths and tracks crossing gills that minimise adverse impacts on river and stream habitats; avoiding new culverts and remove existing culverts where possible	x	x
Avoid development close to water courses that would restrict their natural geomorphological processes and natural flood capacity	x	x
Seek advice on tailoring natural flood management or wetland enhancement measures to the High Weald	x	x
Re-meander and restore channel and floodplain features	x	x
Tailor sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to the landscape character of the High Weald, being aware of possible impacts on vulnerable heritage assets, and considering grey water recycling schemes	x	x
Revise boundary, fertiliser and livestock management, cropping and harvesting practices to reduce diffuse pollution through surface runoff and leaching		x
Establish effective combinations of uncultivated grassland buffer strips and tree planting		x
Ensure alternatives to mains drainage such as septic tanks and cess pits are well maintained and compliant	x	x

**Objective G2**

**To protect sandstone outcrops, soils and other important landform and geological features.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Ensure best practice is complied with to protect soils during construction from compaction, pollution and erosion, and undertake soil health assessments	x	x
Protect undisturbed soils and minimise sterilisation of soils by permanent impermeable surfaces	x	x
Encourage good management practices on geological SSSIs and RIGs and support research to inform their conservation	x	x
Encourage citizen science projects to monitor soil biodiversity	x	
Seek to support, where possible, small scale utilisation of the geological resources e.g. quarried sandstone to provide local materials for construction	x	
Support farmers and landowners wanting to use grass, hedges and trees to protect soils and to reduce soil erosion	x	
Consider minimum tillage to reduce soil erosion and compaction, reverse organic matter decline and improve soil biodiversity		x
Reduce chemical inputs to protect soil organisms and improve biological activity		x
Implement best practice in management of recreational sandstone sites to protect sensitive cryptogams (plants such as ferns and mosses)	x	x
Avoid substantive alterations to landform in development	x	x

**Objective G3**

**To help secure climatic conditions and rates of change which support continued conservation and enhancement of the High Weald’s valued landscape and habitats.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Consider AONB characteristics in climate change mitigation and adaption strategies with particular attention paid to achieving reductions in energy demand and supporting alternative sustainable transport options	x	
Support, where possible, landscape-sensitive, small-scale renewable schemes tailored to AONB conservation	x	x
Support fossil fuel-free and public transport initiatives, encouraging walking, cycling and other travel alternatives where possible	x	x
Encourage all new habitable buildings to be constructed using ultra-low energy building techniques, with landscape-sensitive on-site renewable energy generation where appropriate	x	x
Minimise soil disturbance when managing or restoring habitats	x	x
Maximise local timber use in construction	x	x
Reduce by-products which are burnt or sent to landfill from management interventions (consider opportunities for new markets for waste products)	x	





Natural Beauty

# Settlement

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



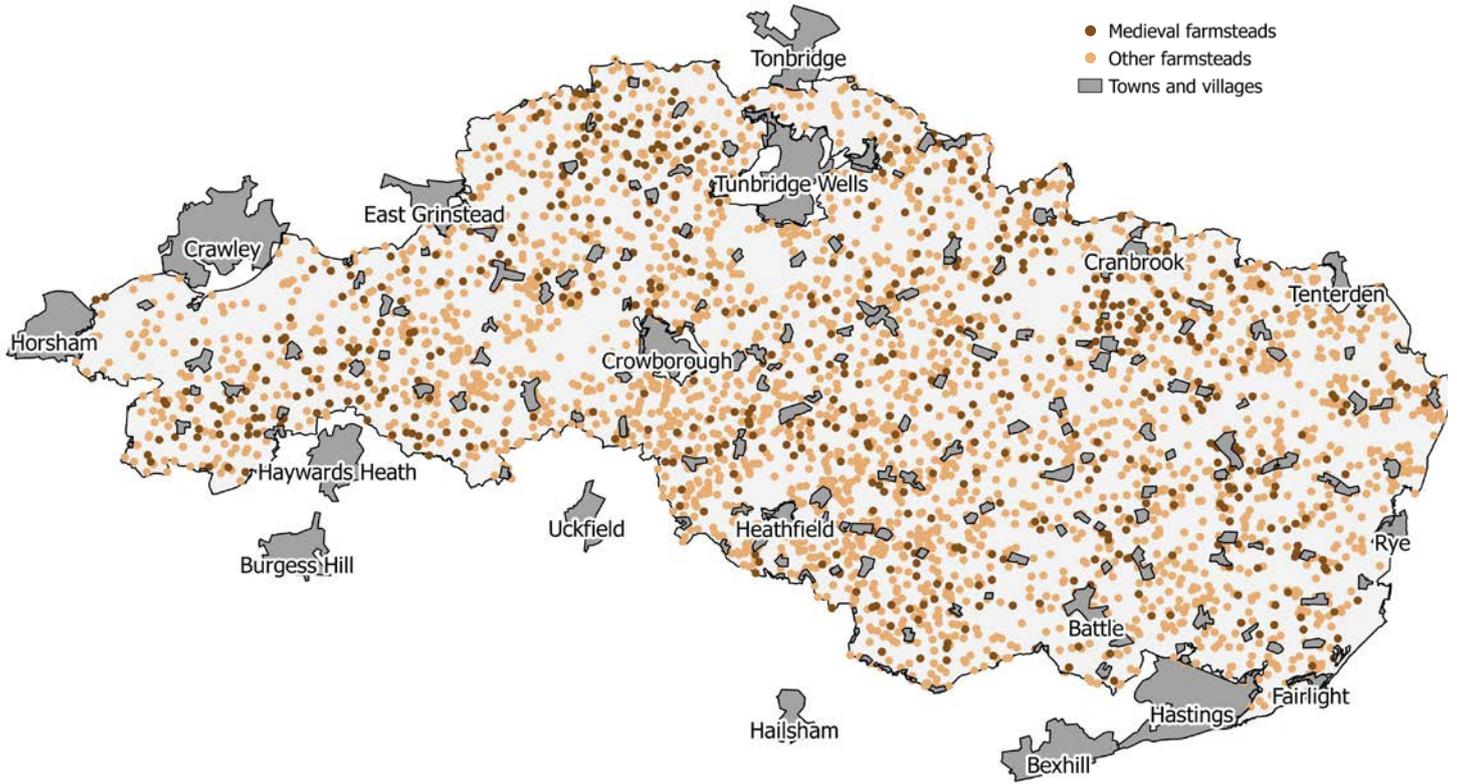
## Key Characteristics

- ✓ **High density of historic farmsteads**, with a long continuity of settlement in the same place; their position strongly influenced by topography and routeways.
- ✓ **Separation between settlements** formed by fields associated with individual historic farmsteads.
- ✓ **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 oasts and other structures associated with the hop industry (hop–pickers’ huts); where a complete range exists, these are rare and particularly significant.
- ✓ **Hamlets occurring around the junction of routeways** or small commons (which became greens or forstals), or as clusters of cottages serving a particular industry.
- ✓ **Pockets of small wayside cottages** (peasant settlement enclosing roadside commons or later worker cottages) interspaced with fields.
- ✓ **Villages and towns of Medieval origin** located at historic focal points or along ridge top roads; typically open areas used for meeting places and trade, with ‘markets’ granted for Burwash, Robertsbridge, Salehurst, Wadhurst, Cranbrook and Frant in the 13th century, and for Ticehurst, Lamberhurst, Heathfield, Rotherfield and Hawkurst in the early 14th century.
- ✓ **Absence of large scale settlement extensions** after AONB designation in 1983.
- ✓ **No significant nucleated settlements** before the 13th century (apart from Battle).
- ✓ **Deer parks** and later 18th century estates.
- ✓ **Distinctive settlement types** and pattern in the eastern High Weald relating to history of the Rother estuary and river trade.
- ✓ **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 landscapes.
- ✓ **A limited palette of local materials**: clay as tiles and brick, timber as weatherboard and framing, and some localised instances of stone.
- ✓ **Green-ness of roads and streets** with trees, hedges and verges dominant.

## Vision

*A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of settlement is protected in a way that positively contributes to the natural environment and improves the connections between settlements and the countryside. Appropriately worded land use planning policies within relevant development plans allow for affordable housing and workspace for local needs while ensuring that settlements retain their distinctiveness and individual historic buildings, and conservation areas and buried archaeological remains are conserved and enhanced as appropriate.*

**Settlements**



**Top five 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 respond to, or reinforce AONB character.
3. Erosion of AONB character through suburbanisation, including pressure for residential intensification unrelated to land management outside of towns and villages, large/landscape-intrusive replacement dwellings, and smaller interventions, boundary treatments etc., which have a cumulative effect.
4. Declining housing affordability, including lack of social housing and key worker housing suitable for land-based workers.
5. Fragmentation and suburbanisation of historic farmsteads, and the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential use with the loss of agricultural/economic functional relationship with land.

**Natural and cultural capital – facts 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.

**64 village** conservation areas.

**91 scheduled** ancient monuments.

### Objective S1

**To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.**

#### Rationale

To understand and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the relationship with the surrounding countryside and wild species, that defines sustainable rural settlement. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports land management objectives and AONB designation.

#### Indicators of Success

- i. Improved conditions for land-based businesses to flourish (HWJAC: land-based business survey)
- ii. Increased procurement by public bodies of goods and services which support AONB landscape conservation (HWJAC: procurement practices survey)

### Objective S2

**To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.**

#### Rationale

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

#### Indicators of Success

- i. Physical and perceived separation between settlements maintained (HWJAC: settlement separation mapping)
- ii. Greater proportion of new homes delivered through re-development or small developments (HWJAC: local authority statistics)

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

**Report on National Parks 1945**

### Objective S3

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

#### Rationale

To protect and enhance the character and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and re-establish the use of local materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to this distinctiveness.

#### Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in new developments according with AONB design guidance (HWJAC: local authority statistics)

#### Evidence and further reading

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**Objective S1**

**To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Preferentially select goods and services which support AONB landscape conservation in procurement decisions e.g. locally produced food, fuel, fencing, timber for construction	x	x
Provide guidance on affordable housing provision and homes for rural workers	x	
Seek to support community agriculture and small-scale horticulture	x	x
Support activities which celebrate and promote local products and services	x	x
Implement education initiatives to promote understanding of and engagement with local food networks	x	x
Protect allotments from development or damage	x	
Require developments to maximise measurable gains for biodiversity and opportunities for birds, bats and other wild native species in the design of buildings, curtilages and open spaces	x	
Make space for wildlife to thrive around buildings, gardens and urban spaces	x	x
Collaborate with neighbours to deliver landscape scale conservation management and sustainable food production	x	x

**Objective S2**

**To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Ensure there is reference to the AONB Management Plan in local plans and other public documents, and ensure its use as material consideration in planning decisions	x	
Require an archaeological assessment for the development affecting historic farmsteads	x	
Publish annual statistics on the rate of development and other land use change in the AONB	x	
Identify and map areas of separation between settlements and links with green infrastructure across settlements	x	
Promote use of the High Weald Design Guide and historic characterisation to guide settlement planning	x	x
Extend farmstead assessment guidance across the AONB	x	
Protect the relationship between historic settlement and its associated green spaces and routeways	x	x
Seek to prioritise the delivery of new housing primarily through small-scale development and a mix of housing sizes that responds to local needs	x	
Produce guidance on the use of Historic Landscape Characterisation to ensure the historic character of settlements, and the historic landscape associated with them, is considered in development proposals	x	x



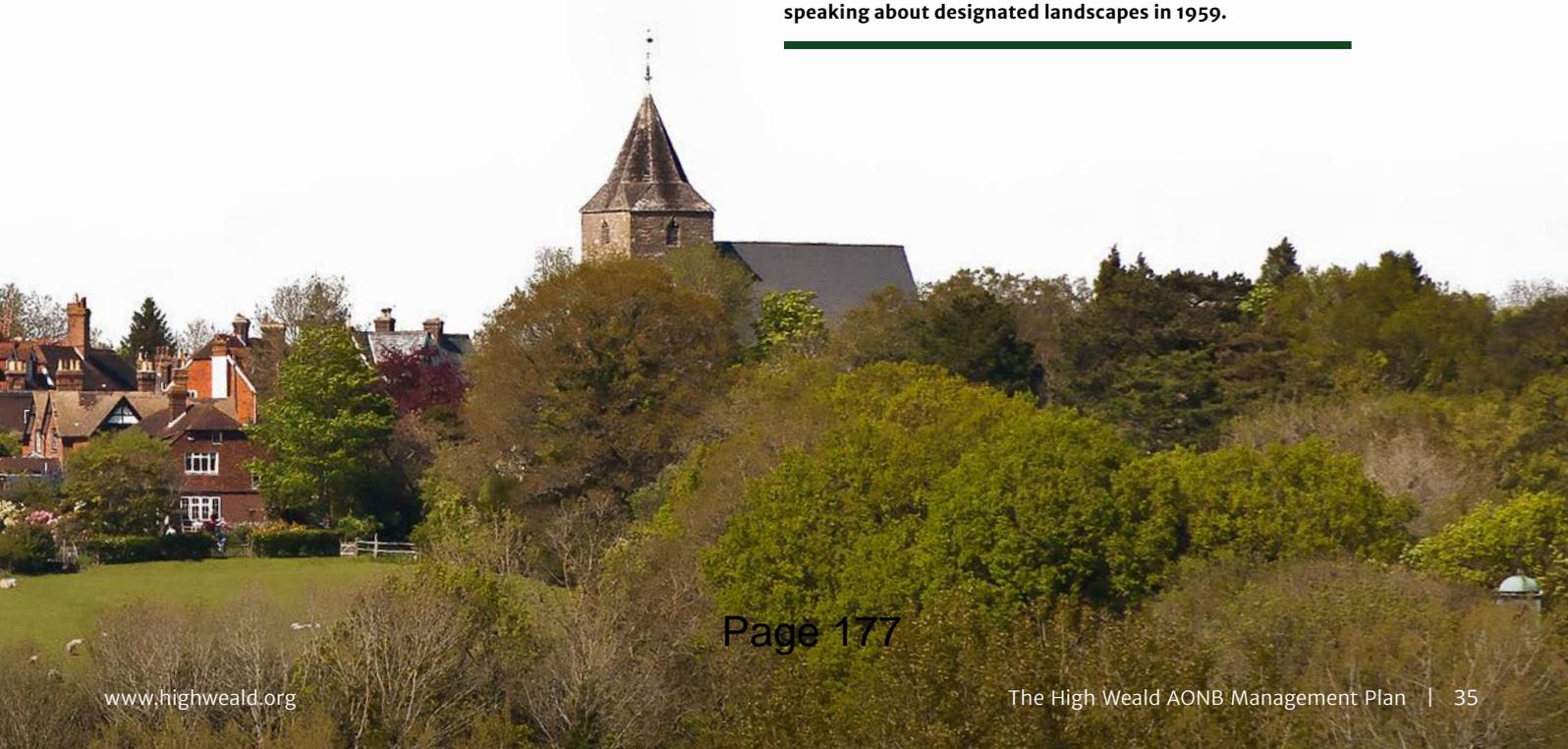
**Objective S3**

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

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Promote the High Weald Design Guide and apply to housing development in the AONB, and publish good practice case studies demonstrating application of the High Weald Design Guide	x	x
Describe and promote traditional architectural detailing	x	x
Promote and utilise the High Weald Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development	x	x
Increase local listing and support a listed building review to tackle the under-listing of historic farm buildings	x	
Facilitate improved links between those specifying construction details and suppliers of construction materials produced from the AONB landscape	x	x
Support innovation in timber technology and its use in construction	x	x
Promote architectural competitions and award schemes to encourage affordable and sustainable construction appropriate to AONB character	x	x
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	x	
Protect and preserve the character of small traditional structures such as cattle sheds and hoppers' huts	x	x
Utilise AONB design guidance for new housing development	x	x
Use local fencing materials or native planting for boundaries	x	x
Reflect local landscape character and use of local provenance species in new landscaping scheme ensuring improved connectivity	x	x

*‘[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.**





Natural Beauty

# Routeways

The High Weald AONB is characterised by historic routeways (now roads, tracks 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.

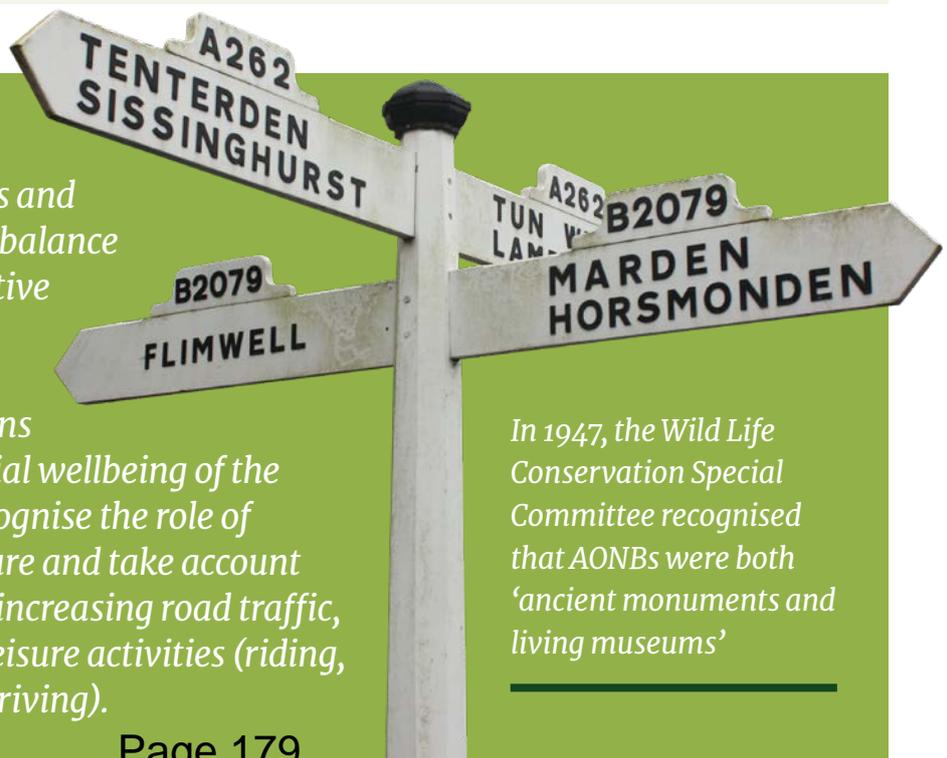


**Key characteristics**

- ✔ **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 flowery grass verges** common, indicating the historic width of routeways and their function as linear common grazing.
- ✔ **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 features** – pre-1964 fingerposts, 'black and white' road signs, roadside milestones – common.
- ✔ **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.

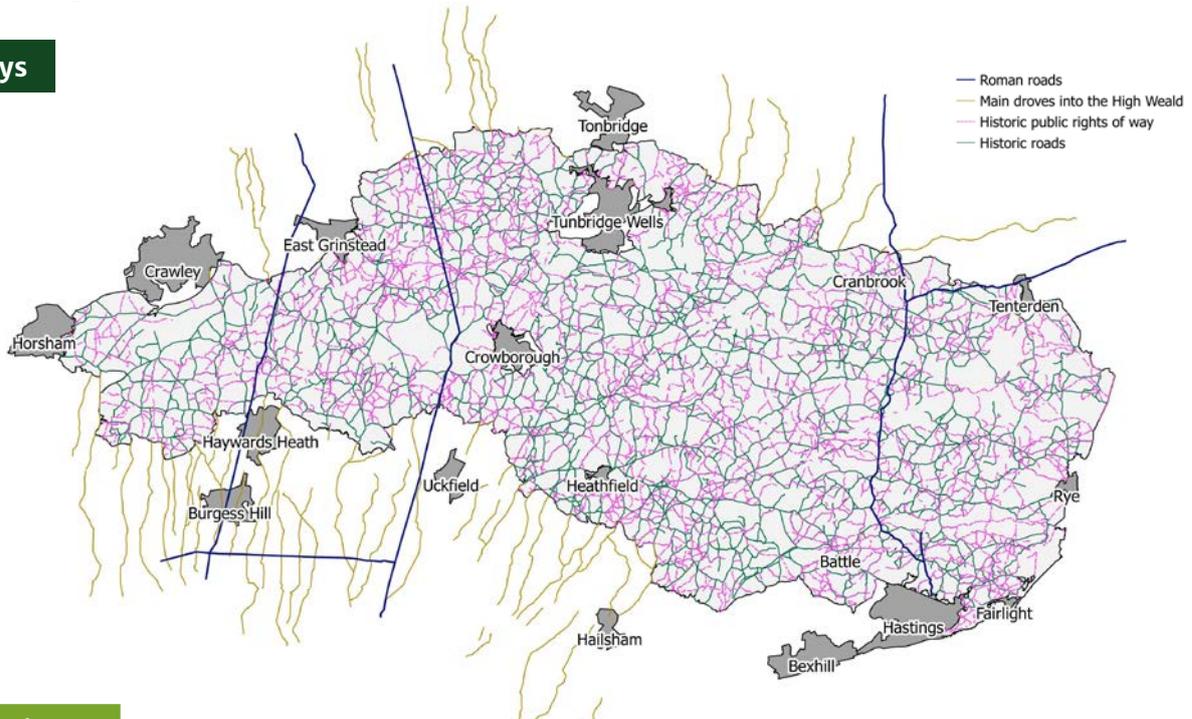
**Vision**

*A landscape in which the character of the distinctive lanes and rights of way is protected and a balance achieved between the comparative quietness and rurality of the roads of the High Weald and their function as communications central to the economic and social wellbeing of the area. The management will recognise the role of routeways as green infrastructure and take account of, and be partly stimulated by, increasing road traffic, safety concerns and increased leisure activities (riding, cycling, walking and off-road driving).*



*In 1947, the Wild Life Conservation Special Committee recognised that AONBs were both 'ancient monuments and living museums'*

**Routeways**



**Top five issues**

1. Diversions of public rights of way from the historic route.
2. Damage from the erection of fences; flytipping, development and ploughing.
3. Insensitive management of veteran trees and roadside coppice including practice of ‘chip and smother’; and inappropriate management of flowery grassland on verges.
4. Insensitive highway engineering including passing bays, deep visibility splays to entrances, and suburban signage and lighting.
5. Damage to narrow roads and BOATs (Byways Open to all Traffic) by motor vehicles and wide agricultural machinery, particularly in wet conditions.

**Natural and cultural capital – facts 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 Henry’s army from victory at Stamford Bridge to defeat at Hastings in 1066.

**Two** main Roman roads (London–Lewes and London–Hassocks/Brighton).

**Droeways** dating to the Anglo–Saxon period and earlier for moving livestock (pigs and cattle).

**More than 4400km** highly interconnected green infrastructure bounded by flower–rich verges, hedges and woods.

**Evidence and further reading**

- High Weald AONB: Biodiversity Statement (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
- Harris, R. (2003). The Making for the High Weald. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Historic Routeway Survey Pack (2011). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Lake, J. (2018) Routeways of the High Weald: Their function, history and character. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Sansum, P. (2013). Woodland in the High Weald AONB: An overview of its character and significance. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

**Objective R1 To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways.**

**Rationale**

To maintain 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; and to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. Fewer public rights of way diversions on historic routeways (HWJAC: local authority footpath diversion statistics)

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Discourage new access points that damage the character of sunken routeways or dilute the pattern of routeways	x	x
Give consideration to the historic alignment of roads, tracks and paths in decision making	x	x
Support the identification, retention and restoration of traditional fingerposts, boundary stones and turnpike features (e.g. milestone and toll houses), adding to the relevant Historic Environment Record where appropriate	x	x
Identify historic routeways in highway improvement plans and consider management tailored to enhance their historic character including early intervention to protect banks	x	
Invest in creative highway engineering solutions, delivering quality, best practice highway alterations which are sensitive to AONB character	x	x
Identify and protect above ground and below ground archaeology (including braided multiple ditch and back systems associated with braided tracks) in any works so as to affect routeways, adding to the relevant Historic Environment Record where appropriate	x	x
Ensure that routeways are recognised as non-designated heritage assets in the planning process	x	
Provide archaeological training for highway engineers and management contractors	x	
Avoid fencing and other activity such as the use of inappropriate machinery which damages routeway archaeology (including ditches and banks) or that alters its historic alignment	x	x

**Objective R2 To enhance the ecological function of routeways.**

**Rationale**

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

**Indicators of Success**

- i. Increase in proportion of designated wildlife verges with tailored management regimes (HWJAC: local authority highway management data)

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support the enhancement of verges, especially verges in new developments, with local provenance grassland species	x	x
Identify ecologically-rich historic routeways in biodiversity and green infrastructure planning	x	
Prioritise the appropriate management of ecologically-rich road verges in highway management and avoid damaging operations such as ‘chip and smother’	x	
Provide ecological training for highway management engineers and contractors to ensure all roadside verges are managed sensitively for biodiversity	x	
Encourage investment in the identification of ecologically rich roadside verges, including community schemes to identify ecologically-rich roadside verges, and enhance others with local provenance wild grassland species	x	x
Avoid vehicular traffic on sensitive routeway verges, particularly when the ground is wet	x	x
Undertake sensitive management of old coppice on routeway banks	x	x
Maintain routeway verges in their ‘natural state’ and refrain from planting non-native species along routeways	x	x



Natural Beauty

# Woodland

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



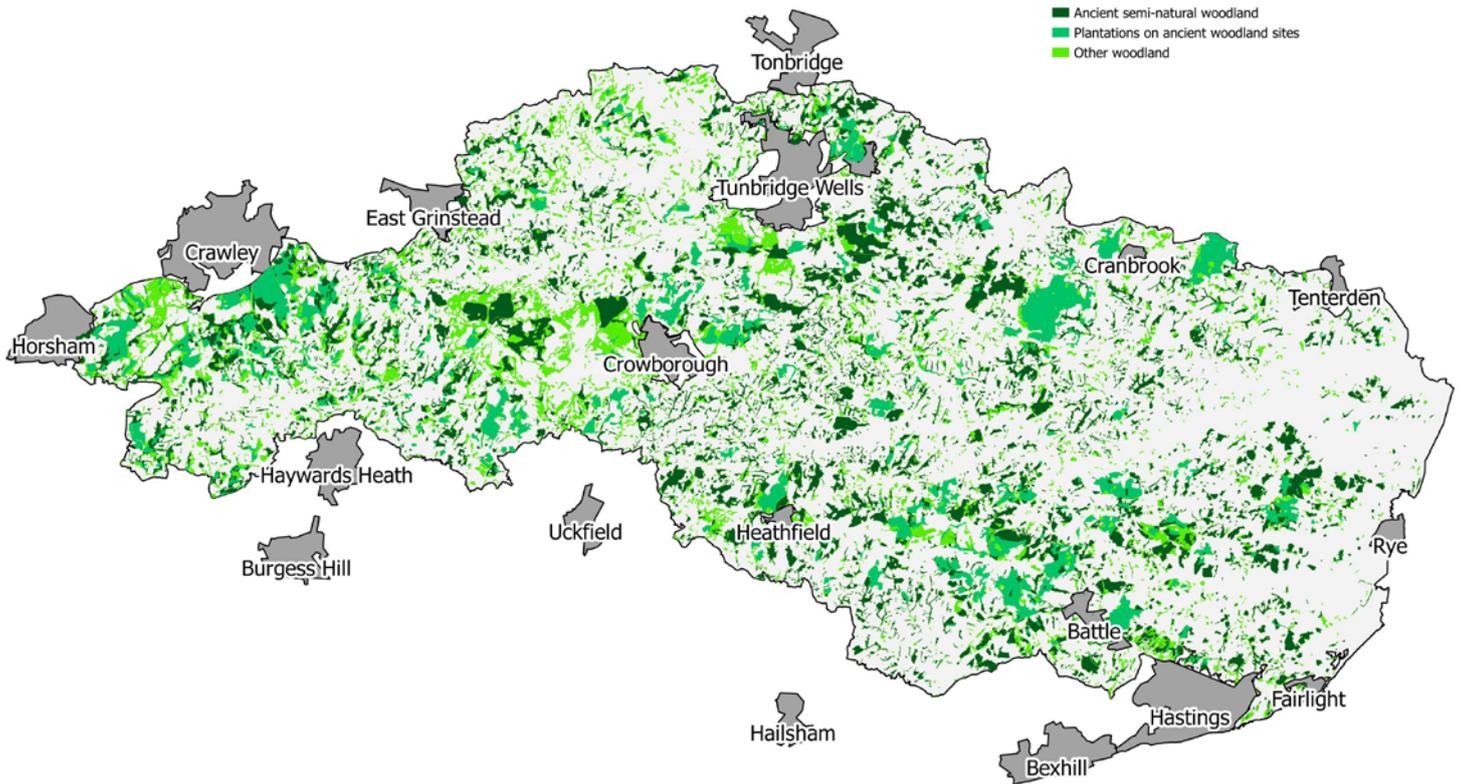
## Key Characteristics

- ✓ **Highly interconnected** and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods, larger forests and numerous linear gill woodlands, shaws, wooded routeways and outgrown hedges.
- ✓ **High proportion of ancient woodland** typically broadleaved coppice with a rich ground flora.
- ✓ **Many irregularly-shaped** small woodlands interlinked with shaws, thick hedges and wooded sunken lanes; forming an intimate part of the farmed landscape.
- ✓ **A few very large woods** lying mostly along the high sandy ridges; remnants of the area's Medieval forests.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **A stronghold for characteristic species** such as dormice, and remnant populations of rare species such as pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.
- ✓ **Considerable variability** in woodland types and tree forms over short distances reflecting the variety of soils, micro-climates and drainage conditions (Principle NVC 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 supporting veteran/ancient trees and their associated wildlife.
- ✓ **Nationally significant resource** of epiphytic and dead-wood dependent species supported by a wealth of veteran trees.
- ✓ **A 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.
- ✓ **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 water power to fuel furnaces, forges and mills).
- ✓ **Trees used for boundary markers** (including outgrown old laid hedges; stubs and pollards).

## Vision

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

**Woodland map**



**Top five issues**

1. Low value bulk markets for timber improving but procurement practices and lack of investment restricting market growth for higher value locally-sourced wood products.
2. Changing management, particularly cessation of traditional coppicing affecting ground flora and species associated with coppicing such as fritillaries.
3. Predicted increase in tree diseases, partly through imported stock or soil.
4. Invasive and damaging species including rhododendron, deer and grey squirrel.
5. Impact of increasing mechanisation and machinery size on soils, small-scale habitat variability and archaeology.

**Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures**

<p><b>28%</b> woodland cover (nearly 3x national average).</p> <p><b>83%</b> broadleaved woodland the majority as coppice.</p> <p><b>Highest coverage</b> of ancient woodland in any protected landscape (3/4 all woodland or 19% land cover) covering 273km<sup>2</sup> of undisturbed woodland soil.</p> <p><b>&gt;2,800</b> parcels of ancient woodland under 2 ha.</p> <p><b>Nationally significant:</b> 8% of England's ancient woodland resource.</p> <p><b>&lt;32%</b> ancient woodland classified as PAWs.</p>	<p><b>191km<sup>2</sup></b> gill woodland in &gt; 1,200 sites supporting internationally rare cryptogams.</p> <p><b>56km<sup>2</sup></b> UK BAP priority habitat: wood pasture and parkland.</p> <p><b>In excess</b> of 7.5m tonnes of carbon stored in woodlands and their soils with an additional &gt; 0.75m tonnes sequestered every year.</p> <p><b>3km<sup>2</sup></b> traditional orchards containing 34 apple varieties.</p> <p><b>Active commercial</b> coppice industry with intergenerational woodland workers.</p>
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### Objective W1

**To maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland.**

#### Rationale

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

#### Indicators of Success

- i. No loss of ancient woodland (HWJAC: Ancient Woodland Inventory statistics)

### Objective W2

**To enhance 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.

#### Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in proportion of woodland managed to remove invasive species (Forestry Commission: Woodland Grant data)
- ii. Increase in woodland dependent butterflies (Butterfly Conservation: Butterfly count in sample areas)
- iii. Length of hedges restored or replanted (HWJAC: multiple sources/sample areas)



### Objective W3

**To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.**

#### Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.

#### Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in Historic Environment Records (HER) for woodlands (HWJAC: County HERs statistics)

### 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.

#### Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in scale and numbers of businesses milling local timber: (HWJAC: Business survey)

#### Evidence and further reading

- Bannister, N.R. (2009). *Medieval Deer Parks and Designed Landscapes in the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Bannister, N. R. and McKernan, P. (2007). *The Cultural Heritage of Woodlands in the South East*. South East AONBs Woodland Programme.
- Greenaway, T., Roper, P. and Ryland, K. (2004). *Wooded Heaths in the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Greig, S. (2010). *High Weald Woodlands: Carbon Report*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald AONB: Biodiversity Statement* (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: Woodlands* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Sansum, P. (2013). *Woodland in the High Weald AONB: An overview of its character and significance*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Sansum, P. (2014). *An overview of the character and ecological significance of gill woodland in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Simpson, J. and Smith, J. (2017). *Dallington Forest Ancient and Veteran Tree Survey*. High Weald AONB: Biodiversity Statement (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Survey (2007–2012)*. High Weald District Reports for Ashford, Hastings, Mid Sussex, Rother, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Well, Wealden, West Sussex.

**Objective W1**

**To maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Resist development that risks the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or veteran trees	x	
Carefully assess opportunities for woodland expansion and their impact on vulnerable non-wooded habitats and cultural landscape prioritising expansion of wet woodland, and the buffering and interlinking of gill and small woodlands through natural regeneration on non-sensitive open habitats together with enhancement of other semi-natural habitats	x	x
Recognise the ecological value of old growth secondary woodland and ensure detailed ecological surveys are carried out if change is proposed	x	x
Ensure ancient wood-pasture and historic parkland are identified and receive the same consideration as other forms of ancient woodland	x	x
Avoid soil damaging activity, such as the use of heavy machinery in wet conditions		
Maintain stock-proof fences around ancient woodland to avoid livestock damage		x

**Objective W2**

**To enhance the ecological functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support appropriate management of woodlands focusing on hand cutting and small-scale machinery adapted to High Weald specific conditions	x	x
Recognise the value of wooded heath and seek to accommodate sustainable heathland restoration where appropriate	x	x
Protect the characteristic species of all woodland	x	x
Target rhododendron and other damaging invasive plants for eradication in ancient woodland, prioritising rhododendron removal from gill woodland	x	x
Ensure a minimum 15m buffer and seek to secure larger buffer zones to protect ancient woodland and veteran trees from the detrimental effects of nearby developments, including predation by cats	x	x
Support locally grown and local provenance stock for tree planting and avoid imported stock or soil	x	x
Support landscape scale initiatives to reverse the decline in key woodland species and protect and enhance vulnerable habitats such as gill woodlands and wet woodland	x	
Promote UK tree and plant health biosecurity policies and ensure effective communication between forest managers and plant health specialists	x	x
Support an inventory of veteran trees	x	x
Seek to retain and secure appropriate management of woodlands for ecological benefits in, and adjacent to, housing development and, where possible, provide new areas of trees and coppice	x	x
Increase cooperation between owners of woodlots and support collaboration and community led woodland management	x	x
Foster natural regeneration in ancient woodland and avoid planting for non-timber purposes	x	x
Protect ancient woodland soil from heavy machinery damage	x	x
Support restoration of planted ancient woodland sites (PAWS) to deciduous woodland	x	x
Avoid or minimise uses that affect ground flora through trampling or disturbance	x	x
Avoid leaving chipped mulch on ancient woodland soil	x	x
Support research into new species and new management techniques to meet the challenges of a changing climate	x	x
Use local provenance bare-rooted stock for tree planting	x	x

**Objective W3**

**To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Require soil conservation and woodland archaeology training for woodland managers operating on public land, and for those receiving public grants for forestry machinery	x	
Require a desk-based archaeological assessment for woodlands affected by development, supported where appropriate by a field assessment	x	
Include mapped historic environment data in licence agreements	x	x
Undertake woodland archaeology surveys and provide data to county Historic Environment Records	x	x
Identify and avoid archaeological features in woodland management operations	x	x
Undertake woodland archaeology surveys and provide data to county Historic Environment Records	x	x

**Objective W4**

**To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
In planning conditions and public procurement, where possible, specify local timber for outdoor furniture, fencing and weatherboard	x	
Seek to foster forestry operations – usually small scale and traditional management – that do not damage characteristic habitats and species	x	x
Support forest skills training within the sector and for new entrants	x	x
Incentivise the use of local wood in construction and seek to support timber yards that can process local wood to produce building grade timber	x	x
Recognise market distortion effect of low transport costs and focus forestry industry support and funding on local SME businesses	x	x
Seek to set up an innovation fund to develop new technologies, products and services supporting AONB woodland management objectives	x	
Support training in woodland management, timber conversion and craft skills	x	x
Choose fencing and gates made from local timber such as chestnut post-and-rail fencing and hazel or chestnut hurdles	x	x
Seek to use local timber for furniture and construction	x	x
Support collaboration initiatives for critical threats such as deer and grey squirrels, including trials of new approaches to control and support for deer larders and other initiatives to enable longer term success	x	x





Natural Beauty

# Field and heath

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



## Key characteristics

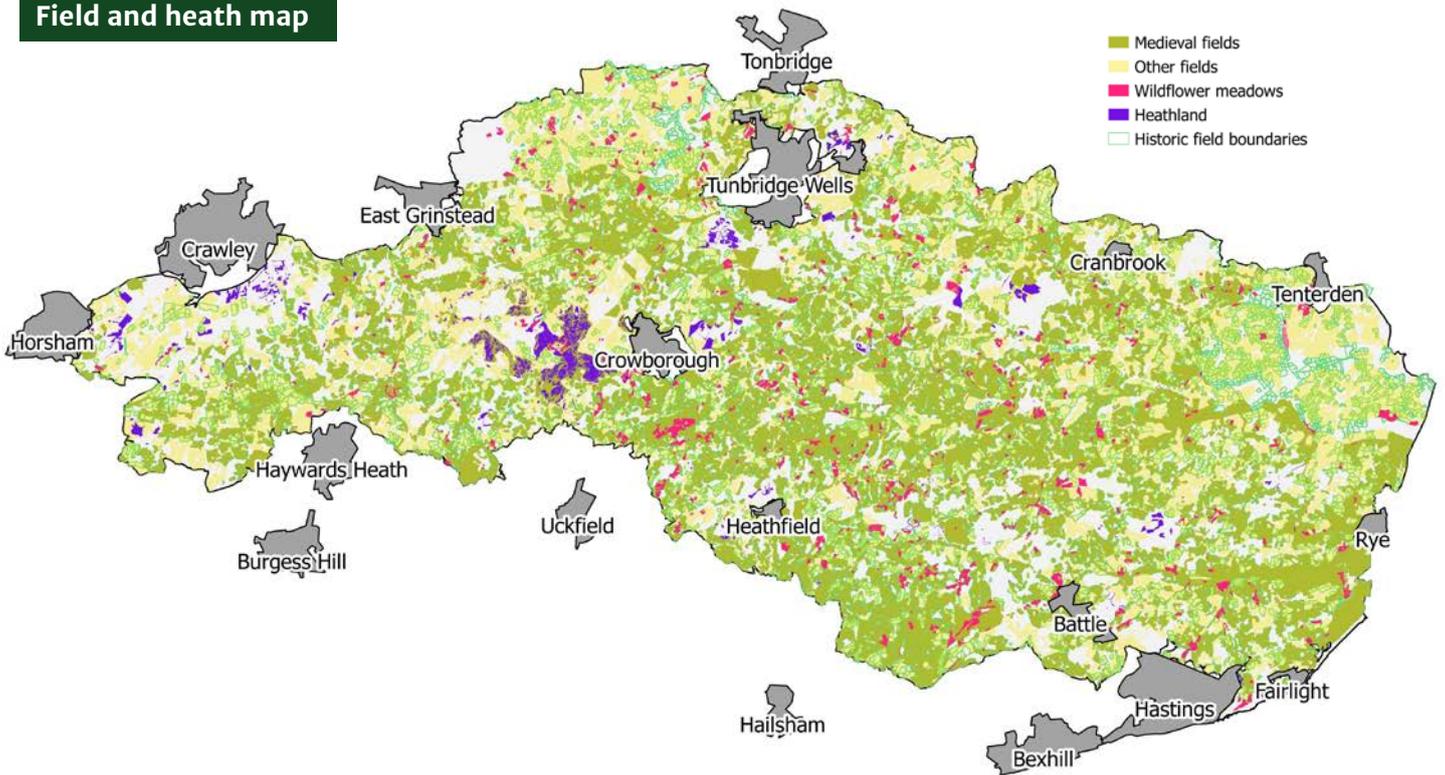
- ✓ **A generally irregular field pattern** with individual fields relatively small (<3 hectares).
- ✓ **Fieldscape dominated by historic farmsteads** surrounded by their own fields resulting from Medieval farming in severalty i.e. land held by individuals rather than in common.
- ✓ **Strong influence 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.
- ✓ **Fields mostly used for grazing** livestock with some small-scale horticulture and cropping.
- ✓ **Medieval character dominant** with a high proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with sinuous mixed woody boundaries and thick hedges common.
- ✓ **Boundary ditch and bank features** typical, along woodland edges or topped with hedges and veteran trees.
- ✓ **Nationally important fragments of unimproved neutral grassland** (habitat type MG5 and variants), often small and isolated, supporting an incredibly rich variety of plants, animals, waxcaps and other fungi.
- ✓ **High proportion of good quality flowery grassland** acting as a buffer for, and link to, fragments of unimproved grassland.
- ✓ **Traditional orchards** scattered across the landscape providing dead and decaying wood for invertebrates, and a mosaic of other habitats.
- ✓ **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.



## Vision

*A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of fields is managed to maximise its full landscape, historic and wildlife value, and in which nature recovery networks have enhanced the special qualities of grassland and lowland heath habitats which are maintained where necessary by skilled land managers. Agricultural land is productive managed through restorative agriculture, small-scale agro-forestry and the growing of vegetables, fruit and salad crops, with some wilded areas to serve as refuges; all delivering public benefits including responsible access and enjoyment by the public.*

**Field and heath map**



**Top five issues**

1. Fragmentation of farm holdings due to an increase in non-farming land ownership.
2. Loss of agricultural skills and knowledge, and reduction in livestock grazing leading to loss of farm infrastructure and degradation of pasture and soils.
3. Increasing costs of managing associated habitats such as hedgerows, exacerbated by reduction in agri-environmental funding for some operations.
4. Loss of green fields to development and infrastructure, or conversion to other land uses such as planting of new woodlands.
5. Difficulties of access to small, isolated sites and lack of grazing infrastructure including fencing and livestock.

**Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures**

**>1,500** farm holdings (2nd highest number of holdings in an AONB) with >750 livestock holdings.

**65%** land is registered with the Rural Payments Agency with 17,000 parcels of land <1.5ha.

**Average farm size** is less than half the national average.

**70%** 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.

**220km<sup>2</sup>** land owned by conservation organisations or designated under international or UK law to protect wildlife including 64km<sup>2</sup> internationally important sites and 51 SSSI's covering 55km<sup>2</sup>.

**<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 (NE, 2013) environmentally sensitive land management.

**85%** land is Grade 3 and 4 with no Grade 1 and 2.5% Grade 2.

**<5%** agricultural holders under 35 years old.

**Steep decline** in livestock numbers with sheep and cattle numbers down by one-third since 2000.

**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, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long-distance transport that produces air pollutants, causing harm to health and the environment.

**Indicators of success**

- i. Maintenance of land registered for grazing animals (RPA: area extent)

**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.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. Increase in hedges restored and new hedges planted (HWJAC: total hedgerow extent in sample areas)
- ii. No loss of Medieval field systems (HWJAC: area of intact field systems in sample areas)

*‘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**

**Objective FH3**

**To 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, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. No loss of species rich grassland (HWJAC & Biological Records Centres: Inventory and priority habitat data)
- ii. No loss of lowland heath (HWJAC & Biological Records Centres: Inventory and priority habitat data)
- iii. Increase in connectivity of species-rich grassland (HWJAC & Biological Records Centres: connectivity measure in sample areas)

**Objective FH4**

**To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.**

**Rationale**

To protect the historic environment of the AONB other than the pattern of fields: i.e. the individual archaeological features.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. Increase in Historic Environment Records for non-wooded habitats (HWJAC & Historic Environment Record Centres: Number of HER records)

**Evidence and further reading**

- Dolphin Ecological services (2013). *Grassland SNCI Review*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Fields in the High Weald: *An Overview of Their Social, Ecological and Economic Value* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Field systems in the High Weald: *A landscape Approach to Assessment* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Field systems in the High Weald: Character Statement* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Field systems in the High Weald: Research History* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald AONB: Biodiversity Statement* (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: Field and Heath* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Jones, P.J. et al. (2009). *Potential of the High Weald to Supply the Food Needs of its Population under Conventional and Organic Agriculture*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Vorley, B. (2014) *Restocking the Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

**Objective FH1**

**To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support existing agricultural infrastructure, food processing facilities and local farmers' markets	x	x
Develop tailored support for pasture-fed livestock farming utilising soil conservation management techniques	x	
Choose local food and support local food growers through procurement policies	x	x
Foster sensitive small-scale growing of vegetables, salad crops and fruit	x	x
Incorporate local food and growing programmes in schools	x	
Focus dedicated support on new entrants to farming	x	
Facilitate and encourage collaborative farming, food processing and marketing enterprises	x	x
Support organic farming and other production methods that conserve soil	x	x
Support advisors providing High Weald specific advice	x	
Support traditional livestock breeds	x	x
Recognise the high cost of maintaining a small-scale landscape with abundant hedges in support schemes	x	
Jointly prepare a best practice code for sustainable land management which fosters activities that enhance the distinctive character of the High Weald and do not damage characteristic habitats and species	x	

**Objective FH2**

**To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Give great weight to medieval field systems in planning decisions especially where there is a high degree of intactness and strong presence or relationship with other notable landscape and heritage features	x	
Require development masterplans to protect and enhance existing field patterns including hedges, ditches or other boundary features, and where possible to restore them when lost, particularly within retained public spaces	x	
Provide specialist advice to support the management of boundary features including hedgerows, coppice, and veteran trees	x	x
Encourage the restoration of derelict hedges, and restoration of lost hedges	x	x
Promote an inventory of Weald hedges	x	x
Support initiatives to generate an economic return from hedge management and hedgerow products	x	x
Protect and manage hedgerows	x	x
Use historic maps to help reinstate lost hedgerows	x	x

**Objective FH3**

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

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Avoid large-scale new tree planting and avoid planting trees on species-rich grassland or heathland and promote natural regeneration for small woodland expansion/creation schemes	x	x
Proactively encourage management and monitoring of local wildlife sites and review the designation of new sites	x	
Identify, designate and appropriately manage species-rich grassland road verges	x	
Deliver workshops aimed at site managers, local landowners and farmers to raise awareness of species-rich neutral grassland habitats and to support best practice management	x	x
Support and facilitate scientific research in collaboration with academic institutes to further knowledge and understanding of species-rich neutral grassland	x	x
Develop a nature recovery network for species-rich grassland, compiling an inventory of core sites, identifying where opportunities exist to restore and enhance degraded species-rich grasslands, and working collaboratively under Weald Meadows Group to co-ordinate conservation action	x	x
Strategies implemented to reduce nutrient input via air pollution to vulnerable habitats such as heathland	x	x
Deliver Countryside Stewardship Facilitation support to cluster groups through targeted advisory visits	x	
Provide support to farmers entering agri-environment schemes and integrate landowner advice on offer from multiple organisations	x	x
Initiate a collaborative campaign to discourage 'tidy' edges and manage fields for structural complexity and species diversity	x	x
Prepare landscape management design guides to steer agri-environment support to ensure environmental net gain	x	x
Choose to sow crops in spring rather than autumn		x
Seek opportunities to deliver community-led projects restoring and enhancing species-rich road verges	x	x
Collaboratively develop improved mechanisms for communicating with and supporting owners and managers of Local Wildlife Sites	x	x
Encourage fire safety awareness on heathland	x	x

**Objective FH4**

**To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Require a desk-based assessment for all development affecting fields or field boundaries supported, where appropriate, by field assessment	x	
Promote field archaeology awareness and recognise the importance of historic small quarries, pits and ponds	x	x
Improve Historic Environment Records for fields	x	x
Identify field archaeology and avoid damage to banks and earthworks	x	x



Natural Beauty

# Land-based economy and related rural life

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



### Key characteristics

- ✔ **Land-based workers** at a proportion higher than the rural average but with an ageing profile.
- ✔ **Strong influence of London** and other employment areas such as Gatwick on the 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.
- ✔ **An expensive landscape to manage** due to its small-scale nature and hedged bank and ditch boundaries.
- ✔ **High house prices in relation to wages** leading to increasing tendency for land-based workers to live out of the area.
- ✔ **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 and IT provision.



### Vision

*A landscape in which small-scale farming, forestry and rural crafts continue to play a defining role in the economy of the area and are supplemented by communities managing land for environmental and public benefit, and new land-based enterprises bringing innovation and new technologies (including precision farming and robotics) to support economically viable, and sustainable, land management of the area supporting its conservation. Community life is intimately connected to the land and affordable housing allows for thriving and diverse community life.*

### Top five issues

1. Low wages and lack of affordable housing and well-designed workspace affecting recruitment and retention of workers and constraining ability of local woodland, craft and agricultural industries to grow.
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 of agri-environmental schemes.
3. High cost of land and decline in affordable farm tenancies a barrier to new entrants to agriculture.
4. Loss of traditional skills due to aging 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 and banks.

### Natural and cultural capital – facts 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.

### Evidence and further reading

- Bibby, P. (2007). *Historic Farm Complexes in Current Socio-economic Context: High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Defra Rural Statistics Unit (2012). *High Weald AONB: Economic profile*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Farming in the High Weald: Current situation and future needs* (2014). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Jones, P. J. et al. (2009). *The potential for the High Weald to supply the food needs of its population under conventional and organic agriculture*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Vorley, B. (2013): *Restocking the Weald: Securing the future of livestock farming in the High Weald's working landscape*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

**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.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. Increase in average rural incomes (Defra Rural Statistics Unit: rural income data)

**Objective LBE2**

**To improve amenities, infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing), and skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty**

**Rationale**

To foster community life and economic activities – including heritage conservation, sustainable tourism and outdoor education – that support conservation of the AONB.

**Indicators of Success**

- i. Numbers of people employed in land-based and craft sectors (HWJAC: ONS Census data)

**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’**

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**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.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support and invest in improved working conditions and manufacturing technology for land-based businesses	x	x
Engage positively with mechanisms, such as community land trusts, capable of delivering truly affordable housing and housing tailored to the specific needs of land-based workers	x	x
Seek to retain capacity for land management within farmsteads	x	x
Support investment in small-scale businesses including dedicated small loans, and promote innovation funds and improved rural broadband	x	x
Prioritise retaining affordable farm tenancies in land disposal and seek to deliver additional affordable tenancies for new entrants	x	x
Establish buy-local procurement policies and choose locally-produced food, fencing and furniture	x	x
Promote and celebrate local crafts	x	x
Collate and maintain AONB level data on farming and forestry	x	
Resist removal of agricultural occupancy conditions	x	
Consider working collaboratively with others to offer viable longer term tenancies to young farmers and new entrants	x	x
Innovate and create new land-based enterprise	x	x
Develop and offer career introductions to the land-based sector	x	x

**Objective LBE2**

**To improve amenities, infrastructure and skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Work collaboratively across sectors to provide comprehensive and relevant AONB tailored training and apprenticeship opportunities	x	x
Seek an in-depth understanding of and creative solutions to rural housing needs	x	x
Seek to support homeworking and co-working particularly related to land-based industries	x	
Support improved digital connectivity across rural areas	x	x
Support the development of training facilities for rural crafts and community land management	x	x
Embed the needs of rural workers within delivery of affordable housing provision	x	x
Work together to plan for appropriate scale and type of development to ensure continuing vitality of local communities and viability of community services	x	x
Seek to retain and support rural services and amenities including bus services, village shops and post offices	x	
Develop and offer career introductions to sectors supporting AONB conservation	x	x

*‘It is above all else to farming... that the landscape of all our potential National Parks [and AONBs] owe the man made element of their character; and it is to the farming communities that we must look for continuance not only of the scenic setting but of the drama itself – the rural life and work, “the mild continuous epic of the soil...”’*

John Dower, 1945

**John Dower, one of the main architects of the NP&AC Act 1949, trusted rural communities to preserve natural beauty. At the time the majority of High Weald farms were small family farms practising mixed pastoral farming and relying on human labour and ingenuity, rather than mechanisation and chemicals.**





Natural Beauty

# Other qualities

The High Weald AONB is characterised by perceptual qualities, features and cultural associations that enrich character components, enhance health and wellbeing, and foster enjoyment and appreciation of the beauty of nature.



**Key characteristics**

✔ **Features and resources providing opportunities for informal outdoor recreation and experiencing the beauty of nature**

- Intricate and extensive network of footpaths, roads, lanes and disused railway lines enabling walking, running, cycling and riding
- Climbable sandrock
- Rivers, reservoirs and the coast used for fishing, birdwatching and water sports
- Local nature reserves and open spaces owned by public bodies enabling widespread access to wildlife habitats

✔ **Locally distinctive and nationally-important features which enrich people’s experience of the High Weald**

- Castles, abbeys, historic parks and gardens
- Hop gardens and orchards
- Traditional and locally distinctive buildings including barns, oast houses, Wealden Hall houses, hoppers’ huts, wine cellars and parish churches
- Notable local populations of rare species, and veteran and ancient trees
- Tangible legacies of the iron and wood industries, e.g. hammer ponds, gravestones and place names
- Extensive remnant of Medieval forests particularly Ashdown Forest
- Rural public realm features, including timber and metal fingerpost signs and milestones
- Locally distinctive products such as food, drink and chestnut fencing

✔ **Other perceived qualities**

- Scenic beauty and glimpsed long views
- Unspoilt rural landscape with a sense of naturalness unusual in South East England
- Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- Human-scale landscape with a sense of intimacy

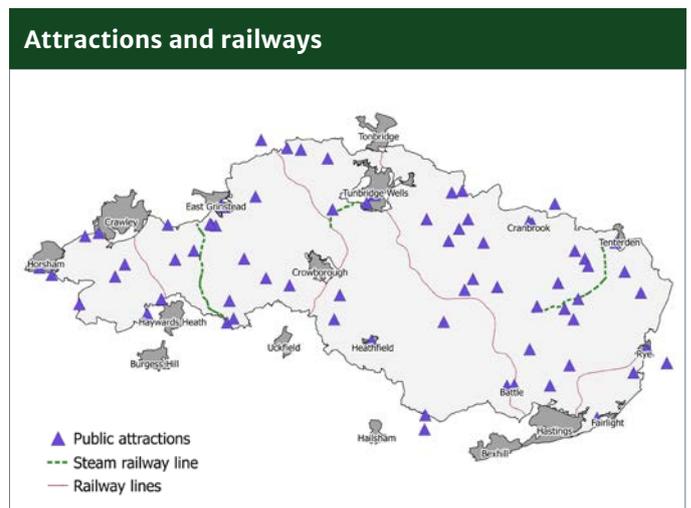
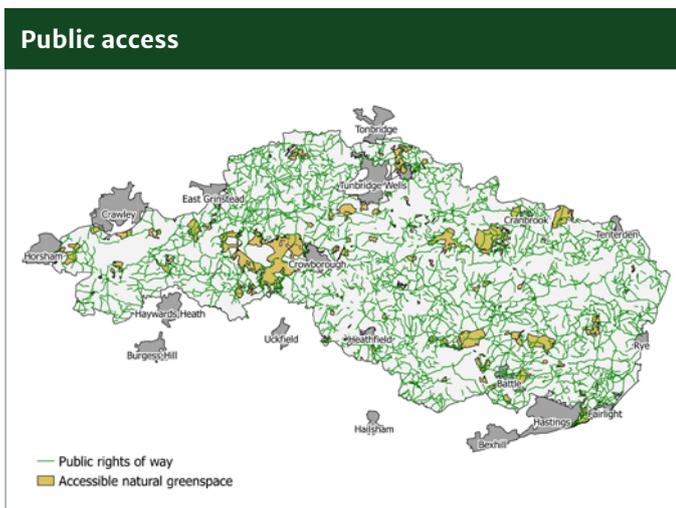
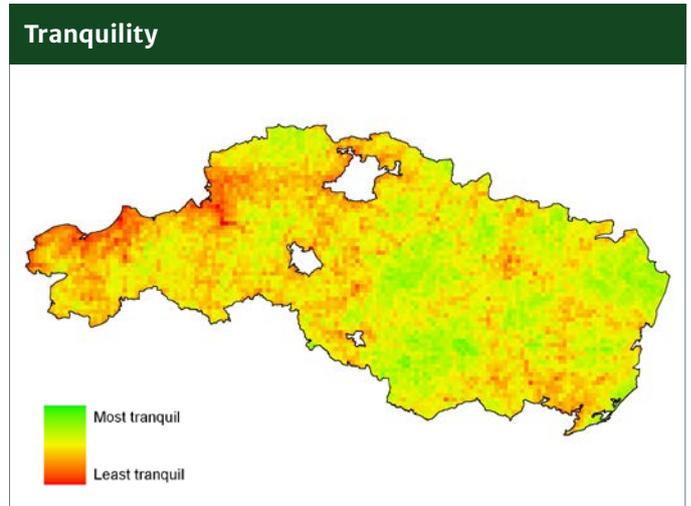
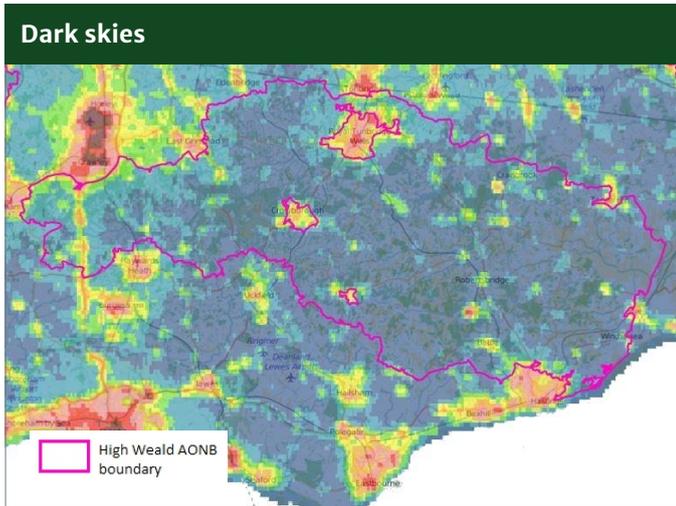
✔ **Cultural associations**

- Writers such as Rudyard Kipling, A.A. Milne, and ‘plein air’ artists inspired by the ‘wilderness’ quality of the landscape
- Cultural events such as Sussex bonfire societies, agricultural shows and wood fairs
- Historic events and activities such as the Battle of Hastings and discovery of Iguanodon
- Health-giving properties of altitude and chalybeate springs



**Vision**

*An AONB in which people have the means to access the landscape easily and can enjoy outstanding quality multi-sensory experiences and increased contact with nature; all contributing to individual health and wellbeing and an improved sense of community, without damage to characteristic habitats and species. People’s emotional engagement with the landscape generates a sense of responsibility and connection to the area leading to more sustainable lifestyles that protect and enhance natural beauty.*



## Top five issues

1. Reducing connection and knowledge of the countryside, including where to go and how to manage it.
2. Increasing visitor numbers with demand for more infrastructure around popular sites and tension between some countryside user groups.
3. Reducing accessibility to some user groups due to poor public transport services and declining rights of way maintenance.
4. Development including traffic, noise and light pollution, degrading the AONB's tranquil and dark qualities.
5. Lack of awareness of AONB designation and the need for conservation management.

## Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

**1 million** people living within 5km of the AONB 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 Hop-picker's line

**88km** of mainline railway and 89km of historic railway line

**227km<sup>2</sup>** sites designated for their biodiversity value

**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

### Objective OQ1

**To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.**

#### Rationale

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

#### Indicators of success

- i. Increase in the number and frequency of schools undertaking outdoor learning activities (HWJAC: High Weald Heroes statistics)

### Objective OQ2

**To increase the contribution of individuals and communities to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.**

#### Rationale

To enable the 127,000 residents of the High Weald, and one million people living within 5km of the AONB, to take action to care for the AONB.

#### Indicators of Success

- i. Number of volunteer days supporting AONB conservation (HWJAC: compiled from partner data)

*‘The protection of landscape beauty and the encouragement of open-air recreation... will be a great national investment, yielding unlimited returns in health and happiness.’*

**Report of the National Parks Committee chaired by Sir Arthur Hobhouse, 1947.**



### Objective OQ3

**To develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty.**

#### Rationale

To meet demand for informal recreation from residents and the nearly one million people living within 5km of the AONB, ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment.

#### Indicators of Success

- i. Proportion of rights of way in good condition (County councils: rights of way statistics)
- ii. Increase in High Weald Walking Festival participants (HWJAC: event data)

### Objective OQ4

**To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value.**

#### Rationale

To ensure that the special qualities people value, such as tranquillity, dark skies, sense of naturalness and clean air, are recognised and taken account of in AONB management.

#### Indicators of Success

- i. No loss of dark skies or tranquillity: HWJAC: CPRE tranquillity data and citizen science sky quality meter readings

#### Evidence and further reading

- Acorn Tourism (2013). *Tourism in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: Public Understanding and Enjoyment* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Land Use Consultants* (2013). *The Value of AONB Partnerships*. Land Use Consultants.
- McKernan, P & Grose, M. (2007). *An analysis of accessible natural greenspace provision in the South East*. Forestry Commission & Natural England.
- *Public Understanding and Engagement Questionnaire: Results* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- van Heijden, E. (2013). *Human Landscape Perception*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

**Objective OQ1**

**To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Work collaboratively to increase awareness of the AONB story and sense of place	x	x
Produce and disseminate AONB welcome packs for new residents	x	
Encourage children to get close to nature and enjoy the landscape through support the landscape-inspired activities including the primary school education programme, High Weald Heroes	x	x
Promote site-specific land management advice open to all	x	x
Erect AONB signage to promote the High Weald's identity	x	
Promote health walks and other outdoor activities encouraging the wider community into the landscape	x	x
Develop celebratory landscape-inspired outdoor events e.g. Glow Wild, Weald walking festivals, with some targeted at young people and new events such dark sky celebrations	x	x
Produce site-based information and interpretation promoting the High Weald and its special qualities	x	x
Seek new opportunities to celebrate the long history of craft (wool, iron and wood), and the utilisation of geological resources (quarrying, brick-making and glass-making)	x	x
Include information about the AONB on websites	x	x

**Objective OQ2**

**To increase the contribution of individuals and communities to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support manage grant schemes that specifically conserve and enhance the AONB	x	x
Widely 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 reduction in waste, litter and fly-tipping	x	x
Share AONB data with local neighbourhood planning committees and foster contributions from local communities to the AONB's knowledge base	x	
Jointly produce High Weald guidance on development, land management and responsible access	x	
Collaborate and coordinate communication campaigns (such as tourism marketing and social media) to promote the actions individuals and communities can take to care for the AONB	x	x
Support neighbourhood planning to utilise the AONB Management Plan, data and guidance	x	
Support business-led and community projects that give back to the AONB	x	
Run citizen science projects to gather data on AONB heritage e.g. dark skies	x	x
Recruit new members to sustain and expand volunteer heritage and conservation groups	x	x
Run training events that develop skills in heritage surveys, land management and rural crafts	x	x
Support local, non-governmental organisations (e.g. the High Weald Landscape Trust) that conserve and enhance the AONB	x	x

*>90% people find the High Weald's extensive footpath network appealing*

High Weald Public Survey, 2018

**Objective OQ3**

**To develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Promote local distinctiveness in the visitor 'offer'	x	x
Consider new permitted routes particularly bridleways	x	
Support landowners to maintain rights of way, particularly promoted routes	x	
Jointly produce an access strategy that sets out areas for strategic investment to improve rights of way and increase access for all users	x	
Support infrastructure and services including new off-road cycling and riding routes that improve access and links with visitor attractions from surrounding urban areas	x	
Set up and manage grant schemes that support improved access to the AONB	x	x
Support landscape-inspired health and wellbeing initiatives	x	x
Encourage responsible access, particularly dog walking	x	x
Encourage engagement of people from all backgrounds and address inequalities of access particularly for people from different ethnic groups, low income households, children and young people and people with disabilities	x	x
Engage with mental health services and environmental therapies	x	x
Develop green infrastructure links between the High Weald and surrounding towns and villages	x	x
Develop high quality (easy to follow, interpreted) self-guided trails including easy access routes	x	x
Produce visitor management plans for sensitive sites and areas	x	x
Run visitor events focused on celebrating the area's sense of place including maintaining and developing the High Weald Walking Festival	x	x
Run networking events and training events to share best practice in visitor management	x	

**Objective OQ4**

**To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value.**

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Maintain an understanding of the perceptual landscape qualities people value and consider these in policy documents and decisions	x	
Recognise and act to minimise the impact of traffic noise and congestion on rural lanes	x	x
Consider reduction in speed limits on rural roads	x	
Follow the Institute for Lighting Professionals guidance; promote information on dark sky-friendly lighting; install outside lighting only when needed and use dark sky-friendly lighting	x	x
Act to remove and reduce inappropriate noise intrusion, supporting further study into the impacts of noise, such as aircraft noise and traffic, on quiet enjoyment	x	
Identify and protect valued views	x	x
Promote fair access to the landscape for health and wellbeing	x	x
Promote the rich cultural, artistic and historical associations with the landscape	x	x
Consider preparing local statements about perceptual landscape qualities valued by the community as part of local landscape assessments	x	

# 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.

✔ **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.

✔ **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.

✔ **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.

✔ **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.

*97% people enjoy the  
High Weald countryside*

High Weald Public Survey, 2018



✔ **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.

✔ **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.

✔ **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.

✔ **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.

✔ **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.

*I thought it would last my time–  
The sense that, beyond the town,  
There would always be fields and farms,...*

*It seems, just now,  
To be happening so very fast;  
Despite all the land left free  
For the first time I feel somehow  
That it isn't going to last...*

Extracts from 'Going Going' by Philip Larkin, 1972



## Definition of terms used in the context of this Plan

- **Aesthetic** – Concerned with beauty, or the appreciation of beauty
- **Assart** – Land enclosed from woodland often still with numerous trees on boundaries
- **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
- **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
- **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 appear to form a coherent whole (in the High Weald this usually results from the influence of topography and land use but also historic tenure)
- **Gill** – A deep cleft or ravine, usually wooded and forming the course of a stream
- **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
- **Key characteristics** – Combinations of elements particularly important to character that help make that character distinctive
- **Landscape** – An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.
- **Natural beauty** – Defined by the Statement of Significance
- **Natural assets** – Biological assets, land and water areas with their ecosystems, subsoil assets and air
- **Regenerative agriculture** – A system of farming principles and practices that increases biodiversity above and below the soils' surface, restores soil health and 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
- **Significance** – What is special and valued about the AONB to this and future generations
- **Species-rich grassland** – A grassland displaying a wide variety of wild flowers 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
- **Wood 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

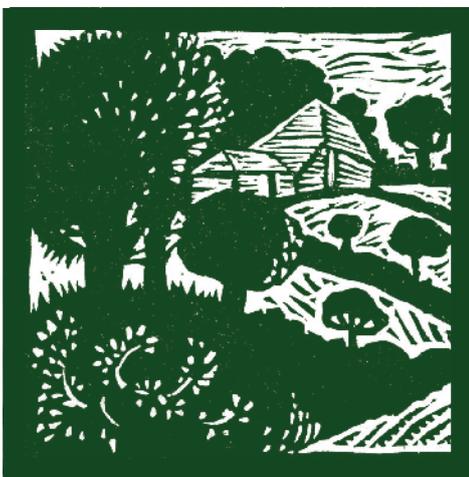
## Glossary of terms

<b>HLC</b>	Historic Landscape Characterisation
<b>JAC/HWJAC</b>	High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
<b>NAAONB</b>	National Association for AONBs
<b>NP&amp;AC Act</b>	National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
<b>RIGs</b>	Regionally Interesting Geological Sites
<b>SAC</b>	Special Areas of Conservation
<b>SSSI</b>	Site of Special Scientific Interest

## 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’.





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Published by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee on behalf of:



**Item 7 (a) - LGA Model Code of Conduct - Recommendation of Working Group**

The attached report was considered by the Standards Committee and the Governance Committee, and the relevant minute extracts are below:

Standards Committee (12 April 2021, Minute 11)

Members considered the recommendations of the Working Group who met to consider the Local Government Association's Model Code of Conduct. The Working Group had concluded that the proposals did not add material advantages to the Council's Code of Conduct, therefore resolved that the Council's existing Code of Conduct be retained.

The Working Group were thanked for their thorough and careful consideration of the proposals.

Resolved: That

- a) the existing Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct be endorsed and retained subject to any comments from the Governance Committee, be recommended to Council; and
- b) the report be referred to the Governance Committee for comment.

Governance Committee (22 June 2021, Minute 4)

Members considered the recommendations of the Working Group which met to consider the Local Government Association's Model Code of Conduct. The Working Group had concluded that the proposals did not add material advantages to the Council's Code of Conduct and therefore resolved that the Council's existing Code of Conduct be retained.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that the existing Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct be endorsed and retained.

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**LGA MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT - RECOMMENDATION OF WORKING GROUP**

**Council - 20 July 2021**

**Report of:** Monitoring Officer

**Status:** For Consideration

**Also considered by:**

- Standards Committee - 12 April 2021
- Governance Committee - 22 June 2021

**Key Decision:** No

**This reports support the Key Aim of:** The effective management of Council resources

**Contact Officer:** Martin Goodman, ext. 7242

**Recommendation to Standards Committee:** That

- a) it be recommended to Council that the existing Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct be endorsed and retained, subject to any comments from the Governance Committee
- b) this report be referred to Governance Committee for comment

**Recommendation to Governance Committee:** That

- a) no comment be made on the recommendation of the Standards Committee to Council that the existing Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct be endorsed and retained

**Recommendation to Council:** That

- a) the Council notes the work of the LGA on a Model Code of Conduct
- b) the Council resolves that the existing Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct be endorsed and retained

**Introduction and Background**

- 1 The Standards Committee considered the sixteenth Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer on 2 February 2021.
- 2 As part of that report, the Monitoring Officer informed the Committee of the LGA Model Code of Conduct.

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3 This was considered at a joint working group of the Standards and Governance Committees, which took place on 16 February 2021. The Members in attendance were Cllrs Ball (Chairman), Eyre, Fothergill, Osborne-Jackson, Pender and Raikes. Cllr Nelson sent her apologies.

4 The Working Group unanimously agreed as follows:

*We do not feel that the LGA proposals add material advantages to the Code of Conduct and therefore we resolve to remain with the existing Sevenoaks District Council Code.*

5 In view of this Working Group decision, the recommendations set out in this report are put before Members for resolution.

### **Key Implications**

#### Financial Implications

None.

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

The Code of Conduct must comply with the provisions set out in Chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011. Both the Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct and the LGA Model Code of Conduct are fully compliant.

#### 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.

### **Conclusions**

Members have been clear that they prefer the Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct to the LGA Model Code of Conduct. The comments of the Working Group are reflected in this report.

#### **Appendices**

Appendix A - LGA Model Code of Conduct

Appendix B - Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct

#### **Background Papers**

None.

**Martin Goodman**  
**Monitoring Officer**



## **Local Government Association**

### **Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020**

#### **Joint statement**

The role of councillor across all tiers of local government is a vital part of our country's system of democracy. It is important that as councillors we can be held accountable and all adopt the behaviors and responsibilities associated with the role. Our conduct as an individual councillor affects the reputation of all councillors. We want the role of councillor to be one that people aspire to. We also want individuals from a range of backgrounds and circumstances to be putting themselves forward to become councillors.

As councillors, we represent local residents, work to develop better services and deliver local change. The public have high expectations of us and entrust us to represent our local area; taking decisions fairly, openly, and transparently. We have both an individual and collective responsibility to meet these expectations by maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct, and by challenging behaviour which falls below expectations.

Importantly, we should be able to undertake our role as a councillor without being intimidated, abused, bullied or threatened by anyone, including the general public.

This Code has been designed to protect our democratic role, encourage good conduct and safeguard the public's trust in local government.

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## Introduction

The Local Government Association (LGA) has developed this Model Councillor Code of Conduct, in association with key partners and after extensive consultation with the sector, as part of its work on supporting all tiers of local government to continue to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance. It is a template for councils to adopt in whole and/or with local amendments.

All councils are required to have a local Councillor Code of Conduct.

The LGA will undertake an annual review of this Code to ensure it continues to be fit-for-purpose, incorporating advances in technology, social media and changes in legislation. The LGA can also offer support, training and mediation to councils and councillors on the application of the Code and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the county associations of local councils can offer advice and support to town and parish councils.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, a “councillor” means a member or co-opted member of a local authority or a directly elected mayor. A “co-opted member” is defined in the Localism Act 2011 Section 27(4) as “a person who is not a member of the authority but who

- a) is a member of any committee or sub-committee of the authority, or;
- b) is a member of, and represents the authority on, any joint committee or joint sub-committee of the authority;

and who is entitled to vote on any question that falls to be decided at any meeting of that committee or sub-committee”.

For the purposes of this Code of Conduct, “local authority” includes county councils, district councils, London borough councils, parish councils, town councils, fire and rescue authorities, police authorities, joint authorities, economic prosperity boards, combined authorities and National Park authorities.

## Purpose of the Code of Conduct

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to assist you, as a councillor, in modelling the behaviour that is expected of you, to provide a personal check and balance, and to set out the type of conduct that could lead to action being taken against you. It is also to protect you, the public, fellow councillors, local authority officers and the reputation of local government. It sets out general principles of conduct expected of all councillors and your specific obligations in relation to standards of conduct. The LGA encourages the use of support, training and mediation prior to action being taken using the Code. The fundamental aim of the Code is to create and maintain public confidence in the role of councillor and local government.

### **General principles of councillor conduct**

Everyone in public office at all levels; all who serve the public or deliver public services, including ministers, civil servants, councillors and local authority officers; should uphold the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#), also known as the Nolan Principles.

Building on these principles, the following general principles have been developed specifically for the role of councillor.

In accordance with the public trust placed in me, on all occasions:

- I act with integrity and honesty
- I act lawfully
- I treat all persons fairly and with respect; and
- I lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.

In undertaking my role:

- I impartially exercise my responsibilities in the interests of the local community
- I do not improperly seek to confer an advantage, or disadvantage, on any person
- I avoid conflicts of interest
- I exercise reasonable care and diligence; and
- I ensure that public resources are used prudently in accordance with my local authority's requirements and in the public interest.

### **Application of the Code of Conduct**

This Code of Conduct applies to you as soon as you sign your declaration of acceptance of the office of councillor or attend your first meeting as a co-opted member and continues to apply to you until you cease to be a councillor.

This Code of Conduct applies to you when you are acting in your capacity as a councillor which may include when:

- you misuse your position as a councillor
- Your actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts that you are acting as a councillor;

The Code applies to all forms of communication and interaction, including:

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- at face-to-face meetings
- at online or telephone meetings
- in written communication
- in verbal communication
- in non-verbal communication
- in electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments.

You are also expected to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times when acting as a councillor.

Your Monitoring Officer has statutory responsibility for the implementation of the Code of Conduct, and you are encouraged to seek advice from your Monitoring Officer on any matters that may relate to the Code of Conduct. Town and parish councillors are encouraged to seek advice from their Clerk, who may refer matters to the Monitoring Officer.

### **Standards of councillor conduct**

This section sets out your obligations, which are the minimum standards of conduct required of you as a councillor. Should your conduct fall short of these standards, a complaint may be made against you, which may result in action being taken.

Guidance is included to help explain the reasons for the obligations and how they should be followed.

### **General Conduct**

#### **1. Respect**

##### **As a councillor:**

**1.1 I treat other councillors and members of the public with respect.**

**1.2 I treat local authority employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the local authority with respect and respect the role they play.**

Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. As a councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. You should not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack.

In your contact with the public, you should treat them politely and courteously. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in councillors.

In return, you have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidating or threatening you are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the local authority, the relevant social media provider or the police. This also applies to fellow councillors, where action could then be taken under the Councillor Code of Conduct, and local authority employees, where concerns should be raised in line with the local authority's councillor-officer protocol.

## **2. Bullying, harassment and discrimination**

### **As a councillor:**

**2.1 I do not bully any person.**

**2.2 I do not harass any person.**

**2.3 I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.**

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) characterises bullying as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying might be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident, happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or phone calls, happen in the workplace or at work social events and may not always be obvious or noticed by others.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 defines harassment as conduct that causes alarm or distress or puts people in fear of violence and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. It can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and contact upon a person in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person.

Unlawful discrimination is where someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics are specific aspects of a person's identity defined by the Equality Act 2010. They are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on local authorities. Councillors have a central role to play in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the local authority's performance and strategic aims, and that there is a strong vision and public commitment to equality across public services.

### 3. Impartiality of officers of the council

As a councillor:

#### **3.1 I do not compromise, or attempt to compromise, the impartiality of anyone who works for, or on behalf of, the local authority.**

Officers work for the local authority as a whole and must be politically neutral (unless they are political assistants). They should not be coerced or persuaded to act in a way that would undermine their neutrality. You can question officers in order to understand, for example, their reasons for proposing to act in a particular way, or the content of a report that they have written. However, you must not try and force them to act differently, change their advice, or alter the content of that report, if doing so would prejudice their professional integrity.

### 4. Confidentiality and access to information

As a councillor:

#### **4.1 I do not disclose information:**

- a. given to me in confidence by anyone**
- b. acquired by me which I believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, unless**
  - i. I have received the consent of a person authorised to give it;**
  - ii. I am required by law to do so;**
  - iii. the disclosure is made to a third party for the purpose of obtaining professional legal advice provided that the third party agrees not to disclose the information to any other person; or**
  - iv. the disclosure is:**
    - 1. reasonable and in the public interest; and**
    - 2. made in good faith and in compliance with the reasonable requirements of the local authority; and**
    - 3. I have consulted the Monitoring Officer prior to its release.**

#### **4.2 I do not improperly use knowledge gained solely as a result of my role as a councillor for the advancement of myself, my friends, my family members, my employer or my business interests.**

#### **4.3 I do not prevent anyone from getting information that they are entitled to by law.**

Local authorities must work openly and transparently, and their proceedings and printed materials are open to the public, except in certain legally defined circumstances. You should work on this basis, but there will be times when it is required by law that discussions, documents and other information relating to or held by the local authority must be treated in a confidential manner. Examples include personal data relating to individuals or information relating to ongoing negotiations.

## **5. Disrepute**

**As a councillor:**

### **5.1 I do not bring my role or local authority into disrepute.**

As a Councillor, you are trusted to make decisions on behalf of your community and your actions and behaviour are subject to greater scrutiny than that of ordinary members of the public. You should be aware that your actions might have an adverse impact on you, other councillors and/or your local authority and may lower the public's confidence in you or your local authority's ability to discharge your/it's functions. For example, behaviour that is considered dishonest and/or deceitful can bring your local authority into disrepute.

You are able to hold the local authority and fellow councillors to account and are able to constructively challenge and express concern about decisions and processes undertaken by the council whilst continuing to adhere to other aspects of this Code of Conduct.

## **6. Use of position**

**As a councillor:**

### **6.1 I do not use, or attempt to use, my position improperly to the advantage or disadvantage of myself or anyone else.**

Your position as a member of the local authority provides you with certain opportunities, responsibilities and privileges, and you make choices all the time that will impact others. However, you should not take advantage of these opportunities to further your own or others' private interests or to disadvantage anyone unfairly.

## **7. Use of local authority resources and facilities**

**As a councillor:**

### **7.1 I do not misuse council resources.**

### **7.2 I will, when using the resources of the local or authorising their use by others:**

- a. act in accordance with the local authority's requirements; and**
- b. ensure that such resources are not used for political purposes unless that use could reasonably be regarded as likely to facilitate, or be conducive to, the discharge of the functions of the local authority or of the office to which I have been elected or appointed.**

You may be provided with resources and facilities by the local authority to assist you in carrying out your duties as a councillor.

Examples include:

- office support
- stationery
- equipment such as phones, and computers
- transport
- access and use of local authority buildings and rooms.

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These are given to you to help you carry out your role as a councillor more effectively and are not to be used for business or personal gain. They should be used in accordance with the purpose for which they have been provided and the local authority's own policies regarding their use.

### **8. Complying with the Code of Conduct**

#### **As a Councillor:**

**8.1 I undertake Code of Conduct training provided by my local authority.**

**8.2 I cooperate with any Code of Conduct investigation and/or determination.**

**8.3 I do not intimidate or attempt to intimidate any person who is likely to be involved with the administration of any investigation or proceedings.**

**8.4 I comply with any sanction imposed on me following a finding that I have breached the Code of Conduct.**

It is extremely important for you as a councillor to demonstrate high standards, for you to have your actions open to scrutiny and for you not to undermine public trust in the local authority or its governance. If you do not understand or are concerned about the local authority's processes in handling a complaint you should raise this with your Monitoring Officer.

### **Protecting your reputation and the reputation of the local authority**

#### **9. Interests**

##### **As a councillor:**

**9.1 I register and disclose my interests.**

Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of interests of members of the authority .

You need to register your interests so that the public, local authority employees and fellow councillors know which of your interests might give rise to a conflict of interest. The register is a public document that can be consulted when (or before) an issue arises. The register also protects you by allowing you to demonstrate openness and a willingness to be held accountable. You are personally responsible for deciding whether or not you should disclose an interest in a meeting, but it can be helpful for you to know early on if others think that a potential conflict might arise. It is also important that the public know about any interest that might have to be disclosed by you or other councillors when making or taking part in decisions, so that decision making is seen by the public as open and honest. This helps to ensure that public confidence in the integrity of local governance is maintained.

You should note that failure to register or disclose a disclosable pecuniary interest as set out in Table 1, is a criminal offence under the Localism Act 2011.

Appendix B sets out the detailed provisions on registering and disclosing interests. If in doubt, you should always seek advice from your Monitoring Officer.

## **10. Gifts and hospitality**

**As a councillor:**

- 10.1 I do not accept gifts or hospitality, irrespective of estimated value, which could give rise to real or substantive personal gain or a reasonable suspicion of influence on my part to show favour from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the local authority or from persons who may apply to the local authority for any permission, licence or other significant advantage.**
- 10.2 I register with the Monitoring Officer any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 within 28 days of its receipt.**
- 10.3 I register with the Monitoring Officer any significant gift or hospitality that I have been offered but have refused to accept.**

In order to protect your position and the reputation of the local authority, you should exercise caution in accepting any gifts or hospitality which are (or which you reasonably believe to be) offered to you because you are a councillor. The presumption should always be not to accept significant gifts or hospitality. However, there may be times when such a refusal may be difficult if it is seen as rudeness in which case you could accept it but must ensure it is publicly registered. However, you do not need to register gifts and hospitality which are not related to your role as a councillor, such as Christmas gifts from your friends and family. It is also important to note that it is appropriate to accept normal expenses and hospitality associated with your duties as a councillor. If you are unsure, do contact your Monitoring Officer for guidance.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A – The Seven Principles of Public Life**

The principles are:

#### **Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

#### **Integrity**

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must disclose and resolve any interests and relationships.

#### **Objectivity**

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

#### **Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

#### **Openness**

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

#### **Honesty**

Holders of public office should be truthful.

#### **Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

## Appendix B Registering

### interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office you must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests)**.

**"Disclosable pecuniary interest"** means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

**"Partner"** means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

### Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest. Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.
5. Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it

### Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in Table 2), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it

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is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

### Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in Table 1) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.
8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –
  - a. your own financial interest or well-being;
  - b. a financial interest or well-being of a friend, relative, close associate; or
  - c. a body included in those you need to disclose under Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**

you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied

9. Where a matter **affects** your financial interest or well-being:
  - a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
  - b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

10. Where you have a personal interest in any business of your authority and you have made an executive decision in relation to that business, you must make sure that any written statement of that decision records the existence and nature of your interest.

**Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in the [Relevant Authorities \(Disclosable Pecuniary Interests\) Regulations 2012](#).

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation</b>	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. [Any unpaid directorship.]
<b>Sponsorship</b>	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
<b>Contracts</b>	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the

	<p>councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council —</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
<b>Land and Property</b>	<p>Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council.</p> <p>'Land' excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.</p>
<b>Licenses</b>	<p>Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer</p>
<b>Corporate tenancies</b>	<p>Any tenancy where (to the councillor's knowledge)—</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the council; and</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.</p>
<b>Securities</b>	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to the councillor's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were</p>

	spouses/civil partners has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.
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\* 'director' includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

\* 'securities' means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

**Table 2: Other Registerable Interests**

You have a personal interest in any business of your authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- a) any body of which you are in general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority
- b) any body
  - (i) exercising functions of a public nature
  - (ii) any body directed to charitable purposes or
  - (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)

## Agenda Item 7a

### Appendix C – the Committee on Standards in Public Life

The LGA has undertaken this review whilst the Government continues to consider the recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in their report on [Local Government Ethical Standards](#). If the Government chooses to implement any of the recommendations, this could require a change to this Code.

The recommendations cover:

- Recommendations for changes to the Localism Act 2011 to clarify in law when the Code of Conduct applies
- The introduction of sanctions
- An appeals process through the Local Government Ombudsman
- Changes to the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012
- Updates to the Local Government Transparency Code
- Changes to the role and responsibilities of the Independent Person
- That the criminal offences in the Localism Act 2011 relating to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests should be abolished

The Local Government Ethical Standards report also includes Best Practice recommendations. These are:

**Best practice 1:** Local authorities should include prohibitions on bullying and harassment in codes of conduct. These should include a definition of bullying and harassment, supplemented with a list of examples of the sort of behaviour covered by such a definition.

**Best practice 2:** Councils should include provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with any formal standards investigation and prohibiting trivial or malicious allegations by councillors.

**Best practice 3:** Principal authorities should review their code of conduct each year and regularly seek, where possible, the views of the public, community organisations and neighbouring authorities.

**Best practice 4:** An authority's code should be readily accessible to both councillors and the public, in a prominent position on a council's website and available in council premises.

**Best practice 5:** Local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format, such as CSV.

**Best practice 6:** Councils should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which allegations are filtered.

**Best practice 7:** Local authorities should have access to at least two Independent Persons.

**Best practice 8:** An Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation, and should be given the option to

review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial.

**Best practice 9:** Where a local authority makes a decision on an allegation of misconduct following a formal investigation, a decision notice should be published as soon as possible on its website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.

**Best practice 10:** A local authority should have straightforward and accessible guidance on its website on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes.

**Best practice 11:** Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.

**Best practice 12:** Monitoring Officers' roles should include providing advice, support and management of investigations and adjudications on alleged breaches to parish councils within the remit of the principal authority. They should be provided with adequate training, corporate support and resources to undertake this work.

**Best practice 13:** A local authority should have procedures in place to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation. Possible steps should include asking the Monitoring Officer from a different authority to undertake the investigation.

**Best practice 14:** Councils should report on separate bodies they have set up or which they own as part of their annual governance statement and give a full picture of their relationship with those bodies. Separate bodies created by local authorities should abide by the Nolan principle of openness and publish their board agendas and minutes and annual reports in an accessible place.

**Best practice 15:** Senior officers should meet regularly with political group leaders or group whips to discuss standards issues.

***The LGA has committed to reviewing the Code on an annual basis to ensure it is still fit for purpose.***

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## APPENDIX Q: Sevenoaks District Council Members' Code of Conduct

You are a member or co-opted member of the Sevenoaks District Council and hence you shall have regard to the following principles - selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Accordingly, when acting in your capacity as a member or co-opted member -

1. You must act solely in the public interest and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person or act to gain financial or other material benefits for yourself, your family, a friend or close associate.
2. You must not place yourself under a financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence you in the performance of your official duties.
3. When carrying out your public duties you must make all choices, such as making public appointments, awarding contracts or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits, on merit.
4. You are accountable for your decisions to the public and you must co-operate fully with whatever scrutiny is appropriate to your office.
5. You must be as open as possible about your decisions and actions and the decisions and actions of your authority and should be prepared to give reasons for those decisions and actions.
6. You must declare any private interests, both pecuniary and non-pecuniary, that relate to your public duties and must take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest, including registering and declaring interests in a manner conforming with the procedures set out in the box below.
7. You must, when using or authorising the use by others of the resources of your authority, ensure that such resources are not used improperly for political purposes (including party political purposes) and you must have regard to any applicable Local Authority Code of Publicity made under the Local Government Act 1986.
8. You must promote and support high standards of conduct when serving in your public post, in particular as characterised by the above requirements, by leadership and example.

You must always comply with relevant laws and have due regard to local codes and protocols in effect from time to time including Appendix W to the Council's Constitution "Guidance on the Disclosure of Confidential Information by Members".

**Registering and declaring pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests**

You must, within 28 days of taking office as a member or co-opted member, notify the monitoring officer of any disclosable pecuniary interest as defined by regulations made by the Secretary of State and set out in Schedule A appended to this Code, where the pecuniary interest is yours, your spouse's or civil partner's, or is the pecuniary interest of somebody with whom you are living with as a husband or wife, or as if you were civil partners.

In addition, you must, within 28 days of taking office as a member or co-opted member, notify the monitoring officer of any disclosable pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest which the Council has decided should be included in the register and set out in Schedule B appended to this Code.

If an interest has not been entered onto the authority's register, then the member must disclose the interest to any meeting of the authority at which they are present, where they have a disclosable interest in any matter being considered and where the matter is not a 'sensitive interest'.<sup>1</sup>

Following any disclosure of an interest not on the authority's register or the subject of pending notification, you must notify the monitoring officer of the interest within 28 days beginning with the date of disclosure.

Unless a dispensation has been granted, you may not participate in any discussion of, vote on, or discharge any function related to any matter in which you have a pecuniary interest as defined by regulations made by the Secretary of State (DPI) and set out in Schedule A. Additionally, you must withdraw from the meeting room, including the public gallery, during the whole consideration of any item of business in which you have a pecuniary interest as defined by regulations made by the Secretary of State (DPI) as set out in Schedule A.

<sup>1</sup> A 'sensitive interest' is described in the Localism Act 2011 as a member or co-opted member of an authority having an interest, and the nature of the interest being such that the member or co-opted member, and the authority's monitoring officer, consider that disclosure of the details of the interest could lead to the member or co-opted member, or a person connected with the member or co-opted member, being subject to violence or intimidation.

SCHEDULE A

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, as prescribed by The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012 No 1464) are as follows:

The descriptions on Disclosable Pecuniary Interests are subject to the following definitions:

“the Act” means the Localism Act 2011

“body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest” means a firm in which the relevant person is a partner or a body corporate of which the relevant person is a director, or in the securities of which the relevant person has a beneficial interest

“director” includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society

“land” excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not carry with it a right for the relevant person (alone or jointly with another) to occupy the land or to receive income

“M” means a member of the relevant authority

“member” includes a co-opted member

“relevant authority” means the authority of which M is a member

“relevant period” means the period of 12 months ending with the day on which M gives a notification for the purposes of section 30(1) or section 31(7), as the case may be, of the Act

“relevant person” means M or any other person referred to in section 30(3)(b) of the Act (the Member’s spouse, civil partner, or somebody with whom they are living as a husband or wife, or as if they were civil partners).

“securities” means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society

Interest	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vacation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by M in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of M.

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	This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:  (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and  (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to M's knowledge):  (a) the landlord is the relevant authority; and  (b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:  (a) that body (to M's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and  (b) either  (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or  (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

### NOTE:

In accordance with section 34 of the Localism Act 2011, it is a criminal offence if, without reasonable excuse, you:

- (a) fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest before the end of 28 days of becoming, or being re-elected or re-appointed, a Member or Co-opted Member of the Authority;
- (b) fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest before the end of 28 days of becoming aware of it, where you are acting alone in the course of discharging a function of the Authority (including making a decision in relation to the matter) and the interest is not already registered or is not the subject of a pending notification to the Monitoring Officer;
- (c) fail to disclose a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest at a meeting, where such interest has not already been registered or notified to the Monitoring Officer;

- (d) fail to notify the Monitoring Officer of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest before the end of 28 days of disclosing it at a meeting, where such interest has not already been registered or notified to the Monitoring Officer;
- (e) take part in discussions or votes at meetings that relate to the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, unless a dispensation has been granted
- (f) knowingly or recklessly provide false or misleading information in any of the above disclosures or notifications.

## **SCHEDULE B**

An interest which relates to or is likely to affect:

(i) any body of which the member is in a position of general control or management and to which he/she is appointed or nominated by the Council;

(ii) any body—

(a) exercising functions of a public nature;

(b) directed to charitable purposes; or

(c) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)

of which the member of the Council is a member or in a position of general control or management;

(iii) any gifts or hospitality worth more than an estimated value of £25 or more which the member has received by virtue of his or her office.

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### **Item 7 (b) - 2023 Parliamentary Boundary Review**

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

#### Governance Committee (22 June 2021, Minute 7)

Members considered a report which detailed the initial proposals from the Boundary Commission for England (BCE), which was in the process of a review of all the Parliamentary constituencies in England. BCE's final recommendations would be taken to parliament by 1 July 2023, increasing the number of English constituencies from 533 to 543. The initial proposals were set out in Appendix A.

Members of the Committee spoke about the changes which would impact their own wards. Members noted that it was proposed a survey would be carried out and requested a 'free text' box be included in any survey, so as to enable the capture of as many varied comments as possible. It was noted that it would be helpful to know whether the BCE proposals would increase or decrease the aggregate number of electors in the Sevenoaks Parliamentary constituency.

#### Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council that

- a) the initial proposals from the Boundary Commission for England for Parliamentary boundaries for Sevenoaks District Council area from 2023, be noted; and
- b) the submission of a consultation response to the Boundary Commission for England based on the views collate from Members and following consultation with the Chairman of the Governance Committee, be approved.

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## 2023 PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY REVIEW

Council - 20 July 2021

**Report of:** Chief Executive

**Status:** For Decision

**Also considered by:** Governance Committee - 22 June 2021

**Key Decision:** No

**Contact Officers:** Lee Banks, Ext. 7161

Nicola Fletcher, Ext. 7188

**Recommendation to Governance Committee:**

That Council be recommended to:

- (a) Note the initial proposals from the Boundary Commission for England for Parliamentary boundaries for the Sevenoaks District Council area from 2023; and
- (b) Approve that the council submits a consultation response to the Boundary Commission for England based on views collated from Members and following consultation with the Chairman of the Governance Committee.

**Recommendation to Council:**

- (a) Note the initial proposals from the Boundary Commission for England for Parliamentary boundaries for the Sevenoaks District Council area from 2023; and
- (b) Approve that the council submits a consultation response to the Boundary Commission for England based on views collated from Members and following consultation with the Chairman of the Governance Committee.

**Reason for recommendations:** To ensure that Members are aware of the initial proposals for new Parliamentary constituency boundaries for the wards they represent and that they are aware how their views may be reported back to the Boundary Commission for England.

### Introduction and Background

- 1 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) is an independent and impartial non-departmental public body which is responsible for reviewing Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England.
- 2 The BCE has the task of periodically reviewing all the Parliamentary constituencies in England. It is currently conducting a review on the basis of

## Agenda Item 7b

rules most recently updated by Parliament in 2020. The BCE are required to report their final recommendations to Parliament by 1 July 2023.

- 3 The BCE are required to develop proposals which retain 650 constituencies for the UK Parliament as a whole and the proposed constituencies must also comply with strict parameters, in particular as far as the number of electors in each constituency is concerned.
- 4 Following the guidance of Parliament the final proposals must result in 543 constituencies in England (from 533), and require that every constituency - apart from two protected constituencies covering the Isle of Wight - has an electorate that is no smaller than 69,724 and no larger than 77,062.
- 5 As well as the primary rule that constituencies must have no fewer than 69,724 electors and no more than 77,062, the legislation also states that, when deciding on boundaries, the Commission may also take into account:
  - special geographical considerations, including in particular the size, shape and accessibility of a constituency;
  - local government boundaries as they existed (or were in prospect) on 1 December 2020;
  - boundaries of existing constituencies;
  - any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies; and
  - the inconveniences attendant on such changes.

### Initial proposals

- 6 The BCE published their initial proposals for the new Parliamentary constituency boundaries in England on 8 June 2021. A summary of the proposals for the wards within the Sevenoaks District are set out at Appendix A to this report for Members information and consideration.
- 7 Whilst the majority of the District wards are unaffected by the proposals for new Parliamentary constituencies, the proposals would see Ash & New Ash Green and Hartley & Hodsoll Street become part of the Tonbridge constituency.
- 8 Darenth and Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley within the Dartford borough would become part of the Sevenoaks constituency.

### Consultation

- 9 The BCE are currently consulting on their initial proposals through their website at [www.bcereviews.org.uk](http://www.bcereviews.org.uk) for an 8-week period, which started on 8 June and will end on 2 August.
- 10 Members may wish to note that the BCE is required to publish all the responses they receive on their initial proposals. This is likely to occur in

“early 2022” and will coincide with a further six week consultation period on the comments that have been received.

**Other options Considered and/or rejected**

11 None.

**Key Implications**

Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

There is a risk that if no consultation response is given the potential for the BCE to review their initial proposals may be reduced.

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.

**Conclusions**

The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) are required to conduct a review of the Parliamentary constituencies in the UK and make recommendations, to be reported to Parliament by July 2023, that sets the number of constituencies in England to 543 (from 533).

**Appendices**

Appendix A - Initial Proposals for the Sevenoaks District

**Background Papers**

Boundary Commission for England initial proposals for the South East

<https://boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/2023-review/>

**Dr. Pav Ramewal**

**Chief Executive**

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Ward	Current Parliamentary	Proposed Parliamentary (8 June 2021)	Voters	Sevenoaks Parliamentary Electorate
Brasted, Chevening and Sundridge	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	4,928	
Crockenhill and Well Hill	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	1,556	
Darenth	Dartford	Sevenoaks	2,010	
Dunton Green and Riverhead	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	4,086	
Eynsford	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	1,494	
Farningham, Horton Kirby and South Darenth	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,842	
Fawkham and West Kingsdown	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	4,949	
Halstead, Knockholt and Badgers Mount	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	2,790	
Hextable	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,355	
Kemsing	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,233	
Otford and Shoreham	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,593	
Seal and Weald	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,212	
Sevenoaks Eastern	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	2,961	
Sevenoaks Kippington	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,693	
Sevenoaks Northern	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,111	
Sevenoaks Town and St. John's	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	4,703	
Swanley Christchurch and Swanley Village	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	4,629	
Swanley St. Mary's	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,181	
Swanley White Oak	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	4,776	
Westerham and Crockham Hill	Sevenoaks	Sevenoaks	3,461	
Wilmington, Sutton-at-Hone & Hawley	Dartford	Sevenoaks	6,131	75,694
Ash and New Ash Green	Sevenoaks	Tonbridge	4,620	
Cowden and Hever	Tonbridge	Tonbridge	1,680	
Edenbridge North and East	Tonbridge	Tonbridge	3,750	
Edenbridge South and West	Tonbridge	Tonbridge	3,171	
Hartley and Hodsoll Street	Dartford	Tonbridge	4,842	
Leigh and Chiddingstone Causeway	Tonbridge	Tonbridge	1,827	
Penshurst, Fordcombe and Chiddingstone	Tonbridge	Tonbridge	1,979	
Lower limit of voters for new proposals		69,724		
Upper limit of voters for new proposals		77,062		
Total voters for proposed Dartford Constituency		70,038		
Total voters for proposed Tonbridge Constituency		72,091		

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**Item 7 (c) - Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations**

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

Governance Committee (22 June 2021, Minute 5)

Members considered the revised Council's Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations. The Protocol had been revised with the advent of video conferencing and the growth in the home office taken into account.

Members noted that most of the original Protocol had been retained and that the changes were valuable to both Members and Officers.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That

- a) the revised protocol on Councillor and Officer relations, be approved; and
- b) it be recommended to Council that the revised protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations, be approved and adopted.

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**PROTOCOL ON COUNCILLOR AND OFFICER RELATIONS**

**Council - 20 July 2021**

**Report of:** Monitoring Officer

**Status:** For consideration

**Also considered by:**

- Governance Committee - 22 June 2021

**Key Decision:** No

**Executive Summary:** This item is for the Committee to approve the revised Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations and recommend to the Council that it be adopted.

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. Fleming

**Contact Officer:** Martin Goodman, Ext. 7245

**Recommendation to Governance Committee:** That

- a) The revised Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations be approved by the Governance Committee;
- b) The revised Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations be recommend to Council for approval and adoption.

**Recommendation to Council:** That

- a) The revise Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations be approved and adopted;
- b) The Monitoring Officer be given authority to amend the Protocol on the Councillor and Officer Relations as from time-to-time may become necessary.

**Reason for recommendation:** To update the Protocol Councillor and Officer Relations to take into account changes in the workplace and in the nature of elected Membership.

## Agenda Item 7c

### Introduction and Background

- 1 The terms of reference of the Governance Committee set out that it may advise the Council on all matters relating to any review of the Council's Constitution.
- 2 It is necessary to revise the Council's Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations to take into account changes in the workplace and in the nature of elected Membership. The attached revised Protocol has in mind the advent of video conferencing and the growth in the home office.
- 3 All Councils must have a Member Code of Conduct and a process for it to be enforced. It is normal for this to be augmented by a Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations and other codes (such as rules on confidentiality or behaviour while in the office).
- 4 In addition to the obligations placed upon Officers as employees, they are subject to a Code of Conduct for Employees. The Member/Officer relationship is one of mutual respect and the Protocol does no more than seek to codify this in a sympathetic way.
- 5 It has always been the case that there are necessary boundaries between Officers and Members. The document before the Committee builds on the previous draft and simply adds clauses to reflect current conditions. There are no new obligations on Members or Officers.

### Key Implications

#### Financial

None.

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

No relevant legal implications or risk assessment.

#### Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevant to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceive impact on end users.

### Conclusions

This report seeks the approval and adoption of the revised Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations.

**Appendices**

Appendix A - Current Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations (Appendix J)

Appendix B - New Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations (Appendix J)

**Background Papers**

None

**Martin Goodman**

**Monitoring Officer**

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## APPENDIX J: Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The relationship between Members and Officers is an essential ingredient that goes into the successful working of the organisation. This relationship within the District Council is characterised by mutual respect, informality and trust. Members and Officers feel free to speak to one another openly and honestly. Nothing in this Protocol is intended to change this relationship. The purpose of this Protocol is rather to help Members and Officers to perform effectively by giving guidance on their respective roles and expectations and on their relationship with each other. The Protocol also gives guidance on what to do on the rare occasions when things go wrong. Responsibility for the operation of this Protocol lies with the Chief Executive.
- 1.2 The Protocol must be read and operated in the context of any relevant legislation and national and local Codes of Conduct and any procedure for confidential reporting.

### 2. Roles of Members and Officers

- 2.1 The respective roles of Members and Officers can be summarised as follows:

Members and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one another. But their responsibilities are distinct. Members are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts. Officers are responsible to the Council. Their job is to give advice to Members and to the District Council, and to carry out the Council's work under the direction and control of the Council, the Executive, and relevant committees, etc.

*Mutual respect between Members and Officers is essential to good local government.*

#### Members

- 2.2 Members as Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:
- (a) determining the policy of the District Council and giving it political leadership;
  - (b) monitoring and reviewing the performance of the Council in implementing that policy and delivering services;
  - (c) representing the Council externally; and
  - (d) acting as advocates on behalf of their constituents.

It is not the role of Members to involve themselves in the day to day management of the Council's services.

#### Members of the Executive, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen

- 2.3 Members of the Executive and Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees, Boards, Groups etc. have additional responsibilities. Because of those responsibilities, their relationships with employees may be different from, and more complex than those of other Members without those responsibilities, and this is recognised in the expectations they are entitled to have. However, such Members must still respect the impartiality of Officers, must not ask them to undertake work of a party political nature, or to do anything which would put them in difficulty in the event of a change in the political composition of the authority.

#### Officers

- 2.4 The role of Officers is to give advice and information to Members upon which they may determine policy issues and to implement the policies determined by the Council, and to provide advice to Members as to how this might properly be done.
- 2.5 In giving such advice to Members, and in preparing and presenting reports, it is the responsibility of the Officer to express his/her own professional views and recommendations. Whilst an Officer may report the views of individual Members on an issue, if the Member wishes to express a contrary view he/she should not seek to pressure the Officer to make a recommendation contrary to the Officer's professional view.
- 2.6 Certain Officers, e.g. Chief Executive (The Head of Paid Service and the Section 151 Officer) the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (the Monitoring Officer) and the Statutory Chief Officers have responsibilities in law over and above their obligations to the Council and to individual Members, and Members must respect these obligations, must not obstruct Officers in the discharge of these responsibilities, and must not victimise Officers for discharging these responsibilities.

### 3. Expectations

- 3.1 Members can expect from Officers:
- (a) a commitment to the District Council as a whole, and not to any political group;
  - (b) a working partnership;
  - (c) an understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures;
  - (d) timely response to enquiries and complaints;

- (e) professional advice not influenced by political views or preference, which does not compromise the political neutrality of Officers;
- (f) regular, up to date information on matters which can reasonably be considered appropriate and relevant to their needs, having regard to any individual responsibilities that they have and positions that they hold;
- (g) awareness of and sensitivity to the political environment;
- (h) respect, dignity and courtesy;
- (i) training and development in order to carry out their role effectively;
- (j) integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality;
- (k) not to have personal issues raised with them by Officers outside the agreed procedures;
- (l) that employees will not use their relationship with Members to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly;
- (m) that Officers will at all times comply with the relevant Code of Conduct;
- (n) support for the role of Members as the local representatives of the authority, within any scheme of support for Members, which may be approved by the Council.

3.2 Officers can expect from Members:

- (a) a working partnership;
- (b) an understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- (c) political leadership and direction;
- (d) respect, dignity and courtesy;
- (e) integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality;
- (f) not to be subject to bullying or to be put under undue pressure. Members should have regard to the seniority of Officers in determining what are reasonable requests, having regard to the power relationship between Members and Officers, and the potential vulnerability of Officers, particularly at junior level;
- (g) that Members will not use their position or relationship with Officers to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly;

- (h) that Members will at all times comply with the relevant Code of Conduct.

Limitations upon Behaviour

- 3.3 The distinct roles of Members and Officers necessarily impose limitations upon behaviour. By way of illustration, and not as an exclusive list:
  - (a) close personal relationships between Members and Officers can confuse these separate roles and get in the way of the proper discharge of the Authority's functions, not least in creating the perception in others that a particular Member or Officer may secure advantageous treatment;
  - (b) the need to maintain the separate roles means that there are limits to the matters on which they may seek the advice of Officers, both in relation to personal matters and party political issues;
  - (c) relationships with a particular individual or party group should not be such as to create public suspicion that an employee favours that Member or group above others. The issue of Officer attendance and advice to political groups is specifically covered below.

4. Political Groups

- 4.1 The operation of political groups is now an integral feature of local government, and such political groups have an important part to play in the development of policy and the political management of the Council. It is in the interests of the Council to support the effective operation of political groups, but their operation can pose particular dangers in terms of the impartiality of Officers.

Reports:

- 4.2 (a) any political group may request the Chief Executive to prepare written reports on matters relating to the Council for consideration by the group;
- (b) Officer reports to political groups will be limited to a statement of material facts and identification of options and the merits and demerits of such options for the Council. Reports will not deal with any political implications of the matter or any option, and Officers will not make any recommendations to a political group.

Officer Attendance:

- 4.3 (a) any political group may request the Chief Executive and/or a Chief Officer to attend a meeting of the group to advise on any particular matter relating to the Council;
- (b) the Chief Executive and/or a Chief Officer may arrange for the

attendance of a representative in his/her stead, or may decline to attend or to provide a representative where he/she is of the opinion that the particular issue is of such a political nature that it would be inappropriate to attend;

- (c) Officers' advice to political groups will be limited to a statement of material facts and identification of options and the merits and demerits of such options for the Council. Advice will not deal with any political implications of the matter or any option, and Officers will not make any recommendation to a political group;
- (d) Officers and Members will respect the confidentiality of any matters, which are discussed in the course of attending a political group meeting.

## 5. When Things Go Wrong

### Procedure for Officers

- 5.1 From time to time the relationship between Members and Officers may break down or become strained. Whilst it will always be preferable to resolve matters informally, through conciliation by an appropriate senior manager or Members, Officers will have recourse to the Council's Grievance Procedure or to the Council's Monitoring Officer, as appropriate to the circumstances. In the event of a grievance or complaint being upheld, the matter will be referred to the Chief Executive, who, having advised the Leader of the Council and the appropriate group leader, to the Standards Committee for consideration and determination.

### Procedure for Members

- 5.2 In the event that a Member is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of an Officer, the matter should be raised with the appropriate Chief Officer. Where the Officer concerned is a Head of Service or Chief Officer, the matter should be raised with the appropriate Chief Officer or with the Chief Executive. Where the employee concerned is the Chief Executive, the matter should be raised with the Head Human Resources. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, it may be necessary to invoke the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

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## APPENDIX J: Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The relationship between Members and Officers is an essential ingredient that goes into the successful working of the organisation. This relationship within the District Council is characterised by mutual respect, informality and trust. Members and Officers feel free to speak to one another openly and honestly. Nothing in this Protocol is intended to change this relationship. The purpose of this Protocol is rather to help Members and Officers to perform effectively by giving guidance on their respective roles and expectations and on their relationship with each other. The Protocol also gives guidance on what to do on the rare occasions when things go wrong. Responsibility for the operation of this Protocol lies with the Chief Executive.
- 1.2 The Protocol must be read and operated in the context of any relevant legislation and national and local Codes of Conduct and any procedure for confidential reporting.
- 1.3 For the avoidance of doubt, failure to comply with this Protocol on Councillor/Officer Relations may constitute a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct or the Code of Conduct for Employees.
- 1.4 Members and Officers may carry out their roles from a home environment and it will not always be necessary or possible for face-to-face meetings to take place. Both Members and Officers recognise this as a feature of the modern workplace and must endeavour to meet each other through agreed channels and at agreed times so as to avoid unnecessary difficulties.

### 2. Roles of Members and Officers

- 2.1 The respective roles of Members and Officers can be summarised as follows:

Members and Officers are servants of the public and they are indispensable to one another. But their responsibilities are distinct. Members are responsible to the electorate and serve only so long as their term of office lasts. Officers are responsible to the Council. Their job is to give advice to Members and to the District Council, and to carry out the Council's work under the direction and control of the Council, the Executive, and relevant committees, etc.

*Mutual respect between Members and Officers is essential to good local government.*

#### Members

- 2.2 Members as Councillors have four main areas of responsibility:

- (a) determining the policy of the District Council and giving it political leadership;
- (b) monitoring and reviewing the performance of the Council in implementing that policy and delivering services;
- (c) representing the Council externally; and
- (d) acting as advocates on behalf of their constituents.

It is not the role of Members to involve themselves in the day to day management of the Council's services. Furthermore, Members may not approach individual Officers to discuss operational areas of work without first raising the issue with the relevant Chief Officer.

Members of the Executive, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen

- 2.3 Members of the Executive and Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees, Boards, Groups etc. have additional responsibilities. Because of those responsibilities, their relationships with employees may be different from, and more complex than those of other Members without those responsibilities, and this is recognised in the expectations they are entitled to have. However, such Members must still respect the impartiality of Officers, must not ask them to undertake work of a party political nature, or to do anything which would put them in difficulty in the event of a change in the political composition of the authority.

Officers

- 2.4 The role of Officers is to give advice and information to Members upon which they may determine policy issues and to implement the policies determined by the Council, and to provide advice to Members as to how this might properly be done.
- 2.5 In giving such advice to Members, and in preparing and presenting reports, it is the responsibility of the Officer to express his/her own professional views and recommendations. Whilst an Officer may report the views of individual Members on an issue, if the Member wishes to express a contrary view he/she should not seek to pressure the Officer to make a recommendation contrary to the Officer's professional view.
- 2.6 Certain Officers, for example the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service), Chief Officer - Finance and Trading (Section 151 Officer) and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer), have responsibilities in law over and above their obligations to the Council and to individual Members. Members must respect these obligations, must not obstruct Officers in the discharge of these responsibilities and must not victimise Officers for discharging any such obligation.

3. Expectations

3.1 Members can expect from Officers:

- (a) a commitment to the District Council as a whole, and not to any political group;
- (b) a working partnership;
- (c) an understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- (d) timely response to enquiries and complaints;
- (e) professional advice not influenced by political views or preference, which does not compromise the political neutrality of Officers;
- (f) regular, up to date information on matters which can reasonably be considered appropriate and relevant to their needs, having regard to any individual responsibilities that they have and positions that they hold;
- (g) awareness of and sensitivity to the political environment;
- (h) respect, dignity and courtesy;
- (i) training and development in order to carry out their role effectively;
- (j) integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality;
- (k) not to have personal issues raised with them by Officers outside the agreed procedures;
- (l) that employees will not use their relationship with Members to advance their personal interests or to influence decisions improperly;
- (m) that Officers will at all times comply with the relevant Code of Conduct for Employees;
- (n) support for the role of Members as the local representatives of the authority, within any scheme of support for Members, which may be approved by the Council.

3.2 Officers can expect from Members:

- (a) a working partnership;
- (b) an understanding of and support for respective roles, workloads and pressures;
- (c) political leadership and direction;
- (d) respect, dignity and courtesy;
- (e) integrity, mutual support and appropriate confidentiality;

- (f) not to be subject to bullying or to be put under undue pressure. Members should have regard to the seniority of Officers in determining what are reasonable requests, having regard to the power relationship between Members and Officers, and the potential vulnerability of Officers, particularly at junior level;
- (g) that Members will not use their position or relationship with Officers to advance their personal interests or those of others or to influence decisions improperly;
- (h) that Members will at all times comply with the relevant Code of Conduct;
- (i) that Members will recognise the boundaries between the Officer's personal and office life, even if that Officer is working from home, and will not seek to approach Officers other than through work channels.

Limitations upon Behaviour

3.3 The distinct roles of Members and Officers necessarily impose limitations upon behaviour. By way of illustration, and not as an exclusive list:

- (a) close personal relationships between Members and Officers can confuse these separate roles and get in the way of the proper discharge of the Authority's functions, not least in creating the perception in others that a particular Member or Officer may secure advantageous treatment;
- (b) the need to maintain the separate roles means that there are limits to the matters on which they may seek the advice of Officers, both in relation to personal matters and party political issues;
- (c) relationships with a particular individual or party group should not be such as to create public suspicion that an employee favours that Member or group above others. The issue of Officer attendance and advice to political groups is specifically covered below.

4. Political Groups

4.1 The operation of political groups is now an integral feature of local government, and such political groups have an important part to play in the development of policy and the political management of the Council. It is in the interests of the Council to support the effective operation of political groups, but their operation can pose particular dangers in terms of the impartiality of Officers.

Reports:

- 4.2 (a) any political group may request the Chief Executive to prepare written reports on matters relating to the Council for consideration by the group;
- (b) Officer reports to political groups will be limited to a statement of material facts and identification of options and the merits and demerits of such options for the Council. Reports will not deal with any political implications of the matter or any option, and Officers will not make any recommendations to a political group.

Officer Attendance:

- 4.3 (a) any political group may request the Chief Executive and/or a Chief Officer to attend a meeting of the group to advise on any particular matter relating to the Council;
- (b) the Chief Executive and/or a Chief Officer may arrange for the attendance of a representative in his/her stead, or may decline to attend or to provide a representative where he/she is of the opinion that the particular issue is of such a political nature that it would be inappropriate to attend;
- (c) Officers' advice to political groups will be limited to a statement of material facts and identification of options and the merits and demerits of such options for the Council. Advice will not deal with any political implications of the matter or any option, and Officers will not make any recommendation to a political group;
- (d) Officers and Members will respect the confidentiality of any matters, which are discussed in the course of attending a political group meeting.

## 5. When Things Go Wrong

Procedure for Officers

- 5.1 From time to time the relationship between Members and Officers may break down or become strained. Whilst it will always be preferable to resolve matters informally, through conciliation by an appropriate senior manager or Members, Officers will have recourse to the Council's Grievance Procedure or to the Council's Monitoring Officer, as appropriate to the circumstances. In the event of a grievance or complaint being upheld, the matter will be referred to the Chief Executive, who, having advised the Leader of the Council and the appropriate group leader, to the Standards Committee for consideration and determination.

Procedure for Members

- 5.2 In the event that a Member is dissatisfied with the conduct, behaviour or performance of an Officer, the matter should be raised with the appropriate Chief Officer. Where the Officer concerned is a Head of Service

or Chief Officer, the matter should be raised with the appropriate Chief Officer or with the Chief Executive. Where the employee concerned is the Chief Executive, the matter should be raised with the Head Human Resources. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, it may be necessary to invoke the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

## 6. Updates

- 5.1 Both Members and Officers recognise that the workplace may change from time-to-time. In particular, new technologies are replacing established ways of working. Flexible hours, remote attendance at meetings and other innovations have enhanced productivity, attracted residents to elected office and reduced staff turnover.
- 5.2 The role of elected Members is not static. Members may experience pressures today which were unheard of yesterday. It is inevitable that there will be future challenges which put pressure on the relationship between Members and Officers but which could not have been envisioned at the time this Protocol was adopted.
- 5.3 For that reason, Members agree that the Monitoring Officer may periodically update this Protocol on Councillor and Officer Relations as necessary to reflect the changing nature of both employment and elected Membership of the Council.

### **Item 7 (d) - Contracts Procedure Rules**

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

#### Governance Committee (22 June 2021, Minute 6)

Members considered the revised Contracts Procedure Rules which had been taken into account changes since the last revision including the impact of leaving the European Union on purchasing rules.

The next review of thresholds would be implemented by January 2022 by amendments to the public procurement regulations. To ensure variable figures are kept up-to-date it was noted that the Monitoring Officer already had the authority to amend the rules from time-to-time to reflect minor changes.

#### Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That

- a) the revised Contracts Procedure Rules be approved; and
- b) it be recommended to Council that the revised Contracts Procedure Rules be approved and adopted.

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## CONTRACTS PROCEDURE RULES

Council - 20 July 2021

**Report of:** Monitoring Officer

**Status:** For Consideration

**Also considered by:**

- Governance Committee - 22 June 2021

**Key Decision:** No

**Executive Summary:** This item is for the Committee to approve the revised Contracts Procedure Rules and recommend to Council that they be adopted.

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. Fleming

**Contact Officer:** Martin Goodman, Ext. 7245

**Recommendation to Governance Committee:** That

- (a) The revised Contracts Procedure Rules be approved by the Governance Committee;
- (b) The revised Contracts Procedure Rules be recommended to Council for approval and adoption.

**Recommendation to Council:** That

- a) The revised Contracts Procedure Rules be approved and adopted;
- b) The Monitoring Officer be given authority to amend the Contracts Procedure Rules as from time-to-time may become necessary.

**Reason for recommendation:** To update the Contracts Procedure Rules in line with legislation and best practice.

### Introduction and Background

- 1 The terms of reference of the Governance Committee set out that it may advise the Council on all matters relating to any review of the Council's Constitution.
- 2 It is necessary to revise the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules in line with legislation and best practice. The attached revised rules take into account

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changes since the last revision, including the impact of leaving the European Union on purchasing rules.

- 3 In addition to the revisions to the Contracts Procedure Rules, the Council will be adjusting internal working documents to ensure procurement and contracting arrangements are efficient and fit for purpose.
- 4 In particular, it is important that where possible the threshold limits set out in the Rules are accurate. These are the limits beyond which full procurement processes must take place. Currently, for 'works' the limit is £4,733,252 and for 'goods and services' £189,330.
- 5 The next review of the thresholds will be implemented by January 2022 by amendments to the public procurement regulations. In order to ensure that these variable figures are kept up-to-date, along with any other detail, the Monitoring Officer requests authority to amend the rules from time-to-time as becomes necessary.

### **Key Implications**

#### Financial

None. Although the subject of this report relates to contracts, Members are only asked to consider the governance implications of updating the Contracts Procedure Rules in line with legislation and best practice.

#### Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

No relevant legal implications or Risk Assessment. The amendments to the Contracts Procedure Rules set out in this report were drafted taking into account the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 as amended by the Public Procurement (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

#### 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.

### **Conclusions**

This report seeks the approval and adoption of the revised Contracts Procedure Rules.

**Appendices**

Appendix A - Current Contracts Procedure Rules ('CPR') (Appendix E)

Appendix B - New Contracts Procedure Rules ('CPR') (Appendix E)

**Background Papers**

None

**Martin Goodman**

**Monitoring Officer**

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## **APPENDIX E: Contracts Procedure Rules**

### **1 Introduction - Purpose of the Contract Standing Orders**

1.1 Purchasing decisions and processes are important because the money involved is public money. The purpose of these Contract Standing Orders is to provide a structure within which purchasing decisions are made and implemented and which ensure that the Council:

- Furthers its corporate objectives
- Uses its resources efficiently
- Purchases quality goods, services and works
- Safeguards its reputation from any implication of dishonesty or corruption.

1.2 Purchasing by the Council, from planning to delivery, shall incorporate (where appropriate) principles of sustainability, efficiency, whole life costings and cost savings.

1.3 These Contract Standing Orders are made in accordance with the requirements of Section 135 of the Local Government Act 1972.

1.4 These Contract Standing Orders do not provide guidelines on what is the best way to purchase works, supplies (goods) and services. They set out minimum requirements to be followed. Further information and guidelines are set out in the Council's Officers' Guide.

### **2 General Principles - Application and Compliance with Contract Standing Orders**

2.1 These Contract Standing Orders apply to the purchase by or on behalf of the Council of works, supplies (goods) and services.

2.2 These Contract Standing Orders apply to all contracts including all purchase orders, concessions and contractual arrangements entered into by or on behalf of the Council, except for the specific types of contracts and purchasing methods which are listed in 2.3.

2.3 These Contract Standing Orders do not apply to:

- Employment contracts
- Contracts relating solely to the purchase or sale of interests in land
- Contracts for retention of legal counsel and the appointment of expert witnesses in legal proceedings

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- Service level agreements setting out the conditions which the Council applies to its funding of particular voluntary sector bodies.

### **3 General Principles Applying to All Contracts**

- 3.1 All purchases however small shall be in writing.
- 3.2 Standard contract clauses shall be used in all contracts of a value of £10,000 or more. The standard contract clauses are issued by Legal Services and can be found on the intranet.
- 3.3 As a minimum, all contracts of a value of £10,000 or more shall include clauses which set out:
- the works, supplies (goods), services, material, matters or things to be carried out or supplied
  - the time within which the contract is to be performed
  - quality requirements and/or standards which must be met
  - requirements on the contractor to hold and maintain appropriate insurance
  - what happens in the event that the contractor fails to comply with its contractual obligations (in whole or in part)
  - requirements on the contractor to comply with all relevant equalities and health and safety legislation
  - that the Council shall be entitled to cancel the contract and recover losses in the event that the contractor does anything improper to influence the Council to give the contractor any contract or commits an offence under the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889 to 1916 or s117(2) Local Government Act 1972.
- 3.4 Written contracts shall not include non commercial terms unless these are necessary to achieve best value for the Council. In this context, “non commercial” means requirements unrelated to the actual performance of the contract.
- 3.5 All contracts shall include relevant specifications and/or briefs/technical requirements which are prepared taking into account the need for effectiveness of delivery, quality, sustainability and efficiency (as appropriate) and the information set out in the Council’s Officers’ Guide.
- 3.6 All contracts of a value of £10,000 or more or which involve a substantial risk to the Council must be subject to a written risk assessment, which should be kept on the contract file.

## **4 Regulatory Context**

4.1 All purchasing shall be conducted in accordance with Regulatory Provisions which are:

- all relevant statutory provisions
- the relevant EU Rules and EC Treaty Principles which are defined in the Council's Purchasing Guide
- the Council's Constitution including these Contract Standing Orders, the Council's Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation
- the Council's Procurement Strategy, Suppliers' Guide and Officers' Guide and other policies and procedures of the Council as appropriate.

4.2 In the event of conflict between the above, the EU Rules will take precedence, followed by UK legislation, then the Council's Constitution, the Council's Purchasing Guide and guidelines, policies and procedures.

## **5 Responsibilities of Chief Officers and Responsible Officers**

5.1 Each Chief Officer shall:

- be responsible for the purchasing undertaken by his/her service.
- be accountable to the Cabinet for the performance of his/her duties in relation to purchasing
- comply with the Council's decision making processes including, where appropriate, implementing and operating a Scheme of Delegation
- appoint a Responsible Officer in writing who shall be an authorised signatory
- take immediate action in the event of breach of these Contract Standing Orders.

5.2 A Responsible Officer is an officer with responsibility for conducting purchasing processes for the purchase of works, supplies (goods) or services on behalf of the Council.

5.3 A Responsible Officer's duties in respect of purchasing are to ensure:

- compliance with all Regulatory Provisions and integrity of the tender process

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- compliance with the relevant statutory provisions and the Council's requirements relating to declarations of interest affecting any purchasing process
- that there is an appropriate analysis of the requirement, timescales, procedure and documentation to be used
- the purchasing process, from planning to delivery incorporates (where appropriate) principles of sustainability, efficiency, whole life costings and cost savings
- compliance with the Council's decision making processes
- that all contracts of a value of £15,000 or more are included on the Council's Contract Register
- that proper records of all contract award procedures, waivers, exemptions and extensions are maintained, with separate files for each purchase of a value of £15,000 or more
- that value for money is achieved
- that adequate and appropriate security (such as a bond or guarantee) is taken to protect the Council in the event of non-performance.

5.4 In considering how best to procure works, supplies and services, Chief Officers and/or Responsible Officers (as appropriate in the context), shall take into account wider contractual delivery opportunities and purchasing methods including the use of Purchasing Schemes and e-procurement/purchasing methods, and the availability of local authority charging and trading powers under the Local Government Act 2003.

5.5 It is a disciplinary offence to fail to comply with these Contract Standing Orders and the Council's Officers' Guide. All employees have a duty to report breaches of Contract Standing Orders to the Chief Officer for their service.

5.6 Any officer or Member who suspects any misconduct or corruption in relation to the purchase by or on behalf of the Council of works, supplies (goods) and services must immediately report that suspicion to the Council's Monitoring Officer and Chief Officer for their service.

## **6 Scheme of Delegation**

6.1 Council purchasing may only be undertaken by officers with the appropriate delegated authority to carry out such tasks as set out in the Council's Scheme(s) of Delegation. Officers with delegated authority may only delegate to other officers who have the appropriate skills and knowledge for the task and such delegation shall be recorded in writing by the officer delegating the task and notified to the relevant Chief Officer.

- 6.2 Officers shall, where appropriate, be informed by their Chief Officer of the extent of any delegated authority and applicable financial thresholds.

## 7 Financial Thresholds and Procedures

- 7.1 The table below sets out the general rules applying to the choice of purchasing procedure for contracts at the stated threshold values.
- 7.2 There is a general presumption in favour of competition. Wherever possible contract opportunities should be advertised by way of a public notice. The Council must consider the potential effect of a contract on interstate trade (at a European level). If a contract may be of interest to contractors from other member states then this may result in a need to advertise in a manner which ensures that potential contractors from other member states are aware of the opportunity, even for small value contracts or contracts under the EU Threshold levels outlined below.
- 7.3 The public notice referred to at 7.2 may take the form of a notice or advertisement in an electronic or paper format, on an easily accessible website (as at June 2014 the South East Business Portal - [www.businessportal.southeastiep.gov.uk](http://www.businessportal.southeastiep.gov.uk)) or other electronic media and/or in the press, trade journals or Official Journal of the European Union (“OJ”) (as appropriate). The Responsible Officer may choose to place one or more public notices in different media.
- 7.4 Table setting out financial thresholds and procedures

Total Value	Type of contract	Procedure to be used
£0 to £10,000	works, supplies and services	At least one quote in advance
£10,000 to £74,999	works, supplies and services	At least three written quotes in advance
£75,000 to £1 below EU procurement threshold for supplies and services**	Supplies and services	At least three written tenders in advance, following advertisement by public notice
EU Threshold and above for supplies and services £172,514 **	Supplies and services	EU Rules apply - full competitive process following advertisement in the OJ for supplies and Part A* services. For Part B* services reduced requirements apply under the EU Rules but there is a presumption in favour of advertising and a competitive process
£75,000 to	Works	Full competitive process with tenders

EU procurement threshold for works £172,514 **		following advertisement by public notice
From EU procurement threshold for works £4,332,012**	Works	EU Rules apply - full competitive process with tenders following OJ advertisement

\* For the purposes of the EU Rules services are divided into two types and the EU Rules apply to a different degree. Responsible Officers should act cautiously and seek advice when considering the procedure to be used and application of the EU Rules to services contracts

\*\* These figures are correct at June 2014 but officers should check for details of the relevant threshold in force at the time of their procurement under the EU Rules. Advice should be sought from the Audit and Efficiency or Legal Teams.

7.5 Where contracts are of a type and value which means that they are subject to the EU Rules then there are four main types of EU procedures available. These are the open, restricted, competitive dialogue and competitive negotiated procedures. Care must be taken to ensure that the correct and most appropriate procedure is used and assistance on the choice and use of EU procedure should be sought.

## 8 Financial Thresholds and Processes Applying to Approval and Execution of Contracts

8.1 For contracts over the relevant EU Threshold (in force at the time), the choice of purchasing procedure to be used and the decision to proceed to advertisement must be authorised in writing by the relevant Chief Officer in advance.

8.2 When a decision is made to award a contract then the Responsible Officer must, in addition to complying with his/her general obligations under these Contract Standing Orders ensure, in particular, that:

- the appropriate approvals have been obtained to authorise that decision; and
- where appropriate, a standstill period complying with the EU Rules is incorporated into the final award process.

8.3 Any contracts valued at £75,000 or above shall be executed as a deed. All other contracts may be signed by officers with appropriate delegated

authority. £10,000 shall be the threshold for the purposes of Regulation 8 of the Local Authority (Executive Arrangements) (Modification of Enactments and Further Provisions) (England) Order 2001.

- 8.4 Electronic signatures may be used in accordance with the Electronic Signature Regulations 2002 provided the sufficiency of security arrangements has been approved by the relevant service Chief Officer.

## **9 Calculating the Contract Value**

- 9.1 The starting point for calculating the contract value for the purposes of these Contract Standing Orders is that the contract value shall be the genuine pre-estimate of the value of the entire contract excluding Value Added Tax. This includes all payments to be made, or potentially to be made, under the entirety of the contract and for the whole of the predicted contract period (including proposed extensions and options).
- 9.2 There shall be no artificial splitting of a contract to avoid the application of the provisions of the EU Rules and/or these Contract Standing Orders.
- 9.3 The EU Rules can cover contracts which are below the stated EU threshold where they constitute repeat purchases and/or purchases of a similar type in a specified period. Responsible Officers should therefore seek advice on the application of the EU Rules where they envisage that they may require repeat purchases and/or purchases of a similar type.

## **10 Principles Underlying Tendering Processes and Tender Evaluation**

- 10.1 All tendering procedures (including obtaining quotes), from planning to contract award and signature, shall be undertaken in a manner so as to ensure:
- Sufficient time is given to plan and run the process
  - Equal opportunity and equal treatment
  - Openness and transparency
  - Probity
  - Outcomes which deliver sustainability, efficiency and cost savings (where appropriate).

## **11 Submission and Opening of Tenders**

- 11.1 An Invitation to Tender shall be issued by the Council for all contracts over £75,000 and tenders shall be submitted in accordance with the requirements of the Invitation to Tender.
- 11.2 Any tenders received (other than those received electronically, to which 11.3 shall apply) shall be:
- addressed to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services.
  - in a sealed envelope marked “Tender” followed by the subject matter to which it relates
  - kept in a safe place by Democratic Services
  - retained unopened until the date and time specified for its opening.
- 11.3 Where the Council has indicated in the Invitation to Tender that a tender can or must be submitted electronically, then those tenders shall be:
- addressed to the e-mail address as notified in the Invitation to Tender
  - in the format specified in the Invitation to Tender
  - stored in a secure mailbox, which requires a code or other appropriate security measure, to open it
  - retained unopened until the date and time specified for its opening.
- 11.4 No tender received after the time and date specified for its opening shall be accepted or considered by the Council unless the Head of Legal & Democratic Services/Chief Officer Corporate Services is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence of the tender having been dispatched in time for it to have arrived before the closing date and time, or other exceptional circumstances apply and the other tenders have not been opened.
- 11.5 Tenders shall be opened by the relevant Chief Officer and an immediate record shall be made of tenders received including names and addresses and the date and time of opening.

## **12 Evaluation of Quotes and Tenders**

- 12.1 All quotes and tenders shall be evaluated in accordance with evaluation criteria notified in advance to those submitting quotes/tenderers.
- 12.2 Tenders subject to the EU Rules shall be evaluated in accordance with the EU Rules.
- 12.3 Save in exceptional circumstances approved in advance by the appropriate Chief Officer all contracts shall be awarded on the basis of the quote or

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tender which represents best value for money to the Council and not on the basis of lowest price.

### 13 Waivers

- 13.1 The requirement for the Council to conduct a competitive purchasing process for contracts in excess of £10,000 may be waived in the following circumstances
- for contracts which are not subject to the EU Rules, the work, supply or service is required as a matter of urgency and a delay would be likely to lead to financial loss, personal injury or damage to property; or
  - the circumstances set out in Regulation 14 apply (whether or not the contract is of a type which is subject to the application of the EU Rules); or
  - the contract is awarded under a Purchasing Scheme of a type where a competition has already been undertaken on behalf of the Council; or
  - at the discretion of the relevant Chief Officer who may proceed in a manner most expedient to the efficient management of the service/Council with reasons recorded in writing.
- 13.2 A Responsible Officer who seeks a waiver of Contract Standing Orders, shall do so only in advance and only in exceptional circumstances. Further guidance on what may constitute exceptional circumstances permitting waiver of these Contract Standing Orders and general tender direction is set out in the Council's Officers' Guide.
- 13.3 All waivers from these Contract Standing Orders must be:
- fully documented
  - subject to a written report in an approved format to be submitted in advance to the relevant Chief Officer which shall include reasons for the waiver which demonstrate that the waiver is genuinely required
  - subject to approval in advance by the relevant Chief Officer who shall record that they have considered the reasons for the waiver and that they are satisfied that the circumstances justifying the waiver are genuinely exceptional.
- 13.4 All decisions on waivers must take into account:
- probity
  - best value/value for money principles.

13.5 For contracts subject to the EU Rules, any waiver from the requirement for competition must meet the conditions set out in the EU Rules in addition to the general requirements above.

13.6 A waiver shall not be applied for reasons of poor contract planning.

## **14 Extensions to Existing Contracts**

14.1 Where extensions to existing contracts are made the extensions must be determined in accordance with the contract terms, for a specified period and made in accordance with the principles set out in the Council's Officers' Guide.

14.2 Any extension must be:

- fully documented
- subject to a written report in an approved format to be submitted to the relevant Chief Officer; which shall include reasons for the extension which demonstrate that the need for the extension is genuinely exceptional
- subject to approval by the relevant Chief Officer who shall record that they have considered the reasons for the extension and that they are satisfied that the circumstances justifying the extension are genuinely exceptional.

14.3 Any extension must take into account:

- probity
- best value/value for money principles.

14.4 For contracts subject to EU Rules, any extension must meet the conditions set out in the EU Rules in addition to the more general requirements set out above.

## **15 Purchasing Schemes**

15.1 A Responsible Officer may use Purchasing Schemes subject to the following conditions and the Council's Officers' Guide.

15.2 Responsible Officers must check in advance that

- the Council is legally entitled to use the Purchasing Scheme
- the purchases to be made do properly fall within the coverage of the Purchasing Scheme

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- the establishment and operation of each Purchasing Scheme is in compliance with the EU Rules (where they apply) and meets the Council's own requirements.

### 15.3 A “Purchasing Scheme” may include:

- contractor prequalification lists/select lists
- framework arrangements (including those set up by the Office of Government Commerce)
- purchasing arrangements set up by central purchasing bodies and commercial organisations
- consortium purchasing
- collaborative working arrangements
- formal agency arrangements
- e-procurement/purchasing schemes and methods
- other similar arrangements

### 15.4 Where a Purchasing Scheme is used then there shall be a whole or partial exemption from the obligations under these Contract Standing Orders in respect of the choice and conduct of procedures to the extent permitted and indicated in the Officers’ Guide.

## **16 Review and Changes to these Contract Standing Orders**

### 16.1 These Contract Standing Orders shall be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Save in the case of revisions to the EU Thresholds in Contract Standing Order 7, amended Contract Standing Orders shall be agreed and adopted by the Audit Board. Revisions to the EU Thresholds shall be dealt with in accordance with Scheme of Delegation.

## APPENDIX E: Contracts Procedure Rules (‘CPR’)

- 1 Introduction – Purpose of the Contract Procedure Rules (CPR)
  - 1.1 Purchasing decisions and processes are important because the money involved is public money. The purpose of these Contract Procedure Rules is to provide a structure within which purchasing decisions are made and implemented and which ensure that the Council:
    - Furthers its corporate objectives
    - Uses its resources efficiently
    - Purchases quality goods, services and works
    - Acts compliantly according to rules around spending public money
    - Safeguards its reputation from any implication of dishonesty or corruption.
  - 1.2 Purchasing by the Council, from planning to delivery, shall incorporate (where appropriate) principles of sustainability, efficiency, whole life costings and cost savings.
  - 1.3 These CPR are made in accordance with the requirements of Section 135 of the Local Government Act 1972.
  - 1.4 These Contract Procedure Rules do not provide guidelines on what is the best way to purchase works, supplies (goods) and services. They set out minimum requirements to be followed. Further information and guidelines are set out in the Council’s Procurement Manual (2021).
- 2 General Principles – Application and Compliance with CPR
  - 2.1 These Contract Procedure Rules apply to the purchase by or on behalf of the Council of works, supplies (goods) and services.
  - 2.2 These Contract Procedure Rules apply to all contracts including all purchase orders, concessions and contractual arrangements entered into by or on behalf of the Council, except for the specific types of contracts and purchasing methods which are listed in 2.3.
  - 2.3 These Contract Procedure Rules do not apply to:
    - Employment contracts or procuring staff\*
    - Contracts relating solely to the purchase or sale of interests in land
    - Contracts for retention of legal counsel and the appointment of expert witnesses in legal proceedings

## Agenda Item 7d

- Service level agreements setting out the conditions which the Council applies to its funding of particular voluntary sector bodies.

\*The term 'staff' refers to employees who are hired and paid for directly by Sevenoaks District Council. This does not include contracts for consultants, contingent labour, temporary staff etc, which are subject to these CPR.

### 3 General Principles Applying to All Contracts

- 3.1 All purchases however small shall be in writing, and appropriate record keeping (in line with Council's Retention Policy) shall apply.
- 3.2 Standard contract clauses shall be used in all contracts of a value of £10,000 or more. The standard contract clauses are issued by Legal Services and can be found accompanying the Procurement Manual (details of which will be published on the intranet).
- 3.3 As a minimum, all contracts of a value of £10,000 or more shall include clauses which set out:
- the works, supplies (goods), services, material, matters or things to be carried out or supplied
  - the time within which the contract is to be performed and when the contract shall cease (NB contracts by default should not automatically renew).
  - quality requirements and/or standards which must be met
  - requirements on the contractor to hold and maintain appropriate insurance
  - what happens in the event that the contractor fails to comply with its contractual obligations (in whole or in part)
  - requirements on the contractor to comply with all relevant equalities and health and safety legislation
  - that the Council shall be entitled to cancel the contract and recover losses in the event that the contractor does anything improper to influence the Council to give the contractor any contract or commits an offence under the Bribery Act 2010 or s117(2) Local Government Act 1972.
- 3.4 All contracts shall include relevant specifications and/or briefs/technical requirements which are prepared taking into account the need for effectiveness of delivery, quality, sustainability and efficiency (as appropriate) and the information set out in the Council's Procurement Manual.
- 3.5 All contracts of a value of £10,000 or more or which involve a substantial

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risk to the Council must be subject to a written risk assessment, which should be kept on the contract file. See Procurement Manual for more details.

## 4 Regulatory Context

4.1 All purchasing shall be conducted in accordance with Regulatory Provisions which are:

- all relevant statutory provisions
- the relevant international rules and treaty principles
- the Council's Constitution including these Contract Procedure Rules, the Council's Financial Procedure Rules and Scheme of Delegation
- the Council's Procurement Strategy, Procurement Manual (and associated Toolkit for Procuring Managers) and other policies and procedures of the Council as appropriate.

4.2 In the event of conflict between the above items, UK legislation will take precedence, then international rules, then the Council's Constitution, the Council's Procurement Manual and policies and procedures.

## 5 Responsibilities of Chief Officers and Responsible Officers

5.1 Each Chief Officer shall:

- be responsible for the purchasing undertaken by his/her service to be undertaken in accordance with these Contract Procedure Rules (and accompanying policies and guidance),
- be accountable to the Cabinet for the performance of his/her duties in relation to purchasing
- comply with the Council's decision making processes including, where appropriate, implementing and operating a Scheme of Delegation
- appoint a Responsible Officer (in line with Council's Scheme of Delegation) in writing who shall be an authorised signatory.
- take immediate action in the event of breach of these Contract Procedure Rules.

5.2 A Responsible Officer is an officer with responsibility for conducting purchasing processes for the purchase of works, supplies (goods) or services on behalf of the Council.

5.3 A Responsible Officer's duties in respect of purchasing are to ensure:

- compliance with all Regulatory Provisions and integrity of the tender

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- process
  - compliance with the relevant statutory provisions and the Council's requirements relating to declarations of interest affecting any purchasing process
  - that there is an appropriate analysis of the requirement, timescales, procedure and documentation to be used
  - the purchasing process, from planning to delivery incorporates (where appropriate) principles of sustainability, efficiency, whole life costings and cost savings
  - compliance with the Council's decision-making processes
  - that all contracts of a value of £10,000 (ex VAT) or more are included on the Council's Contract Register
  - that proper records of all contract award procedures, waivers, exemptions and extensions are maintained, with separate files for each purchase of a value of £10,000 (ex VAT) or more
  - that value for money is achieved
  - that adequate and appropriate security (such as a bond or guarantee) is taken to protect the Council in the event of non-performance.
- 5.4 In considering how best to procure works, supplies and services, Chief Officers and/or Responsible Officers (as appropriate in the context), shall take into account wider contractual delivery opportunities and purchasing methods including the use of Pre-Competed Frameworks and e-procurement/purchasing methods, and the availability of local authority charging and trading powers.
- 5.5 It is a disciplinary offence to fail to comply with these Contract Procedure Rules and the Council's Procurement Manual. All employees have a duty to report breaches of Contract Procedure Rules to the Chief Officer for their service.
- 5.6 Any officer or Member who suspects any misconduct or corruption in relation to the purchase by or on behalf of the Council of works, supplies (goods) and services must immediately report that suspicion to the Council's Monitoring Officer and Chief Officer for their service.
- ## 6 Scheme of Delegation
- 6.1 Council purchasing may only be undertaken by officers with the appropriate delegated authority to carry out such tasks as set out in the Council's Scheme(s) of Delegation. Officers with delegated authority may only delegate to other officers who have the appropriate skills and knowledge for the task and such delegation shall be recorded in writing by the officer delegating the task and notified to the relevant Chief Officer.

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6.2 Officers shall, where appropriate, be informed by their Chief Officer of the extent of any delegated authority and applicable financial thresholds.

## 7 Financial Thresholds and Procedures

7.1 The table below sets out the general rules applying to the choice of purchasing procedure for contracts at the stated threshold values.

7.2 Wherever possible (irrespective of size/value) contract opportunities should be advertised by way of a public notice. The Council must consider the potential effect of a contract on interstate trade. If a contract may be of interest to contractors from other states then this may result in a need to advertise in a manner which ensures that potential contractors from other states are aware of the opportunity, even for small value contracts or contracts under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR) Threshold levels (as indicated below).

7.3 The public notice referred to at 7.2 may take the form of a notice or advertisement in an electronic or paper format, on an easily accessible website or other electronic media and/or in the press, trade journals (as appropriate). Any public notice should be made available on the Council's usual portals (as at April 2021 the Kent Business Portal and [www.mytenders.co.uk](http://www.mytenders.co.uk)). Any contract above the Public Contracts Regulations threshold level must be published also on the Government's Find a Tender Service (FTS). The Responsible Officer may choose to place one or more public notices in different media.

7.4 Table setting out financial thresholds and procedures

Total Value (excluding VAT)	Type of contract	Procedure to be used
£0 to £10,000	works, supplies and services	At least one written quote in advance
£10,000 to £74,999	works, supplies and services	At least three written quotes in advance
£75,000 to £1 below PCR threshold for supplies and services **	Supplies and services	At least three written tenders in advance, following advertisement by public notice

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PCR Threshold and above for supplies and services £189,330 **	Supplies and services	PCR Rules apply - full competitive process following advertisement in the FTS for supplies and Part A* services. For Part B* services reduced requirements apply under the PCR Rules but there is a presumption in favour of advertising and a competitive process.
£75,000 to PCR Threshold for works  £4,733,252 **	Works	Full competitive process with tenders following advertisement by public notice
From PCR Threshold for works  £4,733,252 **	Works	PCR Rules apply - full competitive process with tenders following FTS advertisement

\* For the purposes of the Public Contract Regulations (2015) services are divided in various types which demand different handling. Responsible Officers should act cautiously and seek advice from Legal Services when considering the relevant procedure to be used.

\*\* These figures are correct at June 2021 but officers should check for details of the relevant threshold in force at the time of their procurement.

7.5 Where contracts are of a type and value which means that they are subject to the PCR Rules then there are various procedures available. These are detailed in the Procurement Manual. Care must be taken to ensure that the correct and most appropriate procedure is used and assistance on the choice and use of procedure should be sought. Please see the Procurement Manual for more information.

## 8 Financial Thresholds and Processes Applying to Approval and Execution of Contracts

8.1 For contracts over the relevant PCR Threshold (in force at the time), the choice of purchasing procedure to be used and the decision to proceed to advertisement must be authorised in writing by the relevant Chief Officer in advance.

8.2 When a decision is made to award a contract then the Responsible Officer must, in addition to complying with his/her general obligations under these Contract Procedure Rules ensure, in particular, that:

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- the appropriate approvals have been obtained to authorise that decision; and
- where appropriate, a standstill period complying with the PCR Rules is incorporated into the final award process.

8.3 Any contracts valued at £75,000 or above shall be executed as a deed. All other contracts may be signed by officers with appropriate delegated authority. £10,000 shall be the threshold for the purposes of Regulation 8 of the Local Authority (Executive Arrangements) (Modification of Enactments and Further Provisions) (England) Order 2001.

8.4 Electronic signatures may be used provided the sufficiency of security arrangements has been approved by the relevant service Chief Officer.

## 9 Calculating the Contract Value

9.1 The starting point for calculating the contract value for the purposes of these Contract Procedure Rules is that the contract value shall be the genuine pre-estimate of the value of the entire contract excluding Value Added Tax. This includes all payments to be made, or potentially to be made, under the entirety of the contract and for the whole of the predicted contract period (including proposed extensions and options).

9.2 By way of an example, whole life cost should be calculated as follows:

- If a contract for services is costing £20,000 per year but it needs to run for 3 years, the whole life cost = £60,000 ex VAT
- All contracts should be awarded ex VAT
- It should be made clear in your pricing section of the contract that VAT is to be applied at the prevailing rate.

9.3 There shall be no artificial splitting of a contract to avoid the application of the provisions of the PCR Rules and/or these Contract Procedure Rules.

9.4 The PCR Rules can cover contracts which are below the stated PCR threshold where they constitute repeat purchases and/or purchases of a similar type in a specified period. Responsible Officers should therefore seek advice on the application of the PCR Rules where they envisage that they may require repeat purchases and/or purchases of a similar type.

## 10 Principles Underlying Tendering Processes and Tender Evaluation

10.1 All tendering procedures (including obtaining quotes), from planning to contract award and signature, shall be undertaken in a manner so as to ensure:

- Sufficient time is given to plan and run the process

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- Equal opportunity and equal treatment
- Openness and transparency and that our decisions can be evidenced and reported on (should this be necessary)
- Probity and justifiable decision making
- Outcomes which deliver sustainability, efficiency and cost savings (where appropriate).

### 11 Submission and Opening of Tenders

- 11.1 An Invitation to Tender ('ITT') shall be issued by the Council for all contracts over £75,000 and tenders shall be submitted in accordance with the requirements of the Invitation to Tender. The templates ITT (alongside others) are available in the Toolkit supplied with the Procurement Manual.
- 11.2 Any tenders received (other than those received electronically, to which 11.3 shall apply) shall be:
- addressed to the Head of Legal & Democratic Services.
  - in a sealed envelope marked "Tender" followed by the subject matter to which it relates
  - kept in a safe place by Democratic Services where restricted access applies only to those who are authorised to have access.
  - retained unopened until the date and time specified for its opening.
- 11.3 Where the Council has indicated in the Invitation to Tender that a tender can or must be submitted electronically, then those tenders shall be:
- addressed to the e-mail address as notified in the Invitation to Tender or managed via the mytenders.co.uk portal.
  - in the format specified in the Invitation to Tender and kept confidential
  - stored in a secure mailbox, which requires a code or other appropriate security measure, to open it
  - retained unopened until the date and time specified for its opening.
- 11.4 No tender received after the time and date specified for its opening shall be accepted or considered by the Council unless the Head of Legal & Democratic Services/Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer Corporate Services is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence of the tender having been dispatched in time for it to have arrived before the closing date and time, or other exceptional circumstances apply, and the other tenders have not been opened.
- 11.5 Tenders shall be opened in the presence of the relevant Chief Officer and an immediate record shall be made of tenders received including names

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and addresses and the date and time of opening.

## 12 Evaluation of Quotes and Tenders

- 12.1 All quotes and tenders shall be evaluated in accordance with evaluation criteria notified in advance to those submitting quotes/tenderers.
- 12.2 Tenders subject to the PCR Rules shall be evaluated in accordance with the Rules.
- 12.3 Save in exceptional circumstances approved in advance by the appropriate Chief Officer all contracts shall be awarded on the basis of the quote or tender which represents best value for money to the Council and not on the basis of lowest price. See the Procurement Manual (and associated Toolkit) for more information.

## 13 Waivers

- 13.1 The requirement for the Council to conduct a competitive purchasing process for contracts in excess of £10,000\* may be waived in certain limited circumstances, which include the following
- for contracts which are not subject to the PCR Rules, the work, supply or service is required as a matter of urgency and a delay would be likely to lead to financial loss, personal injury or damage to property; or
  - the circumstances set out in Regulation 14 apply (whether or not the contract is of a type which is subject to the application of the PCR Rules); or
  - the contract is awarded under a Pre-Competed Framework (where direct award is permitted) of a type where a competition has already been undertaken on behalf of the Council.

\*Please note that the waiver process applies to purchases of £10,000 (ex VAT) or more. Below this threshold, Responsible Officers must seek 1 written quote to compliantly meet the Procurement threshold requirements.

- 13.2 A Responsible Officer who seeks a waiver of Contract Procedure Rules, shall do so only in advance and only in exceptional circumstances. Further guidance on what may constitute exceptional circumstances permitting waiver of these Contract Procedure Rules and general tender direction is set out in the Council's Procurement Manual.
- 13.3 All waivers from these Contract Procedure Rules must be:
- fully documented
  - subject to a written report in an approved format to be submitted in advance to the relevant Chief Officer which shall include reasons for

## Agenda Item 7d

the waiver which demonstrate that the waiver is genuinely required

- subject to approval in advance by the Procurement Assurance Group (PAG) who shall record that they have considered the reasons for the waiver and that they are satisfied that the circumstances justifying the waiver are genuinely exceptional.

13.4 All decisions on waivers must take into account:

- probity
- best value/value for money principles.
- Representative of the whole / total contract cost not split to ensure the value of the service (or goods) being waived appears lower.

13.5 For contracts subject to the PCR Rules, any waiver from the requirement for competition must meet the conditions set out in the PCR Rules in addition to the general requirements above.

13.6 A waiver shall not be applied for reasons of poor contract planning and any such attempt to do so shall be escalated to the Chief Officer and / or Procurement Assurance Group (PAG).

## 14 Extensions to Existing Contracts

14.1 Where extensions to existing contracts are made the extensions must be determined in accordance with the contract terms, for a specified period and made in accordance with the principles set out in the Council's Procurement Manual.

14.2 Any extension must be:

- fully documented
- subject to a written report in an approved format to be submitted to the relevant Chief Officer; which shall include reasons for the extension which demonstrate that the need for the extension is genuinely exceptional
- subject to approval by the relevant Chief Officer who shall record that they have considered the reasons for the extension and that they are satisfied that the circumstances justifying the extension are genuinely exceptional.

14.3 Any extension must take into account:

- probity
- best value/value for money principles.
- Legality of any extension in line with Government Procurement

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## Regulations.

- 14.4 For contracts subject to PCR Rules, any extension must meet the conditions set out in these rules in addition to the more general requirements set out above.
- 15 Procurement Frameworks & Other Purchasing Schemes
- 15.1 A Responsible Officer may use Procurement Frameworks subject to the following conditions and the Council's Procurement Manual.
- 15.2 Responsible Officers must check in advance that
- the Council is legally entitled to use the Procurement Framework and that we can adhere to its terms
  - 
  - That any applicable fees which relate to its usage, have been paid by the Council
  - the purchases to be made do properly fall within the coverage of the Procurement Framework
  - the establishment and operation of each Procurement Framework is in compliance with the PCR Rules (where they apply) and meets the Council's own requirements.
- 15.3 Other applicable "Purchasing Schemes" may include:
- contractor prequalification lists/select lists
  - framework arrangements (including those set up by the Crown Commercial Service)
  - purchasing arrangements set up by central purchasing bodies and commercial organisations
  - consortium purchasing
  - collaborative working arrangements
  - formal agency arrangements
  - e-procurement/purchasing schemes and methods
  - other similar arrangements
- 15.4 Where a Procurement Framework is used meaning a pre competition of the relevant supplier's suitability has already taken place, then this shall constitute a compliant route to market in line with the Contract Procedure Rules.
- 16 Review and Changes to these Contract Procedure Rules

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- 16.1 These Contract Procedure Rules shall be reviewed and updated on a regular basis (ideally annually). Save in the case of revisions to the PCR Thresholds in Contract Standing Order 7, amended Contract Procedure Rules shall be agreed and adopted by the Audit Committee. Revisions to the PCR Thresholds shall be dealt with in accordance with Scheme of Delegation.

## Cllr Fleming - Leader's Report

**From: 5 April 2021 - 2 July 2021**

Date	Event
8 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural Housing Ideas Meeting via Zoom</li> <li>• Speaker at Public Sector Executive Conference on Digital Transformation online</li> <li>• MHCLG Ministerial Webinar via Teams</li> <li>• Zoom meeting with Chris Tsielepi and David Leach of Cyclepods</li> </ul>
9 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet/SMT Coronavirus Update Teleconference - SDC</li> </ul>
12 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoom call with Debbie King of The Chronicle re Bank Street licensing</li> </ul>
14 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kent Council Leaders' Covid-19 Meeting via Teams</li> </ul>
16 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet/SMT Coronavirus Update Teleconference - SDC</li> </ul>
20 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council via Zoom</li> </ul>
21 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoom call re Darent Valley Sustainable Transport</li> <li>• LGA Podcast interview via Teams</li> </ul>
22 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kent &amp; Medway Business Fund Investment Advisory Board via Teams</li> <li>• Interview with MHCLG re Grants simplification review via Zoom</li> <li>• Cabinet via Zoom</li> </ul>
23 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• West Kent Partnership via Teams</li> <li>• Visit to Quinton Court, Sevenoaks to view Moat Housing properties - Sevenoaks</li> </ul>
27 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LGA Improvement &amp; Innovation Lead Member Meeting via Zoom</li> <li>• Teams call with Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy</li> </ul>
29 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sevenoaks District Business Board via Zoom</li> <li>• Call with APHA re Oaks Farm</li> </ul>
30 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet/SMT Coronavirus Update Teleconference - SDC</li> </ul>
4 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kent Police Briefing via Teams</li> </ul>
11 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kent &amp; Medway Business Fund Investment Advisory Board Funding Meeting via Teams</li> </ul>
12 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoom call with local residents re Edenbridge Leisure Centre</li> <li>• Kent County Leaders' Meeting via Teams</li> </ul>
13 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Induction Presentation - SDC</li> </ul>
14 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet/SMT Coronavirus Update Teleconference - SDC</li> </ul>
19 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Net Zero catch-up Zoom call with officers</li> <li>• DCN Member Board Meeting via Zoom</li> <li>• Kent &amp; Medway Economic Partnership Meeting via Zoom</li> </ul>
20 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LGA Improvement &amp; Innovation Board Meeting via Zoom</li> <li>• UK CRF Local Stakeholder Panel Meeting via Zoom</li> </ul>

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Date	Event
21 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Induction presentation at Dunbrik</li> </ul>
24 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCN May Assembly via Zoom</li> </ul>
27 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet - SDC</li> </ul>
28 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet/SMT Coronavirus Update Teleconference - SDC</li> <li>• Filming for Mental Health Strategy video</li> </ul>
2 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MHCLG Ministerial Webinar via Teams</li> <li>• Meeting with KCC Cllr Richard Streatfeild - SDC</li> </ul>
8 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sevenoaks District Business Board via Zoom</li> </ul>
9 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair IDEa Board via Teams</li> <li>• Attendance at Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board - SDC</li> </ul>
10 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LGA Councillors' Forum via Zoom</li> <li>• LGA Executive Advisory Board via Zoom</li> </ul>
11 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cabinet/SMT Coronavirus Update Teleconference - SDC</li> </ul>
14 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview for Democratic Services vacancy</li> </ul>
15 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker at Transforming Technology Conference via Zoom</li> </ul>
16 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstration and Siting of Solar Compactor Street Bin - Sevenoaks</li> <li>• Telephone call with Sir Bob Kerlake</li> <li>• Kent County Leaders' Meeting via Teams</li> <li>• Fort Halstead Meeting via Zoom</li> </ul>
17 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MHCLG Ministerial Webinar via Teams</li> </ul>
21 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Armed Forces Flag Raising - SDC</li> </ul>
24 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kent &amp; Medway Climate Leads' Meeting via Teams</li> <li>• Improvement &amp; Innovation Advisory Committee - SDC</li> </ul>
25 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit to Bore Place &amp; Bough Beech Reservoir</li> </ul>
28 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LGA New Councillors' Welcome Event via Zoom</li> </ul>
30 June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DCN Member Board via Zoom</li> </ul>

**AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT TO COUNCIL - 20 JULY 2021**

**Council - 20 July 2021**

Report of: Cllr McGarvey, Chair of the Audit Committee

Status: For Consideration

**Introduction and Background**

- 1 This is our report to the Council on the work of the Audit Committee since Council last met in April 2021.
- 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 meets four times per year and has met once since the last report to Council. However, that meeting took place on 15 July which was after the report deadline for the Council meeting on 20 July.
- 4 As Chair of the Committee, I have continued to hold monthly briefings with Officers.
- 5 Details of the range of issues to be considered by the Committee on 15 July are set out below:

**Internal Audit**

Date of Meeting	Agenda Items
July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal Audit Annual Report and Annual Opinion 2020/21</li> </ul>

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### Governance, Risk & Anti-Fraud

Date of Meeting	Agenda Items
July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Audit Committee Terms of Reference</li><li>• Counter Fraud and Compliance Report 2020/21</li><li>• Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit Committee 2020/21</li><li>• Consideration of recruitment of Independent Audit Committee Member(s)</li></ul>

### Accounts and External Audit

Date of Meeting	Agenda Items
July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• External Audit - Housing Benefit Subsidy 2019/20</li><li>• Annual Governance Statement 2020/21</li><li>• Statement of Accounts 2020/21 - Establishment of Member Working Group</li></ul>

- 6 The Audit Committee maintains a constructive dialogue and effective working relationship with the Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton who attended on 15 July.
- 7 Training of Audit Committee Members is important to ensure that they can add value to the discussions at the Committee. A Member Development Plan has been agreed by the Committee including a training session on Counter-Fraud and Whistle Blowing which took place on 15 July.
- 8 It is my opinion that the work of the Committee has 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.
- 9 I thank all members of the Audit Committee for their personal contribution to the work of the Committee over the past year. I also thank Officers, in particular Adrian Rowbotham and Francesca Chivers, for the help and support they have given the Committee.

**Cllr Philip McGarvey, Chairman, Audit Committee**