

Report to Cabinet

21 March 2019

By The Cabinet Member for Planning And
Development



DECISION REQUIRED

Not Exempt

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek agreement for the adoption of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2019-2024 which has been produced by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee following a five year review. The following report provides an overview of the statutory and policy background to the Management Plan, provides specific details on the management plan itself, including its history, provides information on previous consultations, next steps, other courses of action that could have been taken and why they were not and finally resource consequences of preparing this management plan.

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended

- i) That the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019 – 2024 is adopted by this Council as the Management Plan for the High Weald AONB within Horsham District.

Reasons for Recommendations

- i) This recommendation is considered necessary as local authorities with land in an AONB are legally obliged under the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and publish an AONB management plan.

Background Papers

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024.

Wards affected:

Cowfold, Shermanbury and West Grinstead
Forest
Nuthurst
Roffey South
Colgate

Contact:

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Background Information

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement for the adoption of the [JAC Approved High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024](#). (See Appendix 1). This Management Plan has been prepared to update the existing adopted Management Plan 2014-2019,

2 Statutory and Policy Background

Statutory background

- 2.1 Under the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000, it is a requirement that local authorities prepare and publish a management plan for any Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) within their authority area. This places a requirement on the Council to ensure a Management Plan is prepared for the High Weald AONB, situated in the north east of the district. The High Weald covers 15 separate local authority areas, and to ensure that the landscape is managed as a whole, the relevant local authorities jointly fund the High Weald AONB Partnership. The partnership is overseen by a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) which is made up of a councillor from each of the contributing local authorities. The High Weald Partnership has been tasked with the preparation of the Management Plan on behalf of all local authorities. The current High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 – 2019 was adopted in March 2014 and is due to be replaced by this review.

Relevant Council policy

- 2.2 The Council seeks to protect and enhance protected landscape through the Horsham District Planning Framework (Adopted November 2015), particularly the following policies:

Policy 24: Environmental Protection states: *“The high quality of the district’s environment will be protected through the planning process and the provision of local guidance documents.”*

Policy 30: Protected Landscapes states: *“The natural beauty and public enjoyment of the High Weald AONB and the adjoining South Downs National Park will be conserved and enhanced” “Proposals should have regard to any management plans for these areas”*

The content of the High Weald Management Plan is a material planning consideration for planning proposals in the High Weald AONB area.

3.0 Details

- 3.1 The first version of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) management plan was adopted in March 2004. The management plan is subject to five yearly reviews, with previous updates completed in 2009 and 2014. The current Management Plan runs to 2019, and therefore a review and update of the plan has recently been undertaken.
- 3.2 The High Weald Management Plan aims to take character-led approach to the High Weald Area of Natural Beauty (AONB), setting out the long term policy objectives and short term targets for conserving natural beauty. The Plan also includes a description of the High Weald and its history; the vision; an introduction to the legislation and principles of the plan; the Statement of Significance; facts and figures describing the state of the High Weald landscape, and a section on implementation and monitoring.

3.3 The key points of the High Weald JAC's vision for the future of the High Weald are 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.
- 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.
- Is valued and understood by people, businesses and communities, championed by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

3.4 The Plan commits the High Weald partnership members to:

- Continue to work together towards sound planning policies across the AONB which allow planning proposals to be considered on a consistent basis.
- Use the Plan as a 'checklist' against which to assess the impact that a range of activities may have on the AONB.
- Use the Plan to identify effects of proposed development on the AONB helping ensure any development is 'landscape-led,' and contributes to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.
- Use the Plan to help assess whether activities close to but not within the High Weald have the potential to affect the qualities of the AONB landscape.
- Use the Plan and supporting research, to contribute to criteria for judging what might count as sustainable development within the AONB.

3.5 The review of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan was undertaken in consultation with all the local authority partners, who provided comments on early drafts of the plan as it was being prepared. Key areas of engagement were as follows:

- **Expert Engagement:** A series of High Weald character component-themed workshops were hosted during May 2017. A range of experts and advisers in relevant fields were invited to submit their views on various aspects of a specific character component. Those unable to attend the workshops also had the opportunity of submitting their views via a feedback form.
- **Public Engagement:** From September to November 2017, the High Weald AONB Partnership ran an online public engagement survey as part of the ongoing Management Plan review. A total of 294 people completed the survey and the results were subject to a full qualitative and quantitative analysis.
- **Public Consultation:** Following agreement by the JAC, the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 Consultation Draft was published for a formal period of public consultation between 13 June and 25 July 2018. Comments were invited from a wide range of organisations including statutory and voluntary organisations. Formal letters and emails were sent out to stakeholders inviting them to make comments and information was made available on the website, libraries and in adverts in country magazines. 143 responses were received from 115 individuals and 28 organisations including a response from Horsham District Council.

- 3.6 Following the review of the consultation draft management plan, the view at Horsham District Council was that there were no significant issues or concerns arising from the proposed Management Plan but a number of detailed comments and suggestions were made, including a suggestion to help ensure the retention of field patterns and landscape features and to enhance opportunities for everyone to appreciate and understand the character of the AONB.
- 3.7 Responses to the public consultation were collated over the summer 2018. These responses were summarised by the High Weald Partnership and are published on the High Weald Partnership website.
<http://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan/management-plan-review.html>
- 3.8 All responses were considered by the High Weald Partnership and the Officer Steering Group which comprises Members from the 15 Local Authorities. This led to changes being made to the Management Plan including enhanced references to the suggestions made in the paragraph set out above. A full text of the final documentation is attached as Appendix 1.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 The final High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 was agreed by the Joint Advisory Committee on 28 November 2018. The High Weald Partnership have now written to Horsham District Council requesting that the authority agree to adopt the management plan, to enable it to be used as the framework for continued management and protection of this nationally important landscape.

5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations

- 5.1 Horsham District Council officers were involved in the preparation of the Management Plan during 2018, and comments and suggestions have been incorporated in to the new management plan.

PDAG: The new management plan is due to be reviewed by PDAG on 14 March 2019. Any comments will be reported orally at the Cabinet meeting. Cllr Kitchen who has been involved as the Council's representative to the High Weald Partnership has indicated that she fully supports the plan. 22/02/19

Finance department: No comment 21/2/19

Legal Department: No comment received

Monitoring officer: No comment 18/2/19

Director of Place: No comment received.

6 Other courses of action considered but rejected

- 6.1 Another course of action could be for this Council to produce a Management Plan for the area of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Horsham District alone. This option is however rejected as it would require a greater level of financial and staff resourcing than if undertaken by the High Weald AONB Unit. In addition, there is a risk that a Management Plan produced solely for the area of the High Weald in Horsham District would

lack the linkages to the wider High Weald landscape beyond the district boundary and limit the effectiveness of such a plan.

7 Resource Consequences

- 6.1 It is not considered that there are any major direct staffing or resource consequences arising from this report in addition to the normal staff time that is spent in relation to High Weald matters.

8. Financial Consequences

- 8.1 There are no direct financial consequences arising from this report. to the council pays an existing annual funding contribution towards the High Weald AONB Unit in order to enable this Council to meet out statutory functions in relation to this important landscape.

9. Legal Consequences

- 9.1 Under section 89 of the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 the council is required by law to formally adopt a Management Plan for the area designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that falls within the District. The preparation and adoption of the updated Management Plan will ensure that the Council meets its legal obligations in this respect.

10. Risk Assessment

- 10.1 There are no specific risks which have been identified with the adoption of this management plan. There would a significant risk should the plan not be adopted by the Council as it would not be meeting the legal obligations placed upon the authority. This would therefore require additional funding and cost to the authority as it would still be required to prepare such documentation.

11. Other Considerations

- 11.1 There are no consequences in respect of Crime & Disorder; Human Rights; Equality & Diversity and Sustainability associated with the adoption of the Management Plan.

Appendix 1

The [High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024](#)

Appendix 2

Map of the High Weald AONB in Horsham District.