

High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2009



Stakeholder Questionnaire

The High Weald AONB Unit is currently in the process of reviewing the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004. As part of the review process we would like to ask your opinion on the plans fitness for purpose. Please can you take a little time to complete the pro forma below and return it to us by the 25th January 2008.

Your Details

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How often do you use or refer to the Management Plan?

Daily? Weekly? Monthly?
(no of times) (no of times) (no of times)
Annually Ad Hoc
(no of times) (as required)

We use the Plan about once a month at the moment.

1 General Questions

1.1	Is the Plan easy to use, clear and concise? On the whole. But for the layman, the interplay of legislation and the policies and strategies of different bodies --- and therefore the context and role of the AONB Plan --- is not easy to grasp.
1.2	Is the plan clear about what it is trying to achieve & what its main principles are? Yes.
1.3	What aspects of the Plan do you think work well? The Part I chapters. They make the Plan concrete.
1.4	What aspects of the Plan do you think don't work well? See (1.1) above. And there is also a danger of over-structuring the document with objectives, rationales, indicators, targets, etc.
1.5	The Plan sets out 5 main 'components' of natural beauty. Do you agree with these? Should we include anything else? Archaeology and history may deserve to be a component in their own right.
1.6	How (or for what) do you use the Plan? Focusing our Local Action Plan. Informing comments on local development proposals. Supporting applications for local project funding by helping to identify special features locally as important within the AONB.

2 The Components of Natural Beauty

2.1	Geology, Water systems and climate is a key component of natural beauty. Do you agree with the Objectives and Indicators of Success (see attachment)
	Yes, but there could usefully be some focus on the conservation of the valley levels (eg Brede, Tillingham, Rother). In view of rising sea levels, the Plan may also need to consider the implications for its (small) coastal region.
	Do you have any comments on the Targets? (to be updated as part of the review)
	No.
2.2	Settlement is a key component of natural beauty. Do you agree with the Objectives and Indicators of Success (see attachment)
	Conservation of archaeology and history could perhaps be an Objective in their own right. The problem of traffic within villages needs to be addressed. It is often the most serious problem perceived by residents and has a major adverse impact of the quality of life. The historic layout of settlements is often problematic for traffic flow and traffic management needs to be sensitive if the historic character of settlements is to be preserved. The issue of the design and maintenance of the Public Realm within settlements needs to be addressed. Light pollution and the issue of 'tranquillity' should be addressed.
	Do you have any comments on the Targets? (to be updated as part of the review)
	Practical measures are needed to support Indicator (i) under Objective S3. In particular, the creation by County Councils of archaeological and historic GIS to consolidate our knowledge would be very useful. Reference should be made to implementation of policies on the Public Realm, eg "Streets for All".
2.3	Routeways is a key component of natural beauty. Do you agree with the Objectives and Indicators of Success (see attachment)
	(2.2) above may be relevant. More protection is needed for small country roads and roads within villages, including verges and pavements, and the problem of SatNav causing greater use of rural lanes by large vehicles needs to be recognised.
	Do you have any comments on the Targets? (to be updated as part of the review)
	No.
2.4	Woodland is a key component of natural beauty. Do you agree with the Objectives and Indicators of Success (see attachment)
	Yes.
	Do you have any comments on the Targets? (to be updated as part of the review)
	No.
2.5	Field and Heath is a key component of natural beauty. Do you agree with the Objectives and Indicators of Success (see attachment)
	Yes.
	Do you have any comments on the Targets? (to be updated as part of the review)
	No.
2.1	Public Understanding & Enjoyment is a key component of natural beauty. Do you agree with the Objectives and Indicators of Success (see attachment)

	There needs to be more emphasis on the understanding and enjoyment of local historic/cultural features.
	Do you have any comments on the Targets? (to be updated as part of the review)
	There needs to be stronger targeting of more integration of visitor management initiatives. At the moment, there is a plethora of walking routes and schemes producing leaflets and brochures within the same area but with little reference to each other. This is wasteful and confusing to visitors.

3 Other Issues and Plans 'Fitness'

3.1	What other issues should the Plan be addressing? (environmental, rural etc.)
	The Public Realm within villages. Light pollution and tranquillity. The maintenance and management of the treescape within villages. Traffic through villages and down small country roads, and its impact on the quality of rural life. The role, importance and threat to local shops and post offices. Public transport.
3.2	What local matters should the Plan be addressing?
	See (3.1).
3.3	What else would you like to see the Plan refer to?
	See (3.1).
3.4	How else can the Plan help your activity?
	Greater definition of the boundary of the AONB around Winchelsea as we are on the very edge.
3.5	Do you consider that the Plan is Fit For Purpose? If not please say why.
	Yes, but everything is capable of improvement.

The Unit is a strategic, specialist team that advises on the management of the nationally valued landscape of the High Weald. It furthers understanding of the area's special qualities and enables action to conserve it. It is funded by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership of the 15 local authorities whose areas are covered by the AONB;

- ◆ Kent, Surrey, East and West Sussex County Councils;
- ◆ Ashford, Tunbridge Wells, Crawley, Tonbridge & Malling and Hastings Borough Councils;
- ◆ Wealden, Rother, Horsham, Mid Sussex, Sevenoaks, and Tandridge, District Councils.
- ◆ Natural England and other organizations representing farming, forestry, community, business and recreation interests.

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Appendix - Natural Beauty Components Objectives, Indicators, Targets

Geology Water Systems & Climate

G1 Objective: To restore the natural function of river catchments	Rationale: to protect the built-environment and human life by safe water conveyance across the levels, whilst improving the aquatic ecosystems of the High Weald, mitigating the effects of increasingly frequent and high peak flows, improving the social and economic function of the rivers and streams (e.g. potable water quality and amenity value), and reducing the high costs of maintaining the current system.
Indicators of success	i) reduction in the rate at which flood waters pass down the middle and upper reaches of the AONB's catchments, and reduction of excessive sedimentation due to run off
	ii) shift in the balance between the quantity of floodwater conveyed directly to the outfalls and the quantity diverted into temporary storage on the floodplains
Targets for 2009	a) land management advice for gills, and upper and middle reaches for the entire AONB developed and communicated to advisers and land managers
	b) one or more pilot projects established (e.g. through agri-environment support) that demonstrate the potential benefits of the strategy
	c) discussion forum established with the Environment Agency flood defence team and with the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) for the levels
	d) research undertaken on any existing mechanistic hydraulic modelling of the Rother and developed to generate a model that can verify the scope for change and anticipate risks and rewards
	e) one or more pilot projects undertaken (e.g. through agri-environment support) to demonstrate the benefits of the strategy and the modelling
G2 Objective: To protect the sandstone outcrops	Rationale: to maintain the nationally important geological exposures; to conserve the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support; and to protect their value as some of the most significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB
Indicators of success	i) no loss of sandstone outcrops
	ii) favourable condition achieved at important outcrops
Targets for 2009	a) no change in extent from 2004 baseline
	b) important outcrops identified and management plans produced that accommodate sensitive use for climbing where appropriate

Settlement

S1 Objective: To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with surrounding countryside	to understand and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the symbiosis with the surrounding countryside, that defines sustainable rural settlement. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports other land management objectives of the management plan and AONB designation.
Indicators of success	i) better understanding of the role of settlement in sustainable management of the AONB
	ii) increased connection between settlements and that part of the economy based on the local countryside
Targets for 2009	a) a study, resulting in good practice principles, to identify the existing sustainability attributes of individual settlements, and networks of settlements, and their connections with the countryside
	b) guidance produced on renewable energy schemes for local communities and businesses

	c) pilot rural community renewable energy schemes in operation
	d) an increase in number and frequency of farmers' markets in High Weald villages and towns
	e) possibility explored with LAs for legislative change for provision for affordable housing for key workers and, especially, land-based workers
S2 Objective: To protect the historic pattern of settlement	Rationale: to protect the distinctive character of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, and to maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation) between such settlements that contribute to local identity.
Indicators of success	i) enhanced awareness of AONB objectives to help inform emerging plans and policies
Targets for 2009	a) ability of the AONB partnership to comment on draft development plans (or local development frameworks), and national and regional policy guidance and strategies
	b) identification by LAs of required AONB-wide guidance and information (e.g. for suburbanization), and production thereof
S3 Objective: To enhance the architectural quality of the HW	Rationale: to protect and enhance the architectural identity of the High Weald, and to re-establish the use of local materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to this distinctiveness.
Indicators of success	i) improvement in condition and setting of historic environment
	ii) better design of new buildings and alterations, and wider use of locally-sourced materials
Targets for 2009	a) cleared backlog of repairs to listed buildings and scheduled monuments on English Heritage 'at risk register'
	b) conservation area statements (appraisal/management plan) completed for all conservation areas in the AONB
	c) design guidance produced (where needed) that promotes high quality design, local materials and distinctiveness, and environmental design and construction techniques

Routeways

R1 Objective: To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways	Rationale: to maintain routeway boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; to maintain a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands, and identity; and to protect the individual archaeological features of the historic routeways.
Indicators of success	i) increased protection for and awareness of the best preserved examples of networks of ancient routeways
	ii) historic street furniture retained
	iii) the undeveloped nature of rural lanes maintained
Targets for 2009	a) the best examples identified through research project and protected through national heritage designation for areas of landscape importance, and included in Rights of Way Improvement plans so that they become part of the overall access planning for the AONB
	b) agri-environment target aimed at protecting historic routeways and their archaeology
	c) turnpike-related features (e.g. milestones) identified
	d) timber finger posts identified, retained and maintained
	e) guidelines adopted by LAs throughout AONB. These will promote use of characteristic boundaries and the reduction of the impact of intrusive highway engineering and signage. The latter could promote tight (non-swept) junctions; resist kerbs and drains (especially on sunken lanes); minimize road markings; and promote unintrusive traffic calming
R2 Objective: To enhance the ecological function of routeways	Rationale: to improve the condition and connectivity of habitats along routeways for wildlife.

Indicators of success	i) favourable ecological condition achieved along routeways
	ii) better protection secured for routeways of ecological value
Targets for 2009	a) key types of ecological feature of routeways identified and guidelines for good management produced and promoted
	b) subsidy and support mechanisms targeted at ecology of routeways
	c) routeways of ecological importance identified and protected through designations such as SNCI and designated verge

Woodland

W1 Objective: To maintain existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland	Rationale: to maintain irreplaceable habitats for biodiversity, to maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to maintain contribution to carbon storage
Indicators of success	i) no further loss of ancient woodland
Targets for 2009	a) no change in ancient woodland from 2004 baseline (including woodlands under 2ha, not currently mapped, as information becomes available)
W2 Objective: To enhance the ecological functioning of woodland at a landscape scale	Rationale: to increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and building on existing areas of high value, extending the area of appropriately managed woodland to link and enhance isolated habitats and species populations, providing greater connectivity between woodlands and other important wildlife areas, and helping to facilitate species' response to climate change
Indicators of success	i) favourable condition for wildlife achieved in important woodland areas, focusing on appropriate management for key habitats and species
	ii) increase in connectivity
	iii) appropriate restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland (PAWS)
	iv) improved understanding of the ecological value of wooded heaths
Targets for 2009	a) important woodlands identified, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodlands supporting population of key BAP species, particularly threatened species showing regional/national decline • Large woodland areas providing suitable habitat size for wide range of characteristic species • Nationally important BAP habitats (wet woodlands) • Woodland areas and associated habitats identified in relevant Habitat Action Plans, including gill woodlands, wood pasture & parkland, and Veteran Trees
	b) subsidy and support mechanisms strategically focused on key woodlands with a shift from a reactive to a proactive approach
	c) decline in key species reversed through landscape-scale species analysis, leading to the short-term focusing of management in critical areas possibly supported by a dedicated land management team
	d) guidelines for good management produced and promoted to woodland owners
	e) relevant Habitat Action Plan commitments fulfilled by partner organizations
	f) landscape-scale management strategies for damaging and/or invasive species agreed
	g) better protection and management of smaller ancient woodlands, including mapping of all woodlands under 2ha
	h) woodland listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory to have supporting ecological information available from the relevant

	Local Record Centre
	i) key areas identified for increasing habitat size and connectivity through increased understanding of edge effects, the value of core areas, analysis of species trends, and identification of small, isolated woodlands
	j) increased connectivity between woodland and other important habitat areas, to promote a wildlife-rich habitat mosaic
	k) increased understanding and promotion of the wildlife value of interhabitat transition zones (ecotones)
	l) planned programme implemented for key PAWS sites where restoration will make the greatest contribution to habitat and species connectivity
	m) partnership project established to produce management guidelines for wooded heaths
W3 Objective: To protect the archaeology of AONB woodlands	Rationale: to protect the historic environment of the AONB represented by the unusual concentration of archaeological sites and monuments within ancient and secondary woodlands
Indicators of success	i) increased protection for key archaeological sites and monuments ii) improved management and understanding of historic environment
Targets for 2009	a) increased number of sites and monuments found within woodlands (e.g. ironworking sites) protected by a national heritage designation b) woodlands with good archaeological resource identified and guidelines for appropriate management produced and promoted c) archaeological surveys undertaken prior to publicly-funded management
W4 Objective: To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and under wood for local markets	Rationale: to achieve the most effective management that will deliver the other objectives for woodland, to contribute to sustainable domestic timber production, to support a working countryside, to contribute to UK and international targets for renewable energy, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed woodlands and greenhouse-gas producing international transport
Indicators of success	i) a thriving woodland industry supporting sustainable woodland management within the AONB
Targets for 2009	a) improved marketing of existing wood products and new markets established for locally-sourced timber and under wood b) support mechanisms tailored to industry need generated through greater understanding of the woodland industry c) increase in timber and under wood sales d) increase in number of skilled coppice workers e) 20% increase in United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS) certified woodlands from 2004 baseline f) landscape-scale strategies for grey squirrel control agreed and implemented

Field and Heath

FH1 Objective: To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald AONB, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management	Rationale: to contribute to sustainable domestic food and non-food agricultural production, to support a working countryside, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long-distance transport that produces air pollutants causing harm to health and the environment
Indicators of success	i) an increase in added value to agricultural products ii) increase in production that directly benefits the environment iii) infrastructure established to support main agricultural sectors, especially livestock

	iv) increased demand for locally produced agricultural products
Targets for 2009	a) increase in support for adding value
	b) expansion of farm diversification schemes directly linked to added value
	c) increase in cooperative enterprises such as farm machinery rings
	d) improvement in advice, facilitation and liaison linked to LA's and government agencies
	e) increase in value of products from wildflower grasslands or heathlands
	f) rural development funds targeted at support for critical infrastructure
	g) increase in regular outlets for local agricultural products
FH2 Objective: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands	Rationale: to maintain fields and field boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; and to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape.
Indicators of success	i) payments and accreditation tied to maintaining the historic field pattern
Targets for 2009	a) increase in area of AONB covered by agri-environment payments for field boundaries, old meadows and pastures, old orchards, arable margins and relevant new schemes under Countryside Stewardship Schemes (CSS)
	b) this objective adopted as a regional target for CSS
FH3 Objective: To enhance the environmental function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats	Rationale: to improve the condition and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife
Indicators of success	i) unimproved grasslands retained in favourable condition for wildlife
	ii) heathland retained in favourable condition for wildlife
	iii) improved management of margins and transition zones
	iv) reduction in agrochemical inputs
	v) traditional land management skills retained
	vi) relevant Habitat Action Plan (HAP) targets met
	vii) expert advice on specialist habitats and features of the AONB made available to all land managers
Targets for 2009	a) 100% retention of unimproved grassland identified by the Weald Meadows Initiative
	b) 50ha to buffer and connect existing priority grassland sites using Weald Native Origin Seed
	c) a local network established for conservation grazing
	d) 100% retention of key heathland sites identified by the Weald Heathland Initiative
	e) 1,500ha to buffer and connect existing scattered heaths
	f) increase in area under arable margins, buffer strips, and wildlife strips agri-environment payments
	g) area farmed organically increased by 20%
	h) target for supporting traditional skills adopted by ERDP vocational training
	i) AONB accreditation scheme for contractors established
	j) commitment from relevant organizations to achieving HAP targets, including SSSI and SNCI commitments
	k) AONB co-ordination and training of existing advisory services

FH4 Objective: To protect the historic features of field and heath	Rationale: to protect the historic aspects of non-wooded land other than the pattern of fields: i.e. the individual archaeological features
Indicators of success	i) Ashdown Forest maintained in favourable condition for wildlife and archaeology ii) increased protection for smaller individual archaeological features
Targets for 2009	a) a single management plan produced for the pale and all the land within b) additional scheduling achieved for the major medieval sea walls, iron workings, moated sites etc. c) archaeological features identified through Historic Landscape Characterization (Sussex) d) target aimed at protecting sites outside parks, and old meadows and pastures, adopted by CSS

Public Understanding and Enjoyment

UE1 Objective: To increase opportunities for education and celebration of the character of the AONB	Rationale: to help develop a commitment amongst residents, visitors and businesses to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB
Indicators of success	i) increased participation of residents in community activities and events that develop understanding of the rural environment ii) increased amount of high quality (particularly character-based) AONB interpretation material iii) AONB information incorporated into local studies activity in educational establishments iv) new and stronger links established between land managers and the area's residents and visitors
Targets for 2009	a) new character-focused AONB events established b) joint working between tourism and countryside and arts sectors to develop and promote a programme of AONB events and activities c) information and interpretation guidelines for the AONB developed and promoted d) organizations and service providers actively engaged in providing information on and interpretation of the AONB within AONB guidelines e) AONB profile raised at all major countryside sites, attractions and visitor information centres f) consultation with education providers on the scope for tailoring local studies work to include AONB information g) AONB character-based educational material developed to meet educational establishment needs h) increase in the number of farm familiarization events: open days, guided walks and school events
UE2 Objective: To increase contribution of individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB	Rationale: the actions of the 121,000 population of the High Weald, and the 873,000 living within wards wholly or partly within 5km of the AONB, have a significant impact on the AONB
Indicators of success	i) increased demand for local products derived from sustainable management of the High Weald countryside ii) increased residents' understanding of the positive role individuals can play in conservation of the High Weald iii) increased residents' practical involvement in the care of the AONB iv) improvements in the maintenance of the rural character of AONB properties v) increased number of LA21 activities that make links to the AONB context as well as the global and local context vi) improved control of invasive species, e.g. Rhododendron ponticum

Targets for 2009	<p>a) programme established to increase understanding and enjoyment of the links between consumers and the local landscape</p> <p>b) Caring for the High Weald promoted to residents, visitors and businesses</p> <p>c) development and promotion of a training and events programme that offers opportunities for all to develop skills in countryside crafts and management</p> <p>d) increase participation of residents in local and national wildlife surveys and monitoring</p> <p>e) production and promotion of AONB guidelines on maintaining rural character</p> <p>f) district and local projects that promote and enable residents and businesses to undertake such activities as: using less water; reducing, reusing, recycling; and reducing speed to protect people, horses and wildlife</p> <p>g) increase in residents' understanding of the damage to AONB character caused by invasive plant, animal and fish species</p>
UE3 Objective: To increase community involvement in conservation and enhancement of the AONB	Rationale: the diverse communities with an interest in the AONB have a significant role in generating new initiatives, and protecting and enhancing local features and distinctiveness
Indicators of success	<p>i) communities actively identifying what they value in their local countryside and participating in setting priorities for its sustainable management</p> <p>ii) increased number of community led initiatives to change drivers' attitudes and actions</p> <p>iii) increased number of community initiatives aimed at supporting locally distinctive features</p> <p>iv) comprehensive coverage of AONB by community support mechanisms such as countryside management services (CMS)</p>
Targets for 2009	<p>a) scope for existing mechanisms, such as parish appraisals, to facilitate this reviewed, and new mechanisms piloted where and if appropriate</p> <p>b) a High Weald and local awareness campaign highlighting the impact of traffic on the area's character and residents' enjoyment</p> <p>c) a pilot community investment fund set up to support conservation of locally distinctive features</p> <p>d) existing and new initiatives developed to assist the public to increase and express their knowledge and understanding of local distinctiveness</p> <p>e) extend CMS to cover the gaps in East Sussex, Kent and Surrey</p>
UE4 Objective: Integrated management of the resources for informal open-air recreation to facilitate 'green' use by residents and visitors	Rationale: to meet demand for recreation and ensure that this is consistent with the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty, by providing and promoting the infrastructure - with particular attention to quality, ease of access, location and appropriate facilities - to maximize opportunities for positive enjoyment, appreciation, and understanding of the character of the AONB
Indicators of success	<p>i) improved maintenance standards of the Rights of Way (RoW) network in areas close to towns, villages, visitor attractions and within AONB rural tourism hubs</p> <p>ii) increased range of high quality promoted access opportunities that meet the needs of all users</p> <p>iii) development of key strategic links in the Rights of Way network for all walkers, cyclists and riders</p> <p>iv) improved links between promoted informal access opportunities and public transport provision</p> <p>v) action to reduce traffic impact on AONB lanes with a high level of leisure use</p> <p>vi) integrated approach to the development and promotion of 'green' tourism</p> <p>vii) AONB visitor services raising awareness of the AONB and assisting with its conservation and enhancement</p>
Targets for 2009	a) 100% of network in these zones meeting basic RoW standards

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