

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 22 May 2024

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: The High Weald Management Plan

Purpose: To adopt the High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to adopt the High Weald Management Plan 2024 – 2029, as approved by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

1 Background Information

1.1 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CROW Act) requires local authorities with land in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to prepare and publish an up-to-date management plan which ‘formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it’ (S89 (2)). In November 2023, AONBs were rebranded as ‘National Landscapes’. However, the majority of legislation that applies to these areas and their Management Plans, still refers to AONB’s. Hence, the term AONB is used in this report.

1.2 Where AONBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the management plan (Section 89 of the CROW Act). In the High Weald this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). Following a formal consultation process, the High Weald JAC recommends the joint Management Plan to individual local authorities who each adopt the JAC approved plan. The Plan is reviewed every 5 years.

1.3 A substantial amount of work has been done towards completing the new 20-year strategy within the new Management Plan. The review has needed to take account of the current and future major challenges and issues of biodiversity loss, climate change, fairer access to nature, and development pressure. The Management Plan needs to be in accordance with the forthcoming National Guidance from Natural England for AONB Management Plans, which is anticipated to require Plans to address these issues. Therefore, while the character components and management policy objectives (the most important aspects of the High Weald Management Plan) remain broadly appropriate, the range of character components has broadened, and other aspects of the Management Plan have needed a more substantive reconsideration, including the inclusion of cross cutting themes, programmes, principles for action and an investment strategy 2024-2029, to reflect the aforementioned challenges and issues.

1.4 At its meeting on 27 March 2024 the JAC approved the revised Management Plan. A copy of the High Weald Management Plan and supporting documents have been appended to this report.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 The High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029 incorporates the following sections:

- A section on the High Weald including key facts and figures, and a description of the landscape.
- A section explaining what a Management Plan is, how it was prepared and how it should be used.
- A section explaining the core character components that underpin the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB, along with introducing the five cross-cutting themes: Drivers of Change 2024-2029
- Chapters on the Cross-cutting themes: programmes, principles for action and investment strategy 2024-2029
- High Weald Charter for Residents and Visitors
- Monitoring
- Definition of terms
- List of evidence and further reading considered in the preparation of the plan
- Supporting papers

2.2 The Management Plan is based on evidence and is formulated to coordinate policy, investment and action in the AONB, as well as ensuring achievement of the legal purpose of 'conserving and enhancing natural beauty', as required under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Management Plan, as approved by the JAC, reflects the input and comments received during the various consultation and stakeholder engagement stages.

3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 Lead Member is recommended to adopt the latest review of the High Weald Management Plan 2024-29, as this will enable the County Council to meet its statutory duty to ensure the preparation and publication of a Management Plan for those parts of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) that lie within the administrative boundary.

RUPERT CLUBB

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All divisions that fall within the High Weald AONB boundary.

Appendix 1. The High Weald Management Plan 2024-2029

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Equality Impact Assessment

Consultation Statement