

<b>Mrs Urquhart, Cabinet Member for Environment</b>	<b>Ref No: ENV14 18.19</b>
<b>January 2019</b>	<b>Key Decision: No</b>
<b>Adoption of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024</b>	<b>Part I</b>
<b>Report by Lee Harris, Executive Director Economy, Infrastructure and Environment</b>	<b>Electoral Division(s): All</b>
<p><b>Summary:</b></p> <p>The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers parts of Crawley Borough and Horsham and Mid Sussex District Councils. Legislation requires local authorities with land in an AONB to prepare and publish an up-to-date plan that <i>'formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'</i>. Where AONBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the plan.</p> <p>In the High Weald, this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership that includes all 15 local authorities covering the area, including the County Council, together with community, environment and land-based sector representatives.</p> <p>There is also a legal duty that requires adopted and published management plans to be reviewed at intervals of not more than five years. Accordingly, the current High Weald AONB Management Plan 2014-19 will be replaced by a new plan covering the 2019-2024 period. Consultation on a draft plan took place in summer 2018 and the High Weald JAC is recommending that the individual local authorities adopt the new Plan (included as Appendix A) before the end of March 2019.</p> <p>As a local authority policy document, the Management Plan will guide the County Council's plan-making and decision-taking by providing an objective, evidence-based tool articulating what matters in terms of AONB purpose and the fulfilment of statutory duties.</p>	
<p><b>West Sussex Plan: Policy Impact and Context</b></p> <p>The adoption of the Management Plan directly relates to the delivery of the 'A place of culture, heritage and beauty' outcome under the 'A Strong, Safe and Sustainable Place' priority in the West Sussex Plan. One of the key performance indicators is to maintain up to date management plans for the AONBs in West Sussex.</p>	
<p><b>Financial Impact</b></p> <p>There are no financial implications for the adoption of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-24. Implementation is met from existing resources within the team.</p>	
<p><b>Recommendation</b></p> <p>That the Cabinet Member for Environment approves the adoption of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-24.</p>	

## Proposal

### 1. Background and Context

- 1.1. 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.
- 1.2. The High Weald is one of two AONBs in West Sussex. It was designated in 1983 and extends from Horsham in the west to Rye in the east, covering parts of Crawley Borough and Horsham and Mid Sussex District Councils.
- 1.3. The natural beauty of the High Weald comprises five defining components of character that have made it a recognisably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years:
  - Geology, landform and water systems – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with numerous gill streams;
  - Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries;
  - Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths);
  - Woodland – abundance of ancient woodland, highly interconnected and in smallholdings; and
  - 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<sup>1</sup> river valleys.
- 1.4. AONB Management Plans are statutory documents. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000 requires local authorities with land in an AONB to prepare and publish an up-to-date plan that *'formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'*. Where AONBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the plan.
- 1.5. In the High Weald, this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership that includes all 15 local authorities covering the area, including the County Council, together with community, environment and land-based sector representatives.
- 1.6. There is also a legal duty that requires adopted and published management plans to be reviewed at intervals of not more than five years. Accordingly, the current High Weald AONB Management Plan 2014-19 will be replaced by a new plan covering the 2019-2024 period. Consultation on a draft plan took place in summer 2018 and the High Weald JAC is recommending that the

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<sup>1</sup> 'inned' is in reference to the practice of 'inning' or the enclosing of discrete areas of river valleys (specifically) for agricultural purposes during the middle ages and is a distinctive feature of the High Weald AONB.

individual local authorities adopt the new Plan (attached as Appendix A to this report) before end March 2019.

## **2. Management Plan**

- 2.1. Management Plans are locally-owned and democratically-accountable strategies, based on evidence, for looking after the AONB in the interests of both people and nature. They are formulated to coordinate policy, investment and action in these nationally-important landscapes in order to achieve the legal purpose of '*conserving and enhancing natural beauty*' for the benefit of current and future generations.
- 2.2. The High Weald AONB Management Plan is relevant to many organisations and individuals. As a local authority policy document, it guides local authority plan-making and decision-taking by providing such bodies with an objective, evidence-based tool articulating what matters in terms of AONB purpose and the fulfilment of their statutory duties. However, it also has a wider role; where people engage with local authority services, the Plan can help them tailor their actions to comply with local authority policy, and support the care and conservation of the High Weald landscape.
- 2.3. Use of the Plan also offers a transparent means by which the County Council can ensure that it is fulfilling its duty under Section 85 of the CROW Act to '*have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty*' of the High Weald AONB. County Council functions that may have an impact or influence on the AONB include Planning, Waste Management, and Highways and Transport (including Rights of Way). The Plan can be used by such services to guide environmental land management and assess the impact of development or other changes on the AONB.
- 2.4. The Management Plan identifies 22 objectives that relate to the five defining components of character (see paragraph 1.3) and to 'Land-based economy and related rural life' and 'Other qualities'. They act as a checklist or set of criteria against which policy and actions can be assessed for compliance with legislation. Proposed actions for 'Public Bodies' and 'Others' are identified under each objective.
- 2.5. Monitoring of the Plan's progress and of the condition of the AONB will be carried out by the JAC. Data will be gathered for the 'Indicators of Success' identified for each objective, together with Natural England environmental monitoring information and any other relevant data sets

## **Factors taken into account**

### **3. Consultation**

- 3.1. Relevant internal services have been consulted during the preparation of the Management Plan and appropriate changes have been made as requested.
- 3.2. The County Council's representatives on the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee have been consulted during the preparation of the Management Plan. No changes have been identified.

#### **4. Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no financial or resource implications for the adoption of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-24. Implementation is met from existing resources within the team.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

AONB Management Plans are statutory documents. Sections 89 and 90 of the CROW Act create a statutory duty on all local authorities with land within an AONB to prepare a management plan that '*formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it*', and thereafter to review adopted and published management 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*'.

#### **6. Risk Assessment Implications and Mitigations**

There are no risks associated with the adoption of the Management Plan.

#### **7. Other Options Considered**

There is a duty on the constituent local authorities to review adopted and published management plans at intervals of not more than five years. Therefore, no other options have been considered.

#### **8. Equality and Human Rights Assessment**

An [Equality Impact Assessment](#) was undertaken by the High Weald AONB Unit to inform the preparation of the AONB Management Plan Review. The Assessment identified that the Plan complied with the relevant legislation and that no changes were required.

#### **9. Social Value and Sustainability Assessment**

A [Strategic Environmental Assessment](#) and a [Habitats Regulations Assessment](#) were undertaken by the High Weald AONB Unit to inform the preparation of the Management Plan.

#### **10. Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment**

Not applicable.

#### **Lee Harris**

Executive Director Economy, Infrastructure and Environment

**Contact:** Don Baker, Environment and Heritage Team Manager, 033 022 26439

#### **Appendices**

[Appendix A: High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024](#)

**Background Papers** - none