

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 04 February 2019

Report Title: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
Management Plan Review 2019-24

Report By: Victoria Conheady, Assistant Director Regeneration & Culture

Purpose of Report

To seek Full Council approval to formally adopt the High Weald Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2019-2024 and its supporting papers. On adoption, the Management Plan will be this Council's policy for the management of the AONB area and for the carrying out of our functions in relation to it.

Recommendation(s) that

- 1. Cabinet recommends that Full Council agrees the adoption of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2019-2024 and its supporting papers and authorises the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee to publish the Management Plan on behalf of Hastings Borough Council.**

Reasons for Recommendations

Local authorities with land in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are legally obliged under Section 89(2) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to prepare and publish a plan which '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 (S89 (11)(b)). The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee undertakes the preparation and review of the Management Plan on behalf of the 15 local authorities with land in the High Weald AONB.

An AONB management plan is a locally prepared and agreed statement of public policy for managing landscapes of national importance and their associated nature conservation and other values. The plan is reviewed every five years.

Introduction

1. The High Weald was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONB, in 1983 and extends across 11 District and four County authorities. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, which comprises elected member representatives from the partner local authorities, undertakes the preparation and review of the Management Plan on behalf of the 15 local authorities with land in the High Weald AONB. The Council as one of the 15 partner authorities makes an annual contribution of £1,500 towards the costs of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee. The Council directly inputs into the work of the High Weald as the Council has a representative on the Joint Advisory Committee and the Management Board.

Background

2. Originally published in 2004 as a 20-year strategy, the High Weald Management Plan (HWMP) was deliberately concise and structured around the statutory purpose – to conserve and enhance natural beauty. It defined what natural beauty means in the High Weald in a ‘Statement of Significance’ which included identifying the key landscape character components which make the High Weald outstandingly beautiful and different to other landscapes. It then set objectives for these components and identified actions that would help to conserve and enhance them.
3. It was envisaged that major revisions of the Management Plan would not be necessary during this 20-year period. Indeed, despite significant changes to planning policy, sustained public spending cuts and the abolition or ‘transformation’ of many public sector functions, AONB purpose endures and currently remains supported at the highest level in Government. The decision to limit HWMP reviews to relatively minor revisions in 2009 and 2014 was taken with this context in mind. Similarly in March 2017 the Joint Advisory Committee agreed to restrict the 2019-2024 version to a minor review.
4. Nonetheless the review has needed to take account of the potential impact of Brexit on agri-environmental policy and the significant increase in development pressure on the AONB since the last review. While the character components and management policy objectives, the most important aspects of the HWMP, remain broadly appropriate, other aspects of the Plan have needed a more substantive re-consideration.

The 2019-2024 Management Plan (appended to this report)

5. The Plan is structured around a vision, the history of the High Weald, and the Plan’s preparation, implementation and monitoring. There are detailed chapters on the High Weald’s beauty covering: geology (landform, water systems & climate); settlements; routeways; woodland; field & heath; and land-based economy & rural life as well as other qualities. For each of these themes there is a vision and a number of objectives (management policies) aimed at tackling the priorities issues identified.

6. Approximately 17% of Hastings borough falls within the High Weald AONB designation. This is largely confined to the eastern rural area of the borough including and extending beyond Hastings Country Park and on the north side of The Ridge pockets of the borough's northern extent also fall with the designation¹
7. The Management Plan is designed to be concise. It is tightly focused on the purpose of the AONB designation and the requirements of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000. The Management Plan provides other bodies – planning authorities and Government agencies for example, with an objective-based tool articulating what matters in terms of AONB purpose and the fulfilment of statutory duties. Amongst other matters, the Plan includes:
 - A Statement of Significance defining the natural beauty of the High Weald.
 - Character statements, including a list of key characteristics, describing the components of natural beauty that policy and actions should aim to conserve and enhance.
 - A set of management policies ('Objectives') for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB together with a monitoring framework for judging success.
8. The Plan, and objectives for each 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. A summary of the vision for the future of the High Weald landscape is set out in Appendix 1 of this report
9. There are a number of important supporting papers. These are: a paper which has considered the performance of the management plan to-date which has helped inform the review. A consultation statement; Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) and Equality Impact Assessment. Confirmation from Natural England that they concur with the conclusions contained in both the SEA & HRA and that both supporting documents demonstrate that the Plan is meeting statutory requirements.
10. Public Consultation on the Management Plan and its supporting documents was carried out between 13th June and 25th July 2018. This included consultation with all the local authorities, as well as with statutory bodies and publicised via e-news and social media. Following amendments to the management plan, a further statutory (sec 90) consultation was carried out with Natural England in October 2018 on the final Plan, the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Habitats Regulations Assessment. The management plan has completed all of the statutory stages of a review and has been subject to significant public and expert engagement and scrutiny.
11. Once approved and adopted by the partner authorities, the plan and its supporting documents will be submitted to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in order to complete the process. The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 is due to be published in April 2019.

¹ See [Local Plan Policies Map](#) for the definitive extent of the designation

Policy Implications

12. In terms of local environmental, the management plan and review process has been in place for since 2004 and accords with national and local planning policy. The adoption of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 will enable the Council to meet its statutory requirements under Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
13. There are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations of this report.

Conclusion

14. Hastings Borough Council, together with all High Weald AONB partner local authorities, is required to formally adopt the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024. We need to do this before the 31st March 2019 in accordance with the timetable set out in paragraph 8.
15. On adoption of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024, it will become the Council's policy for management of the AONB, guiding policies and actions of the Council. This will help ensure that the Council is meeting its statutory duty to conserve and enhance the AONB. It will also be a material consideration for planning applications within the High Weald AONB and help inform planning policy.

Timetable of Next Steps

16. List of key actions and the scheduled dates:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Management Plan & supporting papers to be considered by Cabinet		4 February 2019	Planning Policy & Parks & Opens Spaces Team
Management Plan & supporting papers to be adopted by Full Council		13 February 2019	Planning Policy & Parks & Opens Spaces Team
Submission of the Management Plan & supporting papers to DeFRA and publication		April 2019	High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Wards Affected

Ore, Old Hastings, Baird, St Helens, Conquest, Ashdown

Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	N
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	N
Risk Management	N
Environmental Issues	Y
Economic/Financial Implications	N
Human Rights Act	N
Organisational Consequences	N
Local People's Views	N
Anti-Poverty	N

Additional Information

[JAC Approved High Weald Management Plan 2019-2024](#)

Supporting Papers:

[Strategic Environmental Assessment](#) and [table](#)

[Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report](#) and [matrix](#)

[Equality Impact Assessment Screening Report](#)

[Monitoring the Condition of the AONB and Performance of the AONB Management Plan](#)

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