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Date: 1 July 2024

Dear Member

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT CABINET COMMITTEE - TUESDAY, 9 JULY 2024

Please find enclosed, additional supporting information related to Item 7. This is provided separately for agenda management purposes – the core Decision documentation and the AONB Management Plan may be found in the main agenda pack.

Agenda Item No

7 **24/00067 - Kent County Council Adoption of the 4th Revision of the High Weald Area of Outstanding National Beauty Management Plan 2024- 2029 (Pages 1 - 122)**

Additional Supporting Documents

Yours sincerely

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel

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High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2024
Habitat Regulations Assessment

Stage 1 (Screening) Report
Final version

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Contents

N.B. From November 22nd 2023 all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. This change is endorsed by Natural England. The High Weald National Landscape is the new name for this protected landscape. The High Weald National Landscape remains an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty insofar as all policy, legislation and guidance applies to the designated landscape. For this reason, this document still refers to the High Weald AONB Management Plan.
The statutory purpose of the designated landscape "to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape" remains unchanged.

Section 1 - Introduction

Legislation on Habitats

1.1 The Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) process assesses the potential effects of a plan or project on the conservation objectives of sites afforded the highest level of protection in the UK, for their exceptionally important (rare, endangered, or vulnerable) species and/or habitats. These were classified under European legislation - 'Habitats Directive' and the 'Birds Directive'- but since 1st January 2021, they are protected in the UK by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). These sites previously formed part of a network of internationally important sites throughout Europe designated for their ecological status, known as the 'Natura 2000' Network, and Sites within the network were referred to as 'Natura 2000 sites'. Post Brexit, these sites are now referred to as 'European sites' and the 'National Site Network'. The National Site Network of European protected sites in England include:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Areas (SPA)
- Ramsar Sites (Internationally important wetlands)
- European offshore marine sites
- Proposed SACs
- Potential SPAs
- Areas secured as sites compensating for damage to a European site.

1.2 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), and the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora as identified in Annexes I and II, respectively of European Council Directive 92/43/EEC requires that any plan not directly connected with or necessary to the management of European sites, but likely to give rise to a significant effect, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, should be subject to appropriate assessment. The plan should only be adopted after it is ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned.

1.3 National legislation:
The Conservation Regulations 1994
The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)
The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019
reflects European Directives legislation, although it further prescribes that the plan-making authority shall consult the appropriate nature conservation body and have regard to any representations made within such reasonable time as the authority specifies.

1.4 This paper documents the initial stages of assessment described as 'screening', which determines whether specific European Sites require the application of Appropriate Assessment in the plan making process. As part of the screening process, the plans and strategies considered in combination with the Core Strategy are documented as well as:

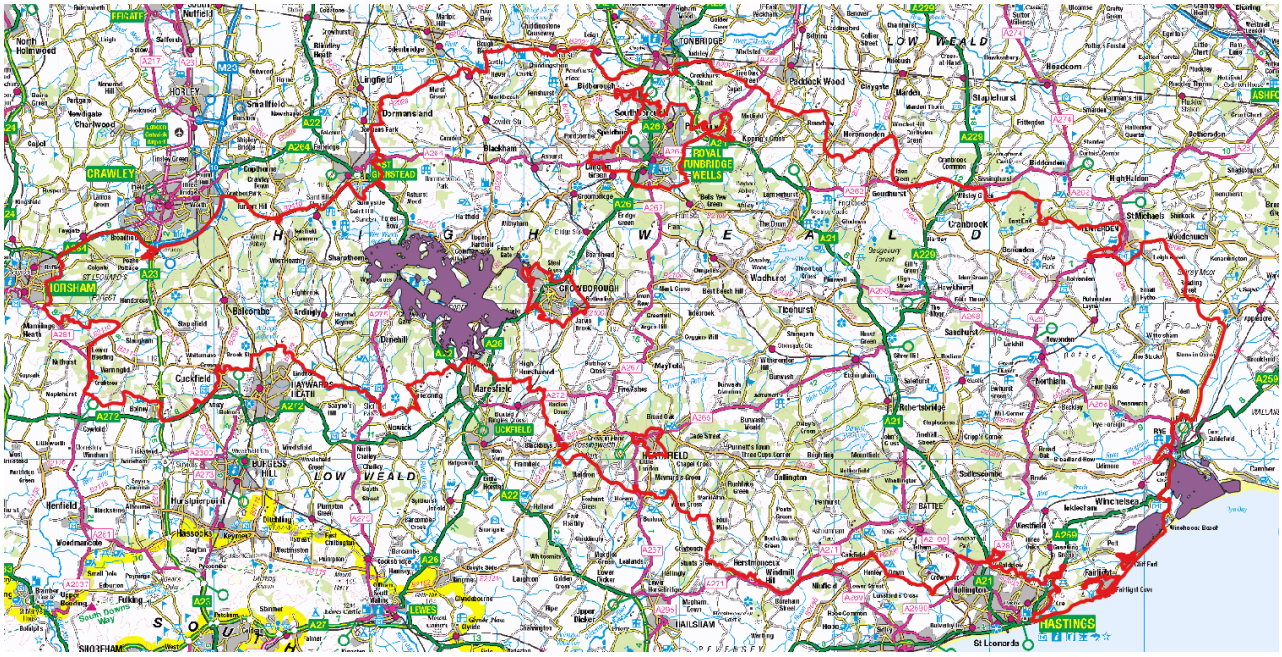
- the scope of the study area;
- characteristics of the European Sites;
- possible impacts;
- the determination as to whether the High Weald AONB Management Plan Review will have significant in combination effects; and
- whether further Appropriate Assessment is required in relation to the European Sites Identified.

1.5 The European Sites which are in or close to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are:

- Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Dungeness Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Dungeness, Romney Marsh, and Rye Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar
- Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar

Special Areas of Conservation in light blue

Special Protection Areas in purple



Ramsar Sites in orange

Appropriate Assessment

1.6 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), does not specify how the stages of the Appropriate Assessment should be undertaken, although it confirms that the Appropriate Assessment must be recorded and carried out with a view to informing decisions in the Plan. It is recognised that the assessment should be proportionate to the geographical scope of the option and the nature and extent of any effects identified.

1.7 There are three key stages of Appropriate Assessment as defined in the Habitats Regulations Assessment guidance 'Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site' (February 2021). The stages are described below:

Stage One: Screening

This step is a simple assessment to check or screen if a proposal:

- is directly connected with or necessary for the conservation management of a European site
- risks having a significant effect on a European site on its own or in combination with other proposals

If not, there is no need to go through the appropriate assessment or derogation stages.

Stage Two: Appropriate Assessment

An appropriate assessment must be carried out if you:

- decide there is a risk of a likely significant effect on a European site
- do not have enough evidence to rule out a risk

The assessment should be to assess the likely significant effects of the proposal in more detail and identify ways to avoid or minimise any effects.

Stage Three: Derogation (allow exceptions)

To decide if the proposal qualifies for a derogation, it must apply three legal tests in the following order:

1. There are no feasible alternative solutions that would be less damaging or avoid damage to the site.
2. The proposal needs to be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest.
3. The necessary compensatory measures can be secured.

A record of all findings, including a failed test, must be kept.

1.8 This paper implements the screening element (stage 1) of the Habitats Regulations Assessment process, as described in relevant guidance 'Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site' (2021).

Section 2 - Screening Assessment

2.1 In terms of screening Part 6 (Chapter 1) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) states:

Any plan or project which

(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and

(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site,

must make an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives.

2.2 Habitats Regulations Assessment guidance 'Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site' (2021), suggests a three-stage process in undertaking screening involving:

Step One: Determination of whether the Plan is for the conservation management of the habitats or species for which the European site has been designated;

Step Two: Assess the likely significant effects on a European site that could affect its conservation objectives;

Step Three: Check for combined effects with any other proposal planned or underway and affects the same site, that on its own also does not have a significant effect.

2.3 Additionally, it is necessary to consider if the proposal could cause a significant effect on a European site. A proposal, alone or in combination with other proposals, could cause a significant effect on a European site if there is:

- a reduction in the amount or quality of designated habitats or the habitats that support designated species,
- a limit to the potential for restoring designated habitats in the future,
- a significant disturbance to the designated species,
- disruption to the natural processes that support the site's designated features,
- only reduction or offset measures in place.

If there is no likely significant effect on the site, either alone or in combination, then you do not need to carry out an Appropriate Assessment.

Step One:

Determination of whether the Plan is directly connected or necessary to the management of the Site

The European Sites which are in or adjoining the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are:

- Ashdown Forest SAC
- Ashdown Forest SPA
- Dungeness SAC,
- Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA and Ramsar Site
- Hastings Cliffs SAC
- Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar Site

2.4 Evidence for the designated sites which fall within or adjoining the High Weald AONB is included within Appendices A-E. This includes evidence gathered from published site details.

2.5 The High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2024-2029 is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European Site. For a project or plan to be directly connected with or necessary to the management of such a site it must refer to management measures that are solely for conservation purposes of that specific site. The High Weald Management Plan is a strategic (i.e., not site specific) landscape management plan and its objectives are concerned with the protection and enhancement of natural beauty. This requires a broader approach; consequently, the objectives reflect this, and are primarily concerned with conserving and enhancing landscape features.

Step Two:

Assess the likely significant effects on a European site that could affect its conservation objectives

<u>The High Weald AONB</u>

2.6 The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies at the heart of South East England, covering 1,461km^2 (570 sq. miles), across four counties. It is an historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and ancient droveways and sunken lanes. The distinctive character of the High Weald arises from a long history of human interaction with the natural environment, and the exploitation of its resources – wood, iron, and food. The landscape of the High Weald is essentially medieval, and its present form was fundamentally established by the 14th century and has survived major historic social and technological changes. Its future evolution and conservation are dependent on understanding and reinforcing the traditional interactions between people and nature that are responsible for the landscape we value today.

2.7 Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) requires local authorities to have regard to 'the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs' in making decisions that affect the designated area. Local authorities with land in an AONB, acting jointly in the case of AONBs crossing administrative boundaries, are legally obliged under the same Act 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', and to review this plan every five years. To assist the local authorities in meeting these statutory duties a High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) was established. This is a partnership of the 15 local authorities covered by the designation plus Natural England and other organisations representing farming, forestry, business, and recreation interests. The Partnership is supported by the High Weald AONB Unit, a strategic, specialist team that advises on the management of this nationally valued landscape.

The High Weald AONB Management Plan

2.8 The High Weald AONB Management Plan was first published in 2004 as a twenty-year plan until 2024. It was reviewed in 2009, 2014 and 2019 but these reviews were limited in scope and did not change the fundamental basis of the Management Plan. The High Weald AONB Management Plan identifies and sets management goals for the key features of the landscape that have survived and form the essential basis of its natural beauty. These key components of Natural Beauty are being actively researched and understood to inform best practice in caring for and managing them, and to inform the choices for its future conservation and enhancement.

2.9 The Management Plan sets the context and background against which policies and actions can be judged in terms of their impact on natural beauty as defined by the components of natural beauty. The Plan gives a framework of features and management advice against which decisions on the type and form of land management can be assessed. This allows stakeholders and agents to measure their activities against these components and effectively audit their actions against the duty under section 85 of the CRoW Act.

Scope of Management Plan Review 2024-2029

2.10 The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004 was reviewed in 2009, 2014 and 2019 as required under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. As the 2004 Management Plan was a twenty-year strategy, these reviews were 'light touch'.

2.11 The 2024 review of the Management Plan will begin a new 20-year strategy, and therefore a more substantive moderate scale review is underway than the previous reviews. The present Management Plan is considered in general fit-for-purpose, so most of the review resource will be dedicated to focusing on developing a new twenty-year Direction of Travel strategy section of the Plan.

2.12 The High Weald AONB Unit does not envision undertaking any specific research projects for the intended new sections, due to both budget and time constraints, but also

because the new sections and content all fall into academically well researched areas e.g., climate change, soil science, nature recovery, dark skies, and wellbeing benefits of accessing natural environments.

2.13 **What will remain unchanged?**

- The High Weald AONB Units approach to, and philosophy of natural beauty, and majority of its key components will remain unchanged.
- Most of the overall structure of the 2019-24 Management Plan and content will remain unchanged. Specifically, there are no changes planned for the chapters on The High Weald (facts and figures, landscape, brief history), About the Plan and AONB Policy and Legal Framework other to ensure they are up to date.

2.14 **What will be deepened and/ or enhanced?**

- The JAC Commitment and Vison will be strengthened.
- What is Natural Beauty is to be updated with contemporary research.
- The Key Characteristics: will be reviewed to ensure a good understanding of what characterises each key component. The individual component vision statements will be removed / incorporated into the overall vision.

2.15 **What will be reviewed and refreshed?**

- All key facts and figures within the Management Plan will be checked and up-dated as required, including High Weald and natural and cultural capital facts and figures.
- The 'Other Qualities' sections will be revamped as 'Perceptual and Aesthetic Qualities'. This will address the qualities that are perceived from moving through the natural and cultural landscape of the High Weald, but which cannot be addressed through the characters of physical features alone. For example, long views, quietude, tranquillity, rurality, and other experiential qualities.
- Planning and development will be given its own section, including Planning Principles for the High Weald AONB.

2.16 **What will be added?**

- A new key component 'Dark Skies' will be added. This will build on substantial work that the High Weald Unit has been undertaking regarding dark skies over the past few years, including work with CPRE and the South Downs National Park Authority, and a number of local dark skies groups.
- High Weald Direction of Travel Strategy – this constitutes the largest change and forms an additional part of the Management Plan (key components and other existing sections making up the first part). This section sets out the drivers for change to the High Weald for the next 20 years and will present an aspirational investment plant for the next 20 years for conserving and enhancing the functional landscape and natural beauty of the High Weald.
- This section is broken down into:

  An introduction to the drivers for change, which will underpin the 20-year strategy.

  1. Soil Health – addressing the neglected importance of soil health with a soil-up strategy based around the holistic land management approach of regenerative agriculture.

2. Climate Change – coupling the ranging threats from climate change with sustainable, nature-based solutions to creating a climate resilient landscape.
3. Nature Recovery – addressing the ecological crisis and how delivery of recovery strategies may be expected to look across the High Weald.
4. People and Access - tackling inequity in access to the natural world, health, and education.
5. Planning and Development – with a dedicated section to providing guidance specific to Local Authority planners using the Management Plan.

Step Three:

Check for combined effects

2.17 This section considers any implications the Management Plan review may have 'in combination' with other plans and/or projects. Only other key plans and projects which are most relevant should be collected for the 'in combination' test.

2.18 The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 has been screened under the Habitats Regulations Assessment, including in combination with the following plans:

- National Planning Policy Framework;
- Local Plans for the local authority areas within the AONB;
- Local Transport Plans for East and West Sussex, Kent, and Surrey; and
- Environment Agency River Catchment Flood Management Plans.

2.19 Whilst the Management Plan has been reviewed in the context of the increased development pressure proposed in these plans and others, it does not in itself determine the amount of development or where sites should be located. Rather it sets objectives that should be taken into account by those taking decisions that affect the AONB, including those taking decisions about how much and where development should take place. Since these objectives are intended to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB, provided the objectives themselves do not conflict with the conservation objectives of the European sites then the Management Plan will not have a significant effect on these sites.

<u>Proposed Changes to the Management Plan Objectives</u>

New objectives:

Objective G3 To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.

Objective G4 To restore soil health across the High Weald.

Objective S3 To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald.

Objective DS1 To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial, and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.

Objective DS2 To protect wildlife and habitats for wildlife from light pollution across the High Weald.

Objective PQ1 To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald.

Objective PQ2 To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.

Objective PQ3 To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all.

Objective LBE2 To reconnect settlements, residents, and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside, and maintain and improve rural amenities and services that support communities within the context of the rural settlement pattern.

Rephrased objectives:

Objective G2 To protect landform and geological features including, sandstone outcrops.

Objective S2 To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout, and design.

Objective W1 To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.

Objective FH4 To protect individual archaeological features as well as historic assets and patterns of field and heath.

Conclusion of Screening Report

2.20 A matrix is attached at Appendix F which lists the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029, assessed against the conservation objectives of the European sites. The assessment is designed to determine whether a Management Plan objective is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site.

2.21 This screening assessment showed that:

- 9 Management Plan objectives positively reinforce the conservation objectives of the European sites;
- 10 Management Plan objectives are unrelated to the conservation objectives of the European sites and therefore not applicable or have no effect; and
- 6 Management Plan objectives have potential conflicts or uncertain effects on the conservation objectives of the European Sites.

2.22 The Management Plan objectives with potential conflicts or uncertain effects on the conservation objectives of the European Sites were then considered further and amendments made to the Management Plan as set out in Appendix F to ensure that there will be no risk of conflict between the wording in the Management Plan and the interest features of the designated sites.

2.23 In conclusion it is considered that the proposed changes to the Management Plan objectives will not result in the High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2024-2029 having a likely significant effect on the European Sites either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Section 3 - Consultation

3.1 Natural England is the statutory consultee for the Appropriate Assessment process. However, local authorities in which the sites are located, and neighbouring local authorities will also be consulted on this screening report:

These organisations are detailed below.

Local Authorities (in which sites are located)

- Wealden District Council
- Hastings Borough Council
- Rother District Council
- East Sussex County Council

Neighbouring/ Other Authorities

- Ashford District Council
- Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
- Tandridge District Council
- Sevenoaks Borough Council
- Mid Sussex District Council
- Horsham District Council
- Crawley Borough Council
- Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

3.2 In addition, this and related documents will be made available to all stakeholders and members of the public via the High Weald AONB Unit's website alongside the consultation on the Management Plan.

Appendices

Appendix A - Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation

Appendix B - Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area

Appendix C – Dungeness Special Area of Conservation

Appendix D - Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site

Appendix E - Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation

Appendix F – Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar Site

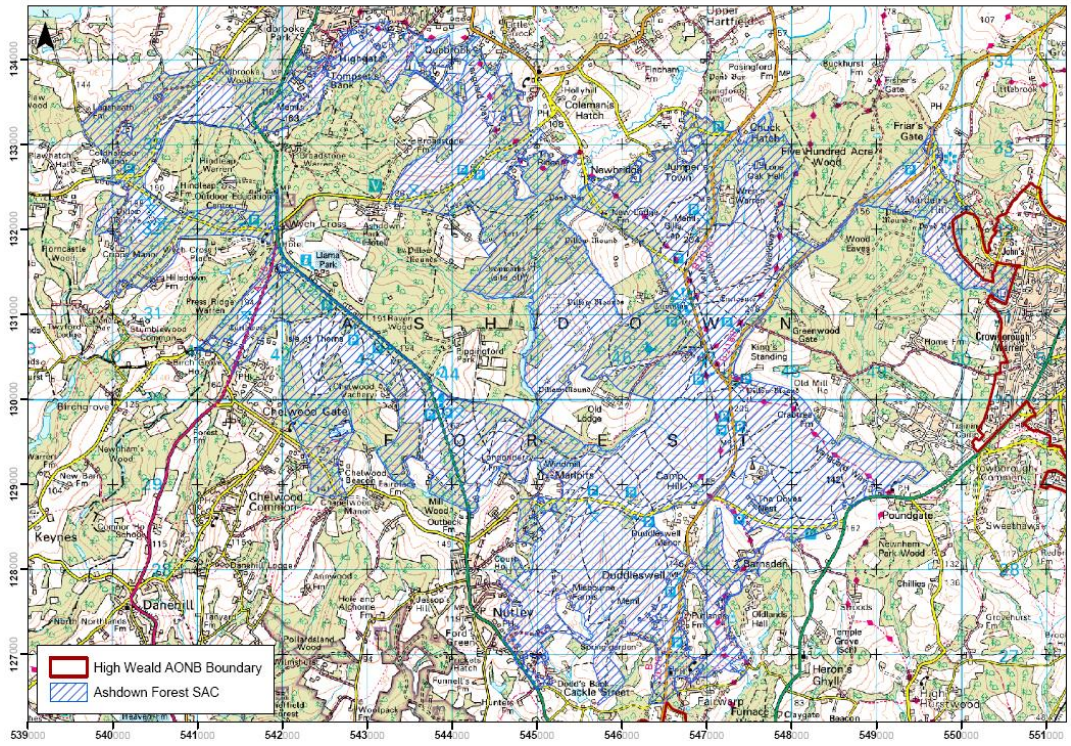
Appendix G - The Assessment Matrix of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029*

*note: this is a separate document

Appendix A - Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation

Designation: **SAC**
Grid reference: TQ450300 (site centroid)
Area: **2729** (ha)
Local Authority: **Wealden District**
Amount of site within AONB: **Whole Site**

Site Map



SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (April 2012)

Ashdown Forest SAC Description

Ashdown Forest received its SAC status in 2005. It is an open heathland occupying the highest sandy ridge-top of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It was designated because it contains one of the largest single continuous blocks of lowland heath in South-East England with both European dry heaths and, in a larger proportion, North Atlantic wet heath, covering over two thousand hectares combined. The survival of the forest's extensive heathlands has become more important when set against the large-scale loss of English lowland heathland over the last 200 years; within the county of East Sussex, heathland has shrunk by 50% over the last 200 years, and most of what remains is in Ashdown Forest. The damming of streams, digging for marl, and quarrying have produced several large ponds in a number of areas of the forest.

The site also supports a significant presence of great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*, although this is not a primary reason for site selection, as well as supporting important assemblages of

beetles, dragonflies, damselflies, and butterflies, including the nationally rare silver-studded blue *Plebejus argus*, and birds of European importance, such as European nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata* and Eurasian hobby *Falco subbuteo*.

General site character

Heath, Scrub, Maquis and Garrigue, Phygrana (60%)
Mixed woodland (40%)

Qualifying Features

H4010 Northern Atlantic Wet Heaths with *Erica tetralix*

The vegetation community M16 *Erica tetralix – Sphagnum compactum* wet heath element provides suitable conditions for several species of bog-mosses *Sphagnum spp*., bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, common cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* and marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*.
M16 wet heath is characteristic of drier climates in the south and east, and is usually dominated by mixtures of *Erica tetralix, Calluna* and *Molinia*. The bog-moss *Sphagnum compactum* is typically abundant. In the south, species with a mainly southern distribution in Britain, such as marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe*, brown beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca* and meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, enrich wet heaths. Wet heath constitutes approximately 54.5% of the total habitat within Ashdown Forest.

H4030 European Dry Heaths

European dry heaths typically occur on freely draining, acidic to circumneutral soils with generally low nutrient content. Ericaceous dwarf-shrubs dominate the vegetation. The most common is heather *Calluna vulgaris,* which often occurs in combination with gorse *Ulex spp*., bilberry *Vaccinium spp.* or bell heather *Erica cinerea*, though other dwarf-shrubs are important locally.
The European Dry heath in Ashdown Forest is an extensive example of the south-eastern H2 *Calluna vulgaris – Ulex minor* community. This vegetation type is dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*, with transitions to other habitats. It supports important lichen assemblages, including species such as *Pycnothelia papillaria*. This site supported the most inland remaining populations of hairy greenweed *Genista pilosa* in Britain, but it has not been recorded on the Forest since the 1970s.

S1166 Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*

The great crested newt is the largest native British newt, reaching up to around 17cms in length. Newts require aquatic habitats for breeding. Eggs are laid singly on pond vegetation in spring, and larvae develop over summer to emerge in August – October, normally taking 2–4 years to reach maturity. Juveniles spend most time on land, and all terrestrial phases may range a considerable distance from breeding sites.

The great crested newt is also fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended), making it a 'European Protected Species'.

Ashdown Forest SAC Conservation objectives[1]

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species rely;
- The populations of qualifying species;
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Existing baseline condition of Ashdown Forest SAC

The majority of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) units which cover the SAC designated heathland habitat of the Ashdown Forest including both wet and dry heath are in unfavourable recovering condition, with a smaller number in either unfavourable declining or favourable condition.

Ecological requirements of qualifying features and species

H4010 Northern Atlantic Wet Heaths is a community that requires acid, nutrient poor soils that are at least seasonally water logged. Wet heath often occupies areas of impeded drainage on lower valley sides and less-steeply sloping ground. Drainage is a key factor. Wet heath can occur naturally, due to abiotic factors such as soil acidity, low nutrient status and waterlogged soil conditions, which impedes succession to woodland.

Wet heaths require relatively high rainfall and an even spread of rain throughout the year. Relative humidity is required to remain moderately high with winters not too cold and summers not too hot. Mild winter temperatures are important for many of the individual plant and animal species.

H4030 European dry heaths typically occur on freely draining, dry acidic to calcareous soils with generally low nutrient content. Nearly all dry heath is semi-natural, being derived from woodland and developed through grazing and burning. Dry heaths vary in their flora and fauna according to climate, and are also influenced by altitude, aspect, soil conditions (especially base-status and drainage), maritime influence and grazing and burning intensity.

[1] European Site Conservation Objectives for Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation Site code: UK0030080, Natural England: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/UK0030080-Ashdown-Forest-SAC_tcm6-31864.pdf

Great crested newts rely on waterbodies for breeding but otherwise they spend much of their lives on land. They over winter on land, normally hibernating underground and emerge soon after the first frost-free days in January or February to begin the migration to breeding ponds. Movement on land occurs almost exclusively at night and their progress is dependent on factors such as evening temperatures and rainfall, favouring wet or damp conditions with temperatures above 5^{o}C. Great crested newts require quite specific pond conditions for breeding. Ponds ideally need to have neutral to alkaline water (pH 6 or above) with areas of open water and well vegetated margins.

Breeding ponds tend to be nutrient rich, not too shaded, free of fish with not too many waterfowl present. They require suitable refuges to use in extreme weather and during daytimes, such as large pieces of rotting deadwood, rubble piles or disused mammal burrows.

Vulnerability[1,2]

Lack of appropriate management

Lowland heathlands are created mostly through human management by grazing, cutting, and burning. If they are left to natural processes, they then lose their open character and disappear under thick scrub or secondary forest. However, some fluctuations and variations from year to year are normal and acceptable. Factors that reduce the area of open heath are damaging. Several bryophyte and lichen species require open bare ground that is wet in winter but dry in summer.

Lack of management is the main threat to the site (insofar as the absence of management would result in succession from open heathland to woodland). Most of the SAC is managed sympathetically by the Conservators of Ashdown Forest and a current and agreed management plan is in place[2]. However, there is a high demand on resources for scrub clearance, bracken mowing etc., particularly in ungrazed areas. A lack of resources can make appropriate and sustainable management difficult.

Grazing

The optimum site management is grazing, however only approximately a third of the SAC is grazed. There is ongoing liaison with the Conservators and other landowners/managers to increase the area of grazed heathland. Obstacles to grazing include public opposition to fencing, availability of graziers/suitable livestock, and constraints on dog walkers. In general, public access is not a threat to the SAC, unless it prevents expansion of the grazed area.

The optimum management for the site is grazing with some other mechanical measures. However, only approximately a third of the site is grazed. The lack of grazing is now being addressed by the grazing strategy. However, obstacles to grazing exist including a need for fencing, constraints on dog walkers and other forms of recreation, the availability of appropriate livestock, the fragmentation of heathland blocks within the site and land ownership

1 European Site Conservation Objectives: Supplementary advice on conserving and restoring site features. Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code: UK003008

[2] Ashdown Forest Vision and Management Strategy: https://ashdownforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Ashdown-Forest-Vision-2021-31.pdf

insofar as land in private ownership is not grazed. Public access is not considered to be a threat to the SAC unless it prevents grazing.

Bracken and undesirable species

The spread of bracken and invasive or non-native species such as rhododendron and Japanese knot weed, and black cherry are threats to the SAC.

The spread of bracken Pteridium aquilinum is a problem on many lowland heathlands. The unpalatable nature and density of bracken as a tall-herb fern, and its decomposing litter, can smother and shade out smaller and more characteristic heathland vegetation. Usually, active management of bracken is required to reduce or contain its cover across this habitat feature. But this fern has also some nature conservation value, for example on sites where fritillary butterflies occur and utilise bracken litter habitat.

Undesirable non-woody and woody vascular plants species may require active management to avert an unwanted succession to a different and less desirable state.

Pollution

Exposure to atmospheric pollutants, for example, nitrogen deposition is a potentially significant threat to the structure and function of wet and dry heaths.

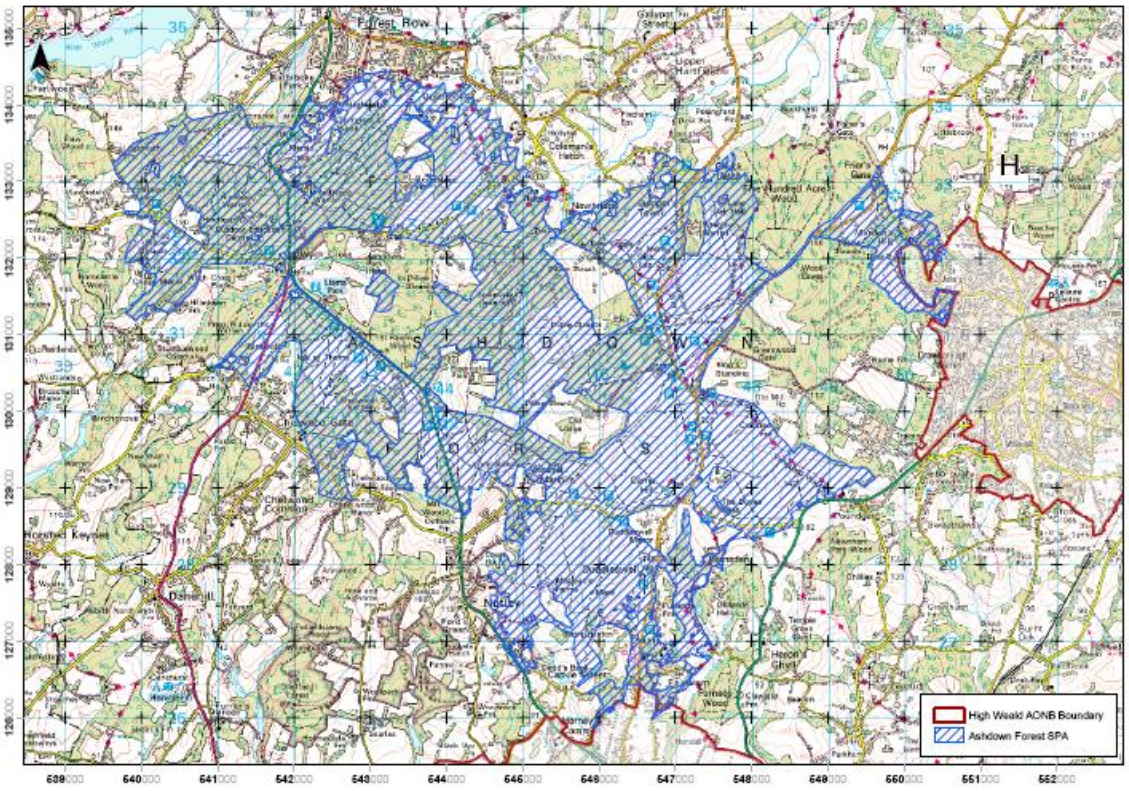
This habitat type is considered sensitive to changes in air quality. Exceedance of these critical values for air pollutants may modify the chemical status of its substrate, accelerating or damaging plant growth, altering its vegetation structure and composition and causing the loss of sensitive typical species associated with it.

Relevant plans, projects, and assessments

Wealden Core Strategy Local Plan 2013-2027 (2013)
Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031
Local Authority Habitat Regulations Assessment of Local Plans
Transport studies for Local Plans
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton and Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan 2013, and Sites Plan 2017
East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 (Lpt 3)
Kent Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering growth without gridlock 2016-2031 (Lpt 4)
West Sussex Transport Plan 2011-2026 (Lpt 3)
Surrey Transport Plan 2011-2026 (Lpt 3)

Appendix B - Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area

Designation: **SPA**
Grid reference: TQ450300 (site centroid)
Area: 3205.64(ha)
Local Authority: **Wealden District**
Amount of site within AONB: **Whole Site**



SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (June 2012)

Ashdown Forest SPA description

Ashdown Forest is in the High Weald of East Sussex in south-east England, where valley mires, heath and damp woodland have developed on soils derived from Hastings Sands (Lower Cretaceous). Once a royal hunting forest, reduced grazing has resulted in the accelerated development of woodland and encroachment of bracken over former heath. Nevertheless, some fine examples of heathland habitats remain, with humid or wet heath predominating, dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Bell Heather Erica cinerea and Cross-leaved Heath *E. tetralix* in the dampest conditions. Where drier heaths occur, they are dominated by heather in association with Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Dwarf Gorse *U. minor*. Stream sides and mires add further variety, with *Sphagnum* mosses, Cottongrass *Eriophorum sp*., Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* all characteristic plants. The woodlands are also varied, with Birch *Betula sp*. typically establishing first over heath, followed by Oak *Quercus robur*, Willow *Salix sp*. and Pine *Pinus sp*. in places, eventually forming dense and shaded areas with sparse ground flora. Breeding birds of heath, scrub and woodland are

associated with the varied mosaic of their respective habitats, distributed over the higher slopes and valleys of the High Weald.

Together with the nearby Wealden Heaths SPA and Thames Basin Heath SPA, Ashdown Forest forms part of a complex of heathlands in southern England that support breeding bird populations of European importance.

Qualifying features

Ashdown Forest qualifies under Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) as it is used by 1% or more of the Great Britain population of species of European importance During the breeding season this includes:
Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*, 20 pairs representing at least 2.1% of the breeding population in Great Britain.
Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, 35 pairs representing at least 1.1% of the breeding population in Great Britain.

Ashdown Forest SPA Conservation Objectives

With regard to the individual species and/or assemblage of species for which the site has been classified (the 'Qualifying Features' listed above); The conservation objective for Ashdown Forest SPA is: **Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), by maintaining or restoring:**

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar);
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar);
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar) rely;
- The populations of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar);
- The distribution of the qualifying features (Dartford warbler / nightjar) within the site.

Targets for Ashdown Forest SPA

<u>Nightjar</u>
Maintain the size of the breeding population at a level which is above 35 pairs, whilst avoiding deterioration from its current level.
To achieve favourable condition the nightjar requires an abundance of night flying insects; open ground with predominantly low vegetation bare patches and sparse woodland/scrub cover; reduction of displacement of birds; extent and distribution of habitat area.

<u>Dartford warbler</u>
Restore the size of the breeding population to a level which is above 20 pairs whilst avoiding deterioration from its current level.

The Dartford warbler requires large unbroken dwarf-shrub layer of heather with scattered gorse; abundance of shrub layer invertebrates; mix of heather trees and gorse amongst heathland vegetation; reduction or displacement of birds; extent and distribution of habitat area to achieve favourable condition.

Ecological requirements

Nightjar

The nightjar is a summer migrant from sub-Saharan Africa, arriving in Britain in April to mid-May and returning in August or September. Nightjars are nocturnal and they are rarely seen in the day, staying still, and camouflaged as they roost. Their nests are usually located in bare or sparsely vegetated patches on the ground, mainly on free-draining sandy soils within areas of mature dry heathland, young forestry plantations or in woodland clearings of over 1.5 hectares. Nightjars often rear two broods a season where normally two eggs are laid from mid-May to mid-July. Chicks hatch after about 19 days and fly at about 17 days old, then are reliant on the parents for about four weeks. Nightjars feed on seasonally available suitable prey consisting of flying insects (such as moths, beetles, and flies), being most active at dusk and dawn and in some circumstances well into the night.

The nightjar will travel an average of 3km from nest sites to feed on a range of habitats such as heathland, deciduous or mixed woodland, orchards, diverse plantations, riparian habitats, freshwater wetlands, and gardens.

Nightjar status

Between surveys in 1968-72 and 1992 there was a decline in UK range of 52%, and now the species breeds mainly in southern England, with scattered populations as far north as central Scotland. Lowland heathland and young forestry plantations are now the most important habitats. An increase in forestry clear-fells because of major storms and forest management have assisted recent increases, with over 50% of the total population found in this habitat in the 1992 survey.

Sussex typically holds 20% of the country's nightjars. The Ashdown Forest nightjar population grew by almost 29% from 1997 – 2004, while the national population increased by 35% between 1992 and 2004. However, there was a decline in the 2005 population by 21.7% based on the 2001 figures. The reasons for this are not known but could relate to weather conditions, survey coverage, or increasing disturbance from visitors or other activities.

Vulnerability

Loss of nesting habitat

The area of heathland in the UK has undergone a dramatic reduction during this century due to agricultural land claim, afforestation and built development. For example, it is estimated that 40% of England`s lowland heathland has been lost since the 1950s. Threats continue from housing and infra-structure developments and where heathland lacks appropriate management, it will become unsuitable as nesting habitat due to invasion by bushes and trees.

Loss of feeding habitat
Nightjars require extensive areas of suitable feeding habitat, especially uncultivated land, therefore the loss of such habitats within a few kilometres of the nesting area may result in a decline in the number of birds.

Decline in food availability
It is possible that a decline in the availability of large insects caused by changes in agriculture (such as the indirect effects of pesticides) and/or climatic change, may have affected nightjar populations.

Disturbance by humans and recreational activities
Nightjars are ground nesting birds and can be disturbed by humans and dogs who may range into heather dominated areas and may flush birds from their nest.

Ecological requirements

Dartford warbler
The Dartford warbler is resident on the lowland heathlands of southern Britain, where it favours mature heather dominated dry heathland with dense bushes of gorse where it feeds on invertebrates. Gorse provides the predominant feeding habitat for Dartford warbler, as it is richer in invertebrate food than heather, therefore management is primarily aimed at maintaining gorse of various age and structure amongst a mainly heathland habitat. Invasive scrub and bracken need to be controlled. Dartford warblers hold territories of between 2 - 6 ha in size (depending on habitat quality) and nests are located in either dense gorse or deep heather. Scattered gorse cover of 5% is optimal and should be of a range of ages to provide a continuum of suitable bushes. Larger blocks of dense gorse have been shown to be especially important during periods of snow, when the birds retreat to them.

Dartford warbler status
The Dartford warbler almost died out in the UK in the severe winter of 1962 and 1963 when the population dropped to just 10 pairs. Since then, populations have increased. In 1974 the total national population was estimated to be 557 pairs; however, the distribution had moved further west. The species is very susceptible to cold winters. In 2006, the UK population was estimated at 3,214 territories representing an increase of 70% since 1994.

The Dartford warbler re-colonised Ashdown Forest in 1989 (one pair) and has since expanded. There were twelve pairs by 1993 and 26 by 1994. However, since 2005 there has been a decline in populations of 57.6%. The reasons for this are not known but could relate to weather conditions, survey coverage, or increasing disturbance from visitors or other activities.

Vulnerability

loss of habitat
Lack of management, and succession of gorse, and loss of heathland to woodland. Pressure on resources makes sustainable management difficult. Habitat fragmentation is also an issue for the heathland.

Recreational disturbance
Most recreation on the site is informal, such as walking, dog walkers and horse-riding. There are areas where intense use is resulting in damage to some rights of way and disturbance to the Forest. The use of the Forest as an area of greenspace to facilitate new development is putting increased visitor pressure on the site.
[Source: JNCC/Natural England]

Severe winters and cold
Dartford Warblers are susceptible to climatic factors such as prolonged periods of snow cover in winter and cold, damp spring weather. Survival and productivity appear to be enhanced when patches of dense gorse are available when provide protection from bad weather.
Dartford warbler numbers within Ashdown Forest declined following the particularly harsh winters of 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Relevant Plans, Projects and Assessments for Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA:

Wealden Core Strategy Local Plan 2013-2027 (2013)
Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031
Wealden District Council Habitat Regulations Assessments
Ecological Monitoring at Ashdown Forest: Considering the Current and Future Impacts on the SAC caused by Air Quality and Nitrogen Deposition., WDC (2018)
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan 2013 and Sites Plan 2017
River Ouse Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
River Medway Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
Ashdown Forest Vision and Management Strategy 2021-2031
SANG Sites established or proposed by Local Planning Authorities
Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMM), Mid Sussex DC, (2019)

Appendix C - Dungeness Special Area of Conservation

Designation: **SAC, SPA and Ramsar Site**
Grid reference: TQ920118
Area: **3223.56**(ha) *entire site* (SAC)
Local Authority: **Rother & Shepway Districts**
Amount of site within AONB: None of the SAC extends into the AONB but does partially follow the AONB boundary on the western side.

Site map SAC

SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (June 2012)

Site Description (SAC)

Dungeness is the UK's largest shingle structure. The site retains very large areas of intact parallel ridges with characteristic zonation of vegetation. It has the most diverse and most extensive examples of stable vegetated shingle in Europe, including the best representation of scrub on shingle, notably prostrate forms of broom *Cytisus scoparius* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. A feature of the site, thought to be unique in the UK, is the small depressions formed within the shingle structure, which support fen and open-water communities.
The Dungeness foreland has a very extensive and well-developed shoreline, although with sparse vegetation. The strandline community on this site comprises Babington's orache *Atriplex glabriuscula*, which occurs mostly on the accreting eastern shoreline, although it is also present on the eroding southern shoreline.
This extensive site also hosts a large and viable great crested newt *Triturus cristatus* population in a range of natural and anthropogenic habitats. These include natural pools and those resulting from gravel extraction and other activities. Terrestrial habitat of importance for feeding and shelter is provided by a range of open shingle vegetation with scrub in the vicinity of some of the waterbodies.

General site character

Tidal rivers/estuaries/mud flats/sand flats/lagoons (20%)
Salt marshes/pastures/steppes (1%)
Shingle/sea cliffs/islets (64%)
Coastal sand dunes, Sand beaches, Machair (2%)
Inland water bodies (standing/running water (2%)
Bogs/marshes/water-fringed vegetation/fens (10%)
Conifer woodland (1%)

Qualifying features

1210 annual vegetation of drift lines

This habitat type occurs on deposits of shingle lying at or above mean high-water spring tides. The types of deposits involved are generally at the lower end of the size range of shingle (2-200 mm diameter), with varying amounts of sand interspersed in the shingle matrix. These shingle deposits occur as fringing beaches that are subject to periodic displacement or overtopping by high tides and storms. The distinctive vegetation, which may form only sparse cover, is therefore ephemeral and composed of annual or short-lived perennial species.

1220 perennial vegetation of stony banks

Shingle structures develop when a sequence of foreshore beaches is deposited at the limit of high tide. More permanent ridges are formed as storm waves throw pebbles high up on the beach, from where the backwash cannot remove them. Several beaches may be piled against each other, and extensive structures can form. The ecological variation in this habitat type depends on stability, the amount of fine material accumulating between pebbles, climatic conditions, width of the foreshore, and past management of the site. The ridges and lows formed also influence the vegetation patterns, resulting in characteristic zonation's of vegetated and bare shingle.

Site SAC Conservation Objectives

is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Existing baseline condition of Dungeness SAC

The majority of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) units which cover the SAC designated vegetated shingle habitat of the Dungeness are in favourable condition, with a few in either unfavourable recovering of unfavourable no change condition.

Vulnerability

Climate change
The site was assessed in 2015 by Natural England as highly vulnerable to climate change, e.g., rising sea levels, due to the sensitivity, fragmentation, and topography of the habitats at the site.

Fragmentation
The site is vulnerable to fragmentation through contraction in the habitat range. This reduces the overall area and local diversity, as well as undermining the resilience of the site to future environmental changes.

Access
Intentional and unintentional public (pedestrian) access as well as vehicle access causes unnecessary disturbance to the site, due to the unconsolidated nature of shingle. Shingle ridges are easily damaged by access.

Relevant Plans, projects, and assessments

Rother Core Strategy (2014)
Ashford Local Plan to 2030
East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2011 to 2026 (LPT3)
Kent Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016–2031 (LTP4)
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan (2013) and Sites Plan (2017)
Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-30
Rother & Romney Catchment Flood Management Plan, EA (2009)
South Foreland to Beachy Head Shoreline Management Plan (2006)
Don and Rother Abstraction Licensing Strategy (2013)
National Character Area Profile:123 Romney Marshes (NE499) (2013)

Appendix D - Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site

Designation: **SPA and Ramsar**
Grid reference: TQ982229 (site centroid)
Area **4010.29**(ha) *entire terrestrial site* (SPA)
Area: **6377.63**(ha) *entire site* (Ramsar)
Local Authority: **Rother & Shepway Districts**
Amount of site within AONB: **Partial Site –**The Eastern end of the SPA and Ramsar designation is within the AONB, following the 'Pett Levels'. Both designations extend much further to the east outside of the AONB, and the bulk of the SPA is an offshore designation.

Site Map (Ramsar site turquoise stripe, SPA yellow stripe)

SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (April 2023)

Site description for the SPA

Dungeness, Romney Marsh, and Rye Bay SPA are located on the south coast of England between Hythe in Kent crossing the county border of East Sussex to Norman's Bay. This is a large area with a diverse coastal and marine landscape comprising a number of habitats, which appear to be unrelated to each other. However, all of them persist because coastal processes have formed and continue to shape a barrier of extensive coastal shingle beaches and sand dunes across an area of intertidal mud and sand flats. The site includes the largest and most diverse area of shingle beach in Britain, with low-lying hollows in the shingle providing nationally important saline lagoons, natural freshwater pits, and basin fens. Rivers draining the Weald to the north were diverted by the barrier beaches, creating a sheltered saltmarsh and mudflat environment, which was gradually infilled by sedimentation, and then reclaimed on a piecemeal basis by man. This area is fringed by important intertidal habitats, and contains relict areas of saltmarsh, extensive grazing marshes and reedbeds.

Qualifying features

A021 *Botaurus stellaris*; Great bittern (Non-breeding)
A037 *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*; Bewick's swan (Non-breeding)
A056 *Anas clypeata*; Northern shoveler (Non-breeding)
A081 *Circus aeruginosus*; Eurasian marsh harrier (Breeding)
A082 *Circus cyaneus*; Hen harrier (Non-breeding)
A132 *Recurvirostra avosetta;* Pied avocet (Breeding)
A140 *Pluvialis apricaria*; European golden plover (Non-breeding)
A151 *Philomachus pugnax*; Ruff (Non-breeding)
A176 *Larus melanocephalus;* Mediterranean gull (Breeding)
A191 *Sterna sandvicensis*; Sandwich tern (Breeding)
A193 *Sterna hirundo*; Common tern (Breeding)
A195 *Sterna albifrons*; Little tern (Breeding)
A294 *Acrocephalus paludicola;* Aquatic warbler (Non-breeding)
Waterbird assemblage

Dungeness, Romney Marsh, and Rye Bay SPA supported on average tens of thousands of individual waterbirds in the non-breeding season, including wildfowl and waders. This assemblage is of both European and international importance. In the context of SPA qualification the assemblage includes the wintering and passage species of European importance as listed above, as well as species whose numbers exceed 1% of the GB wintering or passage populations i.e.: European white-fronted goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*, wigeon *Anas penelope*, gadwall *Anas strepera*, pochard *Aythya ferina*, little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, coot *Fulica atra*, sanderling *Calidris alba*, whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* are also present in sufficient numbers to warrant their being listed as a major component species of the assemblage, since their numbers exceed 2,000 individuals.

Site SPA Conservation Objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely
- The population of each of the qualifying features, and,
- The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

Site Ramsar designation

site qualifies for Ramsar designation under criterion 1 because it contains representative, rare, or unique examples of natural or near-natural wetland types:

- Annual vegetation of drift lines and the coastal fringes of perennial vegetation of stony banks (Ramsar wetland type E – sand, shingle, or pebble shores)
- Natural shingle wetlands: saline lagoons (Ramsar wetland type J – coastal brackish/saline lagoons), freshwater pits (Ramsar wetland type K – coastal freshwater lagoons) and basin fens (Ramsar wetland type U – non-forested peatlands).

The site further qualifies under Criterion 2 because it supports threatened ecological communities and vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species:

Greater water-parsnip *Sium latifolium*, Warne's thread-moss *Bryum warneum*, water vole Arvicola amphibius, aquatic warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*, medicinal leech *Hirudo medicinalis*, a ground beetle *Omophron limbatum*, marsh mallow moth *Hydraecia osseola hucherardi*, De Folin's lagoon snail *Caecum amoricum*, Mute swan *Cygnus olor*, Shoveler *Anas clypeata*.

Vulnerability

Coastal erosion
The site itself is vulnerable to coastal erosion. The birds for which the site is designated are at risk from predation by foxes, mink, and badger – localised pest control is in force. The site is well protected from visitor disturbance, but leisure activities can be a problem, so the area is zoned to try to control this activity.

Land management practises
The site provides a diverse coastal landscape which is vulnerable to changing agricultural practices, particularly the ploughing of grasslands for crops. Changes to turf production may also affect the bird population. Management agreements are addressing the issue of lowering water levels.

Relevant Plans, Projects, and Assessments

Rother Core Strategy (2014)
Ashford Local Plan to 2030
East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2011 to 2026 (LPT3)
Kent Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016–2031 (LTP4)
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan (2013) and Sites Plan (2017)
Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-30
Rother & Romney Catchment Flood Management Plan, EA (2009)
South Foreland to Beachy Head Shoreline Management Plan (2006)
Don and Rother Abstraction Licensing Strategy (2013)
National Character Area Profile:123 Romney Marshes (NE499) (2013)

Appendix E - Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation

Designation: **SAC**
Grid reference: TQ856110 (site centroid)
Area: **182.47** (ha)
Local Authority: **Hastings Borough**
Amount of site within AONB: **Whole Site**

Site Map

SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (June 2012)

Site Description for SAC

Hastings Cliffs are an area of actively eroding soft cliff that includes the most southerly exposures of the lower Hastings Beds. The site contains three valleys cut into the strata, which support woodland and scrub habitats with an unusual 'Atlantic' bryophyte flora. Closer to the sea the maritime influence stunts the trees, but other bryophytes become important here, with one species, *Lophocolea fragrans*, at its only south-east England locality. Maritime scrub and coastal heathland are found closer to the cliff edge, with grassland supporting maritime species such as thrift *Armeria maritima*. The clay cliff slopes are eroding and support a range of habitats from bare ground and flushes to maritime grassland and scrub, reflecting the successional development of vegetation following cliff-falls.

General Site Character

Coastal sand dunes, sandy beaches and machair (1%)
Shingle, sea cliffs, and islets (30%)
Inland water bodies (5%)
Bogs, marshes, water fringed vegetation, Fens (2%)
Heath, scrub, maquis and garrigue, phygrana (13%)
Dry grassland, Steppes (8%)
Improved grassland (10%)
Broad-leaved deciduous woodland (25%)
Mixed woodland (1%)
Inland rocks, screes, sands (5%)

Site Conservation Objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the qualifying natural habitat
- The structure and function (including typical species) of the qualifying natural habitat, and
- The supporting processes on which the qualifying natural habitat rely.

Qualifying Features:

<u>H1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts</u>

Hastings Cliffs are an area of actively eroding soft cliff on the south coast of England. They include the most southerly geological exposures of the Lower Hastings Beds. The site contains three valleys cut into the strata, which support woodland and scrub habitats with an unusual Atlantic bryophyte flora. Closer to the sea the maritime influence stunts the trees, but other bryophytes become important here, with one species, *Lophocolea fragrans* fragrant crestwort, at its only south-east England locality. Maritime scrub and coastal heathland are found closer to the cliff edge, with grassland supporting maritime species such as thrift *Armeria maritima*. The clay cliff slopes are eroding and support a range of habitats from bare ground and flushes to maritime grassland and scrub, reflecting the successional development of vegetation following cliff-falls.

Existing baseline condition of Hastings SAC

The majority of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) units which cover the SAC designated vegetated sea cliff habitat of Hastings Cliffs are in favourable condition, with one unit in unfavourable declining condition and another in unfavourable recovering condition.

Vulnerability

Public access
Most of the SAC can be accessed by visitors through Hastings Country Park, so the number of visitors could potentially have an impact on the cliffs.

Erosion
Hastings Cliffs is a short section of almost natural coastline of dramatic eroding cliffs. The very nature of this soft eroding material results in extensive landslides, with vegetation changing from year to year. The cliffs are known to support a good population of bryophytes, particularly sensitive to changes in water and air quality. The effect on the rate of erosion by surrounding coastal protection measures and offshore activities is unknown but may have an impact.

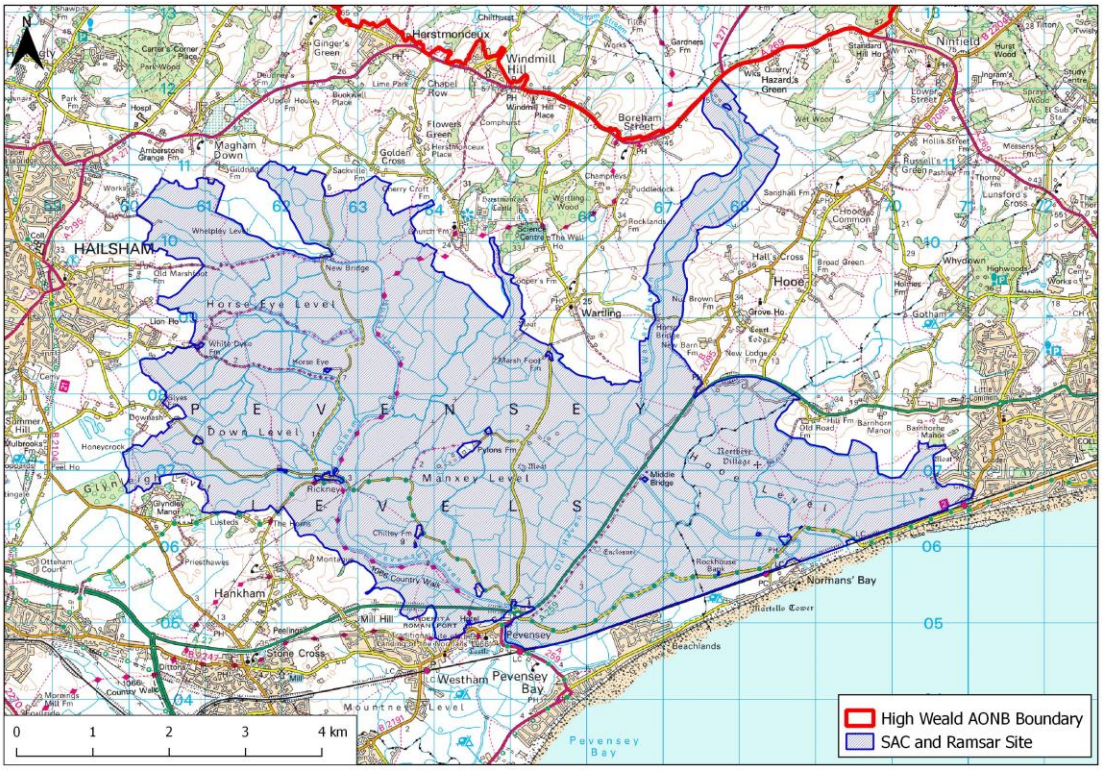
Relevant Plans, Projects, and Assessments

Hastings Planning Strategy (2014)
Hastings Local Plan Habitat Regulations Assessment, HBC (2020)
East Sussex Local Transport Plan 2011 to 2026 (LPT3)
Kent Local Transport Plan 4: Delivering Growth without Gridlock 2016–2031 (LTP4)
East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton & Hove Waste and Minerals Local Plan (2013) and Sites Plan (2017)
Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013-30 (2016)
Hastings Country Park Nature Reserve Management Plan (2020-30)
Rother & Romney Catchment Flood Management Plan, EA (2009)

Appendix F – Pevensey Levels Special Area of Conservation and Ramsar Site

Designation: **SAC and Ramsar**
Grid reference: **TQ649074 (site centroid)**
Area: **3585.38 (ha)**
Local Authority: **Wealden District**
Amount of site within AONB: **None but watercourses originating in the AONB flow into the Site.**

Site map



SAC Boundary data sourced from Natural England via http://magic.defra.gov.uk/ (June 2012)

Site description (SAC)

Pevensey Levels is one of the largest and least-fragmented lowland wet grassland systems in southeast England. The low-lying grazing meadows are intersected by a complex system of ditches which support a variety of important wetland communities, including nationally rare and scarce aquatic plants and invertebrates. The site also supports a notable assemblage of breeding and wintering wildfowl. A small area of shingle and intertidal muds and sands is included within the site.

The site also supports an outstanding assemblage of wetland plants and invertebrates including many British Red Data Book species. The site supports 68% of vascular plant species in Great Britain that can be described as aquatic. It is probably the best site in Britain for freshwater molluscs, one of the five best sites for aquatic beetles Coleoptera and supports an outstanding assemblage of dragonflies Odonata.

General site character

Inland water bodies (Standing water, Running water) (2.5%)
Humid grassland, Mesophile grassland (97.5%)

Site SAC objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Qualifying SAC Features:

S4056 *Anisus vorticulus*; Little whorlpool ram's-horn snail

This is a small freshwater whirlpool ram's-horn snail. Comparatively little is known about the ecology of this species, however it is likely that its requirements reflect those of the freshwater flora and fauna assemblage which is better. This species occurs across a range of sites in southern and eastern England. Pevensey Levels is a large and expansive grazing marsh that supports *Anisus vorticulus* in both a wide spatial distribution and in good population density.

Existing baseline condition of Pevensey Levels SAC

The majority of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) units which cover the SAC habitats of fens, marsh and swamp of Pevensey Levels are in unfavourable recovering condition across the entire site.

Ramsar qualifying features:

Ramsar criterion 2
The site supports an outstanding assemblage of wetland plants and invertebrates including many British Red Data Book species.

Ramsar criterion 3
The site supports 68% of vascular plant species in Great Britain that can be described as aquatic. It is probably the best site in Britain for freshwater molluscs, one of the five best sites for aquatic beetles Coleoptera and supports an outstanding assemblage of dragonflies Odonata.

Vulnerability

Inappropriate Water Levels

The site is a complex managed hydrological system. Maintaining adequate water levels (0.3cm below ditch neck) is critical to the feature. This is currently being delivered through a Water Level Management Plan to achieve appropriate water levels, which should be adequately monitored and maintained. This is critical for the maintenance of the ram's-horn snail (*Anisus vorticulus*) habitat and control of pennywort.

Invasive Species

Floating pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* and Crassula have a known impact on freshwater invertebrate assemblages partly through intervention in ditch succession. There is over 45 km of floating pennywort across Pevensey, and it is likely to spread across the site unless appropriate control is in place. There are no known control methods, and trials are underway to identify suitable methods that could be implemented.

Water Pollution

Two sewerage treatment plants flow into the top of the catchment. Water quality analysis by the Environment Agency show that phosphorus (P) levels are higher than 0.1m/l downstream of these plants. Maximum levels of 0.1m/l P can be tolerated by freshwater invertebrate and plant assemblages (which includes ram's-horn snail).

Discharges from these two sewerage plants are not sufficiently diluted due to low flow. Secondly, the storm water tank of one plant sits directly on the site and during peak flows discharges filtered, but untreated, sewerage into the same location.

Relevant Plans, Projects, and Assessments

- Pevensey levels Water Level Management Plan review (2014)
- Cuckmere and Pevensey Levels Abstraction Licensing Strategy V3 (2019)
- Wealden Local Plan (under production 2024)
- National Character Area Profile:124 Pevensey Levels (NE478) (2013)
- The Pevensey Bay to Eastbourne Coastal Management Scheme (in progress 2023)
- Site Improvement Plan Pevensey Levels (2014)
- Wealden & Rother Core Strategies Appropriate Assessment Hydrology Local to the Pevensey Levels (2010)
- Cuckmere and Sussex Havens Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
- Wastewater Position Statement Hailsham North and Hailsham South Wastewater Treatment Works, Southern Water (2015)

Appendix G - The Assessment Matrix of the revised High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

The assessment matrix is a list of the objectives of the revised High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 assessed against the conservation objectives of the European sites. The assessment was designed to determine whether or not a plan option (objective, in this case) is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site. Consultees should also consider other relevant plans and projects when looking at the matrix.

Three possible outcomes from undertaking the screening process were chosen:

Positive Reinforcement Where High Weald Management Plan objectives and designation objectives are clearly aligned, in these cases positive reinforcement is the result in the matrix.	
Not Applicable/No Effect Where the two sets of objectives are un-related or have no effect upon one another then the matrix has been left uncoloured.	
Potential Conflict or Uncertain Effect This outcome relates to both the compatibility of the objectives and/or management of the sites. Either where compatibility issues are known or where there is the potential for incompatibility.	

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-24 objectives			Ashdown Forest SAC	Ashdown Forest SPA	Dungeness SAC	Dungeness, Romney Marsh to Rye Bay SPA and Ramsar Site	Hastings Cliffs SAC	Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar Site
Key Component	Objective code	Objective	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its qualifying features: European dry heaths and Northern Atlantic wet heaths habitats.	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to maintaining or restoring the site for its qualifying species and populations of: *Caprimulgus europaeus* Nightjar and *Sylvia undata* Dartford Warbler.	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its qualifying feature: Annual vegetation of drift lines and Perennial vegetation of stoney banks.	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the qualifying species for which the site was designated.	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its qualifying features: Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic & Baltic coasts.	Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, for the populations of *Anisus vorticulus* Ramshorn snail and other species for which the site was designated.
Natural Systems	**G1**	To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.			Upstream river & wetland restoration within the AONB will directly & indirectly benefit this downstream site	Upstream river & wetland restoration within the AONB will directly & indirectly benefit this downstream site		Upstream river & wetland restoration within the AONB will directly & indirectly benefit this downstream site
	G2	To protect landform and geological features including, sandstone outcrops.					SAC managed to allow erosion which could conflict with G2.	
	G3	To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.	Climatic conditions are important for maintaining favourable habitat conditions.	Climatic conditions are important for maintaining favourable habitat conditions.	Climatic conditions are important for maintaining favourable habitat conditions.	Climatic conditions are important for maintaining favourable habitats. Improvements in the AONB would affect areas outside its boundary.	Climatic conditions are important for maintaining favourable habitat conditions.	Climatic conditions are important for maintaining favourable habitats. Improvements in the AONB would affect areas outside its boundary.
	G4	To restore soil health across the High Weald.	Restoration of soil health including soil biodiversity supports above ground biodiversity.	Restoration of soil health including soil biodiversity supports above ground biodiversity.				Restoration of soil health including soil biodiversity supports above ground biodiversity.

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-24 objectives			Ashdown Forest SAC	Ashdown Forest SPA	Dungeness SAC	Dungeness, Romney Marsh to Rye Bay SPA and Ramsar Site	Hastings Cliffs SAC	Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar Site
Settlement	S1	To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.						
	S2	To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout and design.						
	S3	To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald						
Routeways	R1	To maintain the historic pattern, morphology and features of routeways.						
	R2	To protect enhance the ecological function of routeways.	Where routeways pass through Ashdown Forest this objective supports habitats.	Where routeways pass through Ashdown Forest this objective supports habitats.	Where routeways connect through to Dungeness this objective supports habitats.	Where routeways pass through Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay this objective supports designated species.	Where routeways pass through Hastings Cliffs this objective supports habitats.	Where routeways connect through to the Pevensey Levels this objective supports habitats
Woodland	W1	To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.	Retention of woodland could frustrate heathland restoration projects.	Retention of woodland could frustrate heathland restoration projects.				
	W2	To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.	This objective supports the woodland habitats of Ashdown Forest	This objective supports the woodland habitats of Ashdown Forest				
	W3	To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.						
	W4	To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.	Some forestry operations could damage habitats and species.	Some forestry operations could damage habitats and species.				
Fieldscapes & Heath	FH1	To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.	Intensive farming methods could damage habitats both directly and indirectly	Intensive farming methods could damage habitats both directly and indirectly		Intensive farming methods could damage habitats both directly and indirectly	Intensive farming methods could damage habitats both directly and indirectly	Intensive farming methods could damage habitats indirectly at Pevensey Leve
	FH2	To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.						
	FH3	To protect and enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.	This objective supports the heathland habitats of Ashdown Forest	This objective supports the heathland habitats of Ashdown Forest		This objective supports the farmed habitats of Romney Marsh	This objective supports the farmed habitats of Hastings Cliffs	This objective supports the farmed habitats of the Pevensey Levels
	FH4	To protect individual archaeological features as well as historic assets and pattern of field and heath.						
Dark skies	DS1	To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution, obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial and	This objective supports dark skies policies for the designated site, and to promote intrinsically dark skies locally	This objective supports dark skies policies for the designated site, and to promote intrinsically dark skies locally	This objective supports dark skies policies for the designated site, and to promote intrinsically dark skies locally	This objective supports dark skies policies for the designated site, and to promote intrinsically dark skies locally	This objective supports dark skies policies for the designated site, and to promote intrinsically dark skies locally	This objective supports dark skies policies for the designated site, and to promote intrinsically dark skies locally

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-24 objectives			Ashdown Forest SAC	Ashdown Forest SPA	Dungeness SAC	Dungeness, Romney Marsh to Rye Bay SPA and Ramsar Site	Hastings Cliffs SAC	Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar Site
		public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.						
	DS2	To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald.	This objective supports a wide range of species found on the Ashdown Forest including the species the site is designated for	This objective supports a wide range of species found on the Ashdown Forest including the species the site is designated for	This objective supports a wide range of species found on Dungeness	This objective supports a wide range of species found Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay including the species the site is designated for	This objective supports a wide range of species found at Hastings Cliffs including the species the site is designated for	This objective supports a wide range of species found on the Pevensey Levels including the species the site is designated for
Perceptual and aesthetic qualities	**PQ1**	To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities, and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald.						
	PQ2	To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.	Promotes the unique landscape and valued views of open heathland of the Ashdown Forest.	Promotes the unique landscape and valued views of open heathland of the Ashdown Forest.	Promotes the unique landscape of open vegetated shingle of the Dungeness.	Promotes the unique landscape of open marsh land and vegetated shingle of the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay.	Promotes the unique character of vegetated sandstone cliffs at Hastings Cliffs.	Promotes the unique open landscape and valued view across the Pevensey Levels.
	PQ3	To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all.	Increased public access can be harmful to habitats and species.	Increased public access can be harmful to habitats and species.	Increased public access can be harmful to habitats and species.	Increased public access can be harmful to habitats and species.	Increased public access can be harmful to habitats and species.	Increased public access can be harmful to habitats and species.
Land-based economy and rural living	**LBE1**	To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.	Intensive land management activities could damage habitats and species.	Intensive land management activities could damage habitats and species.		Intensive land management activities could damage habitats and species.	Intensive land management activities could damage habitats and species.	Intensive land management activities could damage habitats and species.
	LBE2	To reconnect settlements and residents with the surrounding countryside, and maintain and improve rural amenities and services that support communities within the context of the rural settlement pattern.						
	LBE3	To improve agricultural and forestry infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing and workspaces for land-based workers) along with skills development for rural						

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-24 objectives			Ashdown Forest SAC	Ashdown Forest SPA	Dungeness SAC	Dungeness, Romney Marsh to Rye Bay SPA and Ramsar Site	Hastings Cliffs SAC	Pevensey Levels SAC and Ramsar Site
		communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.						

Amendments Made to Management Plan to Avoid Potential Conflicts and Uncertain Impacts

HWAONB MP Objective	Natura 2000 Site	Potential Conflict or Uncertain Effect	Action Taken
G2: To protect the sandstone outcrops, soils and other important landform and geological features	Hastings Cliffs SAC	SAC managed to allow erosion which could conflict with G2.	Rationale for G2: 'To conserve landform and topography on which the High Weald's character depends, and maintain nationally important geological exposures, allowing for erosion where appropriate, conserving the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support and protecting their value as significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.'
W1: To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.	Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA	Retention of woodland could frustrate heathland restoration projects.	Wooded Heath added to the Key Characteristic list for the Woodland component
W4: To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.	Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA	Some forestry operations could damage habitats and species.	Woodland Action public bodies should: 'Support appropriate commercial woodland management, in particular tailored support for a vibrant timber economy in the High Weald woodland landscape.'
FH1: To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.	Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA; Dungeness and Romney Marsh SPA and Ramsar Site; Hastings Cliff SAC, and Pevensey Levels SAC	Intensive farming measures could damage habitats both directly and indirectly.	Regenerative agriculture promoted throughout the Management Plan, especially in the Drivers for Change. Regenerative agriculture works with nature rather than against it.
PQ3: T To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all.	Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA; Dungeness SAC, Dungeness and Romney Marsh SPA and Ramsar Site; Hastings Cliff SAC, and Pevensey Levels SAC	Increased public access can be destructive to habitats and species.	The objective rationale states 'To meet the demand for informal recreation from residents and those living close to the AONB, whilst ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment for this and future generations.'
LBE1: To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.	Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA; Dungeness and Romney Marsh SPA and Ramsar Site; Hastings Cliff SAC, and Pevensey Levels SAC.	Intensive land management activities could damage habitats and species.	Caveat in the Land-based Economy 'N.B. For clarity, the pursuance of the above objectives or actions set out in this section should not harm the other character components or be at the expense of their contribution to the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.'

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High Weald National Landscape

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

of the

High Weald AONB Management Plan review 2024-2029 Final version 2024

Prepared by the

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Contents

From November 22nd 2023, all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. This change is endorsed by Natural England. The High Weald National Landscape is the new name for this protected landscape. The High Weald National Landscape remains an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty insofar as all policy, legislation and guidance applies to the designated landscape. For this reason, this document still titled and refers to the High Weald AONB Management Plan. The statutory purpose of the designated landscape "to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape" remains unchanged.

Non-technical Summary

Consultation on the scoping report for the Sea took place between 21st April an 26th May 2022, and on the draft Strategic Environmental Assessment via a public consultation between 25th September and 5th November 2023. Comments received from these consultations inform the environment report.
Objectives were taken from the SEA of the previous Management and were then used to assess the proposed objectives in the draft Management Plan against their reasonable alternatives. The alternatives include not having an objective on the subject area and the original wording of the objective where this is proposed to be changed.

In all cases the SEA concludes that the proposed objectives in the draft Management Plan have the most or equal positive environmental effects compared to their reasonable alternatives.

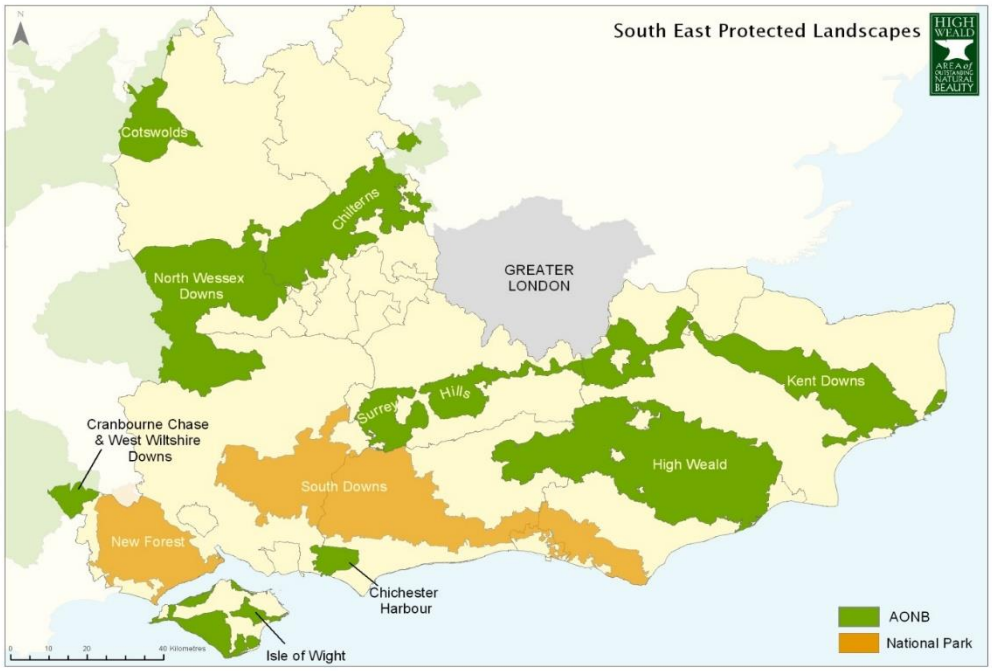
In considering cumulative impacts and mitigation, the following conclusions were drawn:

W4	To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.	Mitigation for potential adverse effects provided by guidance from the AONB Unit on woodland management that does not damage archaeology or ecological assets of woodland.
FH1	To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.	Mitigation for potential adverse effects provided by guidance from the AONB Unit on agricultural land management practices that protect and enhance habitats, water systems and soils. Colour and design guidance can mitigate impact of new buildings.

1.0 Introduction to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

1.1 The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) lies at the heart of South East England, covering 1,457 km^2 (570 sq. miles), across four counties. It is an historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and ancient droveways and sunken lanes. The distinctive character of the High Weald arises from a long history of human interaction with the natural environment, and the exploitation of its resources – wood, iron, and food. The landscape of the High Weald is essentially medieval, and its present form was fundamentally established by the 14th century and has survived major historic social and technological changes. Its future evolution and conservation is dependent on understanding and reinforcing the traditional interactions between people and nature that are responsible for the landscape we value today.

1.2 Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities to 'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of AONBs in making decisions that affect the designated area. Local authorities with land in an AONB, acting jointly in the case of AONBs crossing administrative boundaries, are legally obliged under the same Act 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', and to review this plan every five years. To assist the local authorities in meeting these statutory duties a High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) was established. This is a partnership of the 15 local authorities covered by the designation plus Natural England and other organisations representing farming, forestry, business and recreation interests. The Partnership is supported by the High Weald AONB Unit, a strategic, specialist team that advises on the management of this nationally valued landscape.



2.0 The High Weald AONB Management Plan

2.1 The High Weald AONB Management Plan identifies and sets objectives for the key features of the landscape that have survived and form the essential basis of its natural beauty. These key components of Natural Beauty are being actively researched and understood to inform best practice in caring for and managing them, and to inform the choices for its future conservation and enhancement.

2.2 The High Weald AONB Management Plan was first published in 2004 as a twenty-year plan until 2024. It was reviewed in 2009, 2014 and 2019 but these reviews were limited in scope and did not change the fundamental basis of the Management Plan.
The Management Plan 2024-2029, will begin a new 20-year strategy, and therefore a more substantive review was undertaken planned than the previous reviews.

2.3 The Management Plan sets the context and background against which proposed policies and actions can be judged in terms of their impact on the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. This allows decision-makers and their advisors to effectively audit their actions against the duty of regard to conserving and enhancing the AONB under section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

2.4 In this way the Management Plan seeks to set the framework against which stakeholders and decision makers can set their own actions and programs. Where their activities meet and complement the objectives of the Management Plan then natural beauty should be conserved or enhanced. Activities that conflict with the Management Plan objectives are likely to have a negative effect on the quality and integrity of the natural and historic environment and hence the landscape and overall environment. The High Weald AONB Unit produces guidance and expert advice on the care and management of the AONB to inform and guide stakeholders.

2.5 The Management Plan does not set policies about individual issues, but sets the context and background against which these issues can be judged in terms of their impact on natural beauty. Thus, the Plan does not set planning policy or rules for land management but gives a framework against which decisions can be assessed.

3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2024-2029

3.1 As stated above, the next Management Plan will begin a new 20-year strategy, and therefore a more substantive review was planned than the previous reviews. The previous Management Plan was robust and continued to be relevant subject to minor updates, so the majority of the review resource focused on developing a new 20-year strategy and implementation section of the Plan (the cross-cutting themes drivers of change).

3.2 The High Weald AONB Unit did not undertake any specific research projects for the new sections, due to both budget and time constraints, but also because the new sections and content all fall into academically well researched areas e.g., climate change, soil science, nature recovery, dark skies, and the health and wellbeing benefits of accessing natural environments.

3.3 **What will remain unchanged?**

- The High Weald AONB Units approach to, and philosophy of natural beauty, and majority of its key components remains unchanged.
- Most of the overall structure of the 2019-24 Management Plan and content remains unchanged. Specifically, there were no changes for the chapters on The High Weald (facts and figures, landscape, brief history), About the Plan and AONB Policy and Legal Framework other to ensure they were up to date.

3.4 **What was be deepened and/ or enhanced?**

- The JAC Commitment and Vision was strengthened.
- What is Natural Beauty was updated with contemporary research.
- The Key Characteristics: were reviewed to ensure a good understanding of what characterises each key component. The individual component vision statements were removed / incorporated into ambition statements.

3.5 **What was reviewed and refreshed?**

- All key facts and figures within the Management Plan were checked and up-dated as required, this includes High Weald natural and cultural capital facts and figures, as well as maps throughout the document.
- The 'Other Qualities' sections was relaunched as 'Perceptual and Aesthetic Qualities'. This addresses the qualities that are perceived from moving through the natural and cultural landscape of the High Weald, but which cannot be addressed through the characters of physical features alone. For example, long views, quietude, tranquillity, rurality, and other experiential qualities.
- Planning and development has been given its own section, including Planning Principles for the High Weald AONB.

3.6 **What was added?**

- A new key component 'Dark Skies' was added. This builds on substantial work that the High Weald Unit has undertaken regarding dark skies over the past few years, including work with CPRE and the South Downs National Park Authority, and a number of local dark skies groups.
- High Weald Cross Cutting Themes – this constitutes the largest change and forms an additional part of the Management Plan (key components and other existing sections making up the first part). This section sets out the drivers of change to the High Weald

for the next 20 years and presents an aspirational investment plant for the next 20 years for conserving and enhancing the functional landscape and natural beauty of the High Weald.

- This section is broken down into:

  An introduction to the drivers of change and investment strategy, which will underpin the 20-year strategy.

  1. Soil Health – addressing the neglected importance of soil health with a soil-up strategy based around the holistic land management approach of regenerative agriculture.
  2. Climate change – coupling the ranging threats from climate change with sustainable, nature-based solutions to creating a climate resilient landscape.
  3. Nature Recovery – addressing the ecological crisis and how delivery of recovery strategies may be expected to look across the High Weald.
  4. People and Access - tackling inequity in access to the natural world, health, and education.
  5. Planning and Development – with a dedicated section to providing guidance specific to Local Authority planners using the Management Plan.

3.7 **This Strategic Environmental Assessment:**

- Reviews the relevant plans, policies and programmes,
- Updates the baseline information,
- Updates key issues and environmental problems,
- Tests the proposed Management Plan objectives and their reasonable alternatives against environmental objectives as set out in section 8.

4.0 Methodology and Timetable for Strategic Environmental Assessment

4.1 The requirement to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment is set out in 'The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (Statutory Instrument 2004 No.1633)', which transposes the European SEA Directive 2001/42/EC since leaving the European Union.

4.2 In broad terms a SEA requires;

- consultation on the scope of the SEA, including the policy context and baseline environmental data available, the identification of environmental issues and problems and the proposed framework for the SEA; and
- the preparation of an environmental report which will test the proposed Management Plan Review and its reasonable alternatives against environmental objectives. This report was consulted on, in parallel with the Management Plan, and the finalised version published alongside the final Management Plan. The expected timetable is as follows.

4.3 The timetable for stages of the SEA was as follows.

Dates	Management Plan Review	SEA process
March 2022	Scope of review approved by JAC.	Draft SEA Scoping Report written
April-May 2022	Natural England formally notified of commencement of Plan process.	Carry out consultation on Scoping Report with statutory bodies (5 weeks).
May 2022 – August 2023	Draft Plan, having regard to findings of SEA Environmental Report	Draft SEA Environmental Report of emerging draft Plan
September 2023	Consultation Draft Plan approved by JAC.	Environmental Report to accompany report on Plan to JAC.
September-November 2023	Public consultation on Consultation Draft MP.	Public consultation on draft Environmental Report.
November – January 2023/24	Scope of revisions discussed and preparation of final draft Plan.	Scope of revisions discussed and preparation of final Environmental Report.
February 2024	Local authority & partner consultation and approval of revised MP.	Final Environmental Report to accompany local authority adoption reports on the Plan.
March2024	Present final Plan to JAC for approval.	Present final Environmental Report to JAC for approval.
May 2024	Send Plan to SoS.	Send Environmental Report to SoS with Plan.

5.0 Policy Context – Relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes

5.1 In preparing, developing, and reviewing the Management Plan, regard will be had to the objectives and directions of other relevant plans, policies and programmes. The following policies are relevant in setting the context and parameters for the scoping stage of this strategic environmental assessment and setting out the areas in which the Management Plan may have an impact or needs to respond to, in setting the management guidelines and issues for Natural Beauty.

Title	Date	Purpose of Document and Links with Other Documents	Relevance to Management Plan & SEA
International			
UN Paris Climate Change Agreement https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement	2016	International agreement to keep global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels.	The Management Plan and SEA need to take account of Climate Change and agreed measures to address and mitigate it.
Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, United Nations https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf	2015	Has set in place legally binding emission reductions targets for developed countries that have ratified it.	
UN Resolution 2015 Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld	2015	Details a set of 17 Goals which were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the Goals.	
European Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention	1993	Promote the maintenance of biodiversity taking account of economic, social, cultural and regional requirements. Conservation of natural habitats and maintain landscape features of importance to wildlife and fauna.	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Convention.

Title	Date	Purpose of Document and Links with Other Documents	Relevance to Management Plan & SEA
International Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) https://www.ramsar.org/	1976	This is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. The Convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.	The Ramsar and SAC sites at Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay and at Pevensey Levels are downstream of head waters within the High Weald and may be impacted by Management Plan objectives.
The Aarhus Convention - UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/text	1998	Acknowledges the need for public participation in environmental issues and grants the public's rights to access to justice and information on the environment.	Public participation in the preparation and implementation of the Management Plan will be required.
European Landscape Convention https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236096/8413.pdf	2006	To integrate landscape considerations into any policies with possible impacts on landscape.	Defines landscape as "an area perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors". The Management Plan should take account of people's perceptions and how the landscape is affected by people.
Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories, IUCN https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/pag-021.pdf	2008	Promotes the conservation of biological diversity particularly where conservation objectives need to be met over a large area with a range of ownership patterns and governance.	AONBs are recognised as Category V Protected Landscapes under IUCN's (International Union for Conservation of Nature) global protected area framework.
National			
National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/97	1949	Statutory basis for AONBs and National Parks	Sets purpose of AONB designation to conserve and enhance natural beauty, which the Management Plans defines for the High Weald.
Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (legislation.gov.uk)	2017	To conserve habitats in Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and	Ashdown Forest SAC and SPA and Hastings Cliffs SAC are within

Title	Date	Purpose of Document and Links with Other Documents	Relevance to Management Plan & SEA
The 2017 Regulations are one of the pieces of domestic law that transposed the land and marine aspects of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and certain elements of the Wild Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC). The changes are made by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.		Special Protection Areas (SPA). It establishes a network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs)	the High Weald AONB. The Management Plan will need to avoid damaging these areas – see HRA.
Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/contents	1981	Principal legislative mechanism for the protection of wildlife in Great Britain. Affords certain protection to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Act in its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.
The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/section/1	2000	Statutory basis for AONBs	Gives public bodies the 'duty to have regard to conserving and enhancing the AONB'. Sets statutory requirement for AONB Management Plans.
The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents	2006	Sets up Natural England and the Commission for Rural Communities and imposes a duty on public bodies to have regard to conserving biodiversity.	The Management Plan should have regard to this Act, particularly in relation to its biodiversity objectives, policies and targets.
Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/407/made Since the UK left the EU, the EU Water Framework Directive has been revoked and replaced in England by the above noted law	2017	The Regulation commits to achieving good qualitative and quantitative status of all water bodies.	The Management Plan will need to have regard to this Regulation.
The Equality Act 2010 and National Disability Strategy 2021 https://www.gov.uk/rights-disabled-person/the-equality-act-2010-and-un-convention	2010 and 2021	Seeks to level up opportunity at every stage and area of disabled people's lives	The Management Plan and SEA contents and preparation process should comply with this legislation and support this strategy.
The Climate Change Act 2008 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/27/contents	2008	To ensure that by 2050 the UK greenhouse gas emissions are 80 % lower than 1990 baseline.	The Management Plan and SEA need to take account of Climate Change and agreed measures to address and mitigate it.
The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2019/1056/contents/made	2019	To reduce greenhouse gas to net zero by 2050.	
The Climate Change Committee: Net Zero – The UK's Contribution to Stopping Global Warming https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Net-Zero-The-UKs-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming.pdf	2019	To make sure there is net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.	

Title	Date	Purpose of Document and Links with Other Documents	Relevance to Management Plan & SEA
Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/biodiversity-2020-a-strategy-for-england-s-wildlife-and-ecosystem-services	2018	Provides aims for reducing biodiversity loss, improving networks and guiding development.	Management Plan should complement this strategy.
DEFRA. A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf	2018	Detail and targets for the next 25 years.	The Management Plan should have regard to this Plan.
Historic England's 'Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment' Advice Note https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/sustainability-appraisal-and-strategic-environmental-assessment-advice-note-8/	2016	Provides advice on historic environment considerations as part of the SEA process	The Management Plan and SEA should have regard to this advice
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2	2021	To set out the government's planning policies.	The Management Plan should have regard to these policies.
National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance	Ongoing	To provide further detail and application of policies in the NPPF.	The Management Plan should have regard to this guidance.
Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents/made	2017	Seeks to ensure that plans or projects do not adversely affect the protected features of a habitats site.	The Management Plan should take account of this legislation
The Environment Act https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted	2021	Introduces Nature Recovery Strategies, Biodiversity Net Gain and other environmental legislation	The Management Plan should take account of this legislation
Environmental Improvement Plan https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1133967/environmental-improvement-plan-2023.pdf	2023	First revision of the 25YEP, setting out how landowners, communities and businesses deliver each of the goals for improving the environment.	The Management Plan should have regard to these policies.
Regional/Local			
Environment Agency Catchment Flood Management Plans for the Cuckmere and Sussex Havens; the Ouse; the Rother and Romney; and the Medway.	Various	Considers all types of inland flooding, from rivers, groundwater, surface water and tidal flooding. Shoreline management plans consider flooding from the sea.	Management Plan should have regard to but also influence these plans.
Local Plans produced by the 15 local planning authorities in the High Weald and their supporting assessments and evidence.	Various	Set out local planning policies for the area.	The Management Plan should have regard to but also influence these plans.

Title	Date	Purpose of Document and Links with Other Documents	Relevance to Management Plan & SEA
Local Transport Plans produced by the 4 local highway authorities in the High Weald.	Various	Set out the transport strategy and priorities for the area.	The Management Plan should have regard to but also influence these plans.

6.0 Baseline Environmental Information

6.1 Extensive data and GIS resources are used regularly to develop the understanding and advice relating to each of the features of the components of natural beauty. A wider range of statistical and data sources are available to assist in our understanding of the features and qualities of the landscape. The following data is available to inform the SEA process and Management Plan review in general.

Data sources for Management Plan review and SEA		
Landscape - Key components of natural beauty from AONB Management Plan		
Natural systems	Sandrock outcrops Geology Gill Streams Soils	British Geological Survey Environment Agency – Flood Maps and Water Quality High Weald AONB datasets Soil Classification System for England and Wales
Settlement	Built development (settlement pattern) Historic Farmsteads Listed Buildings Historic Parkland	Heritage England – Extensive Urban Surveys High Weald AONB datasets Historic Landscape Characterisation Ordnance Survey Tithe Maps Historic Farmstead mapping
Routeways	Historic Droveways Public Rights of Way Roman roads	High Weald AONB datasets Ordnance Survey Tithe Maps
Woodland	Ancient Woodland Other woodland (not ancient) Woodland Archaeology	Ancient Woodland Inventories
Field and Heath	Unimproved/semi-improved grassland (Meadows) Heathland Historic field boundaries Archaeology of field and heath	High Weald AONB High Weald AONB datasets Fieldscapes Study
Dark skies	Dark skies mapping Star counts	High Weald (with CPRE) dataset
Other data sources		
Biodiversity	SSSI SAC SPA Sites of Nature Conservation Importance	Defra https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics Natural England – MAGIC data sets and Monitoring Information http://www.magic.gov.uk/ Natural England http://www.sssi.naturalengland.org.uk/ Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre http://sxbrc.org.uk/ Kent Wildlife Trust http://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/ Surrey Biodiversity Information Centre http://www.surreywildlifetrust.org/SBIC
Cultural Heritage	Archaeological sensitive areas Scheduled ancient monuments	County Councils – Historic Environment Records Historic England – https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/
Material Assets	Farm Holdings Farmed Area Farm Size Public Rights of Way Network	Defra June Agricultural Census https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-agricultural-industry-in-england-and-the-uk-at-june Local Highway Authorities

Population Statistics and Human Health	Population of the AONB Health of the population	Office of National Statistics - Census 2021
Air Quality	Air Quality Management Areas	Local Authorities
Climate change	Soil and biomass carbon flux, stores and stocks Habitat climate vulnerability	NAAONB and Cranfield University Carbon Audit Natural England 2021 climate change adaptation manual NE571 http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5679197848862720
Public access and perceptions	access, use, perceptions of natural beauty and climate mitigation	Bespoke external consultant lead engagement 2022

6.2 Landscape

The High Weald was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983. It is one of 34 AONBs in England. Twenty percent of Britain's finest countryside in England and Wales is protected by law as National Parks or AONBs. The High Weald also lies almost entirely within the High Weald National Character Area, which in places extends beyond the AONB boundary.

Time depth and objective analysis has defined the High Weald AONB as characterised by dispersed settlement particularly historic farmsteads; ancient tracks and routeways; an abundance of ancient woodland, wooded heaths and shaws with a heritage of woodland industries and iron working; and small, irregularly shaped, and productive fields. These are all draped over a deeply incised and ridged landform of clays and sandstones with numerous gill streams and are closely related to socio-economic characteristics that have roots extending deep into history.

6.3 Geography

The High Weald AONB covers 1461 sq. km. It extends across four counties, 11 districts and 100 parishes.

6.4 Population

In 2021 the AONB had a population of 124,111 (51,000 households) with a density of 84 people per sq. km. An additional 80,800 people lived in urban areas directly adjacent – Tunbridge Wells, Crowborough and Heathfield – but which are excluded from the AONB designation boundary. A further 716,000 people lived in wards wholly or partly within 5km of the AONB boundary.

6.5 Settlements

The High Weald AONB has no urban areas but has 17 market towns and villages with populations greater than 2000, the largest being Battle with a population over 6000. Adopted Green Belt covers 7.7 % of the area.

6.6 Economy

In 2021, 12 % of High Weald businesses were land-based businesses compared with 2.4 % in the South East. Eighteen percent of those in employment in the High Weald are self-employed compared to 13 % in England as a whole, with the vast majority working without employees. Twenty-nine percent of the High Weald population were retired compared with 22 % of the South East in 2021. Average house prices in the High Weald are higher than in the South East.

6.7 Agriculture

In 2021 there were 1,562 registered farm holdings in the AONB, down from 3,192 in 2008. The total area used for agriculture fell by 7.5 % in the same period with farms under 5 ha showing the greatest fall in numbers down from 1,363 to 216. The number of farms engaged in livestock production reduced by 15.5 % while horticulture declined by 50 % and those engaged in cereals and general cropping increased by over 100 %. The number of people employed in agriculture also fell from 4,698 in 2008 to 3,853 in 2021.

6.8 Soils

There is no Grade 1 agricultural land in the High or Low Weald. Grade 2 covers 2.5 % of the High Weald with 85 % being Grade 3 and 4, compared to 3.7 % Grade 2 in the Low Weald and 90 % Grade 3 and 4.

Whilst this is the traditional way of measuring soil quality, it does not take into account its biodiversity or carbon sequestration function. There are more soil microorganisms in the form of fungi, bacteria, and soil microbes living in a teaspoon of healthy soil than there are people on the earth. These microorganisms along with earthworms, beetles, ants, and mites all have a different job to do to boost soil and plant health. Healthy soil life works together to reduce plant diseases and provide a range of nutrients and minerals for the plants. This nourishes wildlife, crops and other plants and in turn the grazing livestock.

Regenerative farming reveres soil health. It regenerates and builds the soil and then protects and nurtures the life in the soil by working with nature rather than against it. As the health of the soil recovers it becomes naturally fertile and productive and allows soil life to return and thrive. This stabilises the farm ecosystem, stops soil erosion, builds more soil, improves water infiltration and increases the farm's ability to absorb carbon from the air and store it within the soil.

6.9 Water

The High Weald covers part of the headwaters of eight river catchments: the Arun; the Adur; the Ouse; the Mole; the Medway; the Teise; the Rother; and the Cuckmere. Thirteen river catchments fall at least partly within the boundary of the AONB. There are 4,613 km of water courses in the High Weald, including 253 km of main river channels. There are 13,401 ponds (many of which originated as small-scale extraction sites for clay, stone and marl). Five reservoirs cover 744 ha, including Bewl Water, the largest body of inland water in the South East.

6.10 Cultural Heritage

The essential character of the High Weald was established by the 14th century and has survived major historical events, and social and technological changes. It is considered to be one of the best surviving coherent medieval landscapes in Northern Europe: this fundamental and largely immutable character is the essence of the natural beauty of the AONB.

The High Weald is also renowned for the site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings. There are 5,296 listed buildings; 91 Scheduled monuments; 57 medieval parish churches and 44 registered historic parks and gardens. Historic parkland especially medieval deer parks and 'designed landscapes' are a distinctive feature of the High Weald.

6.11 Biodiversity

Nearly 15 % of the High Weald is publicly owned, owned by conservation organisations, or designated under international or national law to protect wildlife. Internationally important sites for nature conservation (SPAs, SACs and Ramsar sites) cover 3,400 ha of the High Weald. In the High Weald 51 SSSIs cover 5,538 ha. The High Weald AONB offers a highly interconnected ecological infrastructure network with a mosaic of intermingled semi-natural habitat.

7.0 Statement of Key Environmental Issues

7.1 The following key environmental issues are relevant to the High Weald landscape and its Management Plan. These are scoped in terms of the key components of natural beauty identified by the 2019-2024 Management Plan, and then a range of other external factors that may have impacts on the environment of the AONB. Additionally, any predicted trends that may occur in the absence of any intervention (or inappropriate intervention) are outlined.

Key Issues for High Weald Management Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment		
Topic	**Key Issues**	**Predicted trends and impacts without intervention**
Natural systems	Flooding	Extended hard engineering management of rivers and flood defences with damage to environment and landscape quality around river basins
	Poor aquatic systems – failing to meet their potential for water quality, biodiversity, and amenity	Degradation of river and stream quality, reduction in fresh water biodiversity and natural function of small-scale water systems essential to gill woodland
	River restoration policies that can utilize natural processes to reduce flooding, improve the aquatic systems, and reduce costs of maintaining the current systems	Hard engineering river defences inappropriate in scale and function to the landscape and traditional interactions. Archaeological impacts
	Threats to sandstone outcrops – inappropriate use, management, and neglect of key geological features and the ecology that they support	Loss of, or continuing damage to the resource leading to erosion of the features
	Loss of soil through erosion and inappropriate management, and reduction in soil health	Increased need for petrochemical fertilizer use, loss of food growth medium, loss of water storage and water holding capacity, increased risk of flooding
Settlement	Need for greater understanding – e.g., of the dispersed settlement pattern of the High Weald, and the connections between settlements and the countryside	Inappropriate development and artificial expansion of key settlements to the detriment of the rural areas
	Suburbanization – erosion of AONB character through extension of curtilages, and inappropriate modifications, or treatments, of boundaries and buildings	Unsustainable patterns of development dependent on local key services not providing services to local rural areas and small-scale settlement typical of the Weald. Impact on settlement archaeology.
	Suburbanization – introduction of non-native species inappropriate boundaries and gates, and intrusive highway engineering	Gradual decline in landscape quality and traditional indigenous species and distinctive features
Routeways	Poor understanding – of the resource and the management needed to conserve the roads and non-vehicular routeways, for their ecology, archaeology, and their potential for informal recreation and non-vehicular transport	Threat to localised habitats dependent on the routeway character and loss of biodiversity. Threat to the quiet enjoyment and character of the country lanes and paths through inappropriate management
Woodland	Neglect – e.g., lack of management and poor stock Increased commercialization and archaeological impact	Degradation of existing woodland, loss of biodiversity and development of scrubby woodland and inappropriate species
	Lack of deer control	Failure of coppice, regenerative and new planted woodlands. Loss of distinctive ground flora.
	Extent of non-native species. Non-native species include invasive rhododendron, cherry laurel, sycamore, and grey squirrels	Spread of invasive species leading to degradation of biodiversity and decline in landscape quality.
	Fragmentation – the poor connectivity, increasing isolation, fragmented ownership, and small size of many woodlands is degrading their ecological value	Reduction in quality and spread of woodland and links between them, further degradation of biodiversity value.

Field and Heath	Declining extent of agriculture – land falling out of productive use into amenity and residential use, with consequent suburbanization and neglect	Loss of biodiversity, particularly plant species common to flower rich meadows, reduction in finite resource of un-improved grassland
	Environmental degradation – neglected fields scrubbing up, increasing run-off and agrochemical inputs, loss of key habitats (e.g., meadows and heaths), and damage to historic features (e.g., field boundaries/pattern, and archaeological sites and monuments)	Continued scrubbing up of fields, decline in biodiversity and loss of specialist habitats, heathland and unimproved grassland. Threat to field boundaries and historic and archaeological features of these landscape features.
	Lack of identification and understanding of the importance and potential of semi-improved / low input grasslands	Further loss of semi-improved / low input grasslands to development, woodland creation schemes, and loss of carbon stores if soils are disturbed.
Climate Change	Temperature rise, threat to species, hotter summers, migration, or loss of habitats	Threat to local indigenous species and habitats, loss of biodiversity, fundamental change in land cover and locally distinctive species
	Sea level rise	Risk to coastal areas, challenge of managed retreat or hard engineering sea defences
	Higher rainfall, wetter winters, risk of flooding	Damage to water courses, risk of flooding, threat of need to engineer against high water levels in water courses
	More frequent, increased intensity, longer duration extreme weather events.	Threat of irreversible damage or loss to habitats and features
	Approaches to and types of mitigation against the effects of climate change	Need to understand and scope the possible effects and impacts of any actions to mitigate for climate change in terms of their impact on landscape character and locally distinctive features. E.g., renewable energy – effects of wood fuel, bio crops etc.
	Approaches to and types of adaptation against the effects of climate change	Need to understand and scope the possible effects and impacts of any actions to adapt to the effects of climate change in terms of their impact on landscape character and locally distinctive features. E.g., need to understand the effects of temperature rise on specific species and ability of habitats to migrate.
Biodiversity	Loss of habitats	Continued declines in both habitat quality and quantity, such as continued loss of semi-improved grasslands to other land use types, and loss of quality of woodland and unimproved grasslands from lack of appropriate management.
	Species loss	Continued decline in many species across all taxa due to decreases in habitats, used for feeding and breeding, loss of habitat corridors and continued use of chemicals in the environment. This is particularly an issue for specialist species and those which are less mobile.
	Loss of soil health	Lack of education and understanding of the importance of soil health on planetary health, including climate cooling, water storage and flood mitigation, biodiversity and human health. Unnecessary surface sealing, chemical inputs and soil disturbance all contribute to loss of soil health.
Farming	Intensification of farming, concentration of holdings,	Intensive farming is a threat to biodiversity and traditional land management. Trend to increase farm holdings threatens to break down the traditional small-scale approach to farming in the High Weald. Intensive farming may lead to larger field sizes, loss of boundaries and features and degradation of landscape quality. Archaeology impacts.
	Agricultural profitability	Low or non-profitable farming, especially traditional farming practices, is a threat to the continued use of the land. Holdings are going out of production and management leading to a degradation of landscape quality, and habitats.
	Hobby farming, loss of traditional farming families & traditions	Small scale buying up of farm holding and hobby farming is a threat to the integrity of holdings and the traditional structure of agriculture in the High Weald, leading to a break down in land use, management, and biodiversity/habitat maintenance.
Development	Housing development	High levels of house building cumulatively, the potential of major development in the AONB, plus inappropriate scale, form, and details of housing generally, are aspects of inappropriate development that threatens local character and distinctiveness

		and traditional settlement patterns. Significant Archaeological impacts, particularly in un-surveyed areas.
	Sustainable development (rural / environmental sustainability)	Inappropriate definition and interpretation of sustainable development and communities threatens to impose uncharacteristic forms and patterns of development on the landscape to the detriment of the built environment and local social and economic patterns in rural areas.

8.0 Framework and Methodology

Objectives

8.1 The following objectives have been taken from the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the previous review of the Management Plan. This is because they remain relevant to present day environmental issues, and it retains consistency of approach.

1. To protect and enhance the landscape
2. To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)
3. To protect and where practical enhance and connect diverse habitats
4. To protect, enhance and connect flora and fauna
5. To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management
6. To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions
7. To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production
8. To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population
9. To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.

Potential conflicts between objectives

8.2 It is considered that the most likely conflicts are:

- Between 1 and 7, for instance where sustainable energy development has a significant landscape impact; and
- Between 1-7 and 8, for instance where initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of the population of the High Weald cause other environmental effects such as loss of habitat, landscape or historical feature or other natural resource.

Scoring methodology

8.3 As part of the Environmental Report the High Weald AONB Management Plan objectives and targets will be assessed against the nine environmental objectives listed above to identify their likely significant environmental effects. The possible outcomes used will be;

++	significant positive effect,
+	partial positive effect,
?	uncertain effect,
-	partial negative effect,
--	significant negative effect,
n/a	not applicable

Consultation

8.4 Consultation on this Scoping Report was carried out with the statutory bodies (Natural England, Historic England, and the Environment Agency) and the local authorities and other partners on the High Weald National Landscape Partnership. This Environmental Report is published at www.highweald.org alongside the Management Plan as set out in the timetable in section 4.

Table 1: Quality Assurance Checklist for Scoping Report

Strategic Environmental Assessment Requirements (Scoping Stage)	Where these are met
Objectives and Context	
The AONB Management Plan's purpose and objectives are made clear.	2.0 The High Weald AONB Management Plan; and 3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2024.
Environmental issues and constraints, including international and EC environmental protection objectives, are considered in developing objectives and targets.	5.0 Policy Context – Relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes. 6.0 Baseline Environmental Information; and 7.0 Statement of Key Environmental Issues and Problems.
SEA objectives are clearly set out and linked to indicators and targets where appropriate.	8.0 Proposed Strategic Environmental Assessment Framework.
Links with other related plans, programmes and policies are identified and explained.	5.0 Policy Context – Relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes.
Conflicts that exist between SEA objectives, between SEA and plan objectives and between SEA objectives and other plan objectives are identified and described.	8.0 Proposed Strategic Environmental Assessment Framework.
Scoping	
The assessment focuses on significant issues.	3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2024.
Technical, procedural, and other difficulties encountered are discussed; assumptions and uncertainties are made explicit.	3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2024.
Reasons are given for eliminating issues from further consideration.	3.0 Scope of Management Plan Review 2024.
Baseline information	
Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and their likely evolution without the plan or programme are described.	6.0 Baseline Environmental Information.
Environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected are described, including areas wider than the physical boundary of the plan area where it is likely to be affected by the plan.	6.0 Baseline Environmental Information.
Difficulties such as deficiencies in information or methods are explained.	6.0 Baseline Environmental Information.
Consultation	
Consultation Bodies are consulted in appropriate ways and at appropriate times on the proposed content and scope of the Environmental Report.	4.0 Methodology and Timetable for Strategic Environmental Assessment.

High Weald AONB Management Plan Objective Assessment Tables

The possible outcomes are:
++ significant positive effect,
+ partial positive effect,
? uncertain effect,
- partial negative effect,
-- significant negative effect,
n/a not applicable

Natural Systems

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective G1: To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.
Rationale: To improve water quality, water resource and structural habitats associated with water; to enhance the role of rivers, water courses and water bodies in supporting and increasing biodiversity, cooling the environment, protecting people and communities from flooding, and promoting enjoyment of wetlands.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	+	Some restoration projects may also enhance the landscape by removing artificial barriers.	-	No objective on this issue could result in retention of artificial barriers that have an adverse impact on the landscape.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	?	Some restoration projects may restore a historic water body with cultural associations but may also result in the loss of more recent historic features.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that historic routes with cultural associations remain lost but may also retain more recent historic features.

3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Restoration is likely to be beneficial to habitats by creating or restoring wetlands.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities to restore wetland habitats are missed.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Restoration is likely to be beneficial to flora and fauna by creating or restoring wetlands.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities to restore wetland habitats are missed.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	++	Restoration is likely to be beneficial to water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities to protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk are missed.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	?	Water quality and climatic conditions may be enhanced through restoration.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to safeguard the quality of water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	+	Restoration is likely to slow flows and reduce flooding which is a risk to some populations.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to slow flows and reduce flooding which is a risk to some populations.
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Options A have the most positive environmental effects.**			

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective G2: To protect landform and geological features, including sandstone outcrops.
Rationale: To conserve landform and topography on which the High Weald's character depends, and maintain nationally important geological exposures, allowing for erosion where appropriate, conserving the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support and protecting their value as significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.

Option B – No objective on this subject.

Option C – Previous Objective G2: To protect and enhance soils, sandstone outcrops, and other important landform and geological features.

Rationale: In order to conserve the soil health and soil carbon, landform and geology on which the High Weald's character depends, and maintain nationally important geological exposures allowing erosion where appropriate, conserving the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support and protecting their value as significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B		Option C	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Protecting and enhancing sandstone outcrops and landform will have a significant positive effect on the landscape.	--	The loss of these features would have a significant negative impact on the landscape	++	Protecting and enhancing sandstone outcrops and landform will have a significant positive effect on the landscape.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	+	Some sandstone outcrops are archaeologically important as they were used as prehistoric rock shelters.	-	The loss of these sandstone features would have a partial negative impact on the cultural heritage.	+	Some sandstone outcrops are archaeologically important as they were used as prehistoric rock shelters.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	+	Protect sandstone outcrop habitats which support communities of ferns, liverworts and mosses	n/a		+	Protect sandstone outcrop habitats which support communities of ferns, liverworts and mosses
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Protecting important and in some cases rare ferns, liverworts and mosses found on sandstone outcrops	n/a		++	Protecting important and in some cases rare ferns, liverworts and mosses found on sandstone outcrops
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to reduce silt run off.	++	Protecting and enhancing soil and landform would help prevent silt runoff into rivers.

6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to reduce silt run off.	++	Protecting and enhancing soil and landform would help prevent silt runoff into rivers.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.	++	Protecting and enhancing soil would protect a natural resource.
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A and C has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective G3: To pursue net zero across the High Weald without compromising its characteristic landscape beauty.
Rationale: To ensure that transformative mitigation and adaption policies are tailored to the High Weald's defining landscape character.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C - Previous Objective G3: To help secure climatic conditions and rate of change which support continued conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's valued landscape and habitats.
Rationale: In order to reduce locally arising greenhouse gas emissions and allows the High Weald to play its role in mitigating climate change.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B		Option C	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	?		?		?	Depends on the measures chosen.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Climate change mitigation measures should include water efficiency, SuDs etc	n/a		++	Climate change mitigation measures should include water efficiency, SuDs etc
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Climate change mitigation measures should include safeguarding soil, water and air quality.	n/a		++	Climate change mitigation measures should include safeguarding soil, water and air quality.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Climate change mitigation measures should include the protection of natural resources and sustainable energy use and production.	n/a		++	Climate change mitigation measures should include the protection of natural resources and sustainable energy use and production.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	+	Climate change mitigation measures will protect human populations from flooding etc.	-	No objective on this issue could result in adverse impacts of climate change on water systems, flooding and water supply.	+	Climate change mitigation measures will protect human populations from flooding etc.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	++	Work within and to nationally recognised monitoring and targets as set out under the legally defined term ‘net zero’	-	No objective on this issue could result in adverse impacts of climate change on soil, water and air quality.	++	Climate change mitigation measures should include water efficiency, SuDs etc
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	++	Work within and to nationally recognised monitoring and targets as set out under the legally defined term ‘net zero’	-	No objective on this issue could result in adverse impacts of climate change on natural resources and reduce use of sustainable energy use and production.	++	Climate change mitigation measures should include safeguarding soil, water and air quality.

8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	Work within and to nationally recognised monitoring and targets as set out under the legally defined term 'net zero'	-	No objective on this issue could result in adverse impacts of climate change on the human population from flooding etc.	++	Climate change mitigation measures should include the protection of natural resources and sustainable energy use and production.
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective G4: To restore soil health across the High Weald.
Rationale: To increase carbon sequestration and storage potential of soils, as well as water holding capacity to reduce flooding following high rainfall. Improve the soil ecosystem which supports above-ground and below-ground biodiversity and habitats across the High Weald. Healthy soil has higher nutrients for plants, which reduces the need for artificial fertilizer use in the long-term.
(Note: this is a brand-new objective to the 2024-2029 Management Plan)

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	?		-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Protecting and enhancing soil would through regenerative farming practices which prioritises soils would help to maintain traditional use of farmed land	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	+	Undisturbed soils ecosystems support above ground habitats, especially where undisturbed and with no inputs into the soil.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.

4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Protecting and enhancing soil would help both below and above ground biodiversity and ecology	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	++	Protecting and enhancing soil would help prevent silt runoff into rivers, and water holding capacity in soils.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	++	Protecting and enhancing soil would help prevent silt runoff into rivers, water holding capacity in soils, and water quality.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	++	Protecting and enhancing soil would protect a natural resource.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	Protecting and enhancing soil would protect a natural resource.	-	No objective on this issue could mean that opportunities are missed to protect soil.
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Settlement

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective S1: To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.
Rationale: To protect the distinctive character and landscape settings of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, remove despoiling influences, and maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation and green infrastructure) between settlements that contribute to local identity.
Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification

1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	The historic pattern and character of settlement is an important component of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in unsympathetic settlement that would be detrimental to the landscape.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	The historic pattern and character of settlement is an important part of the cultural heritage.	-	No objective on this subject could result in development that is detrimental to cultural heritage.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	n/a		n/a	
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	n/a		n/a	
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective S2: To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout and design.
Rationale: To enhance the beauty and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and ensure new development reflects intrinsic High Weald character and place-making, embedded with a true sense of place, along with re-establishing the use of local materials and rich colour palette as a means of protecting the environment and adding to local distinctiveness.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C – Previous Objective S3: To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure development reflects the character of the High Weald in its scale, layout and design.
Rationale: To protect and enhance the character and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and re-establish the use of local materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to this distinctiveness.

SEA Objective	**Option A now C**		**Option B**		**Option C**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	The architectural quality, character and design of development is an important component of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in unsympathetic development that would be detrimental to the landscape.	++	The architectural quality, character and design of development is an important component of the landscape.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	The architectural quality, character and design of development is important to protect cultural heritage.	-	No objective on this subject could result in unsympathetic development that would be detrimental to cultural heritage.	++	The architectural quality, character and design of development is important to protect cultural heritage.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	n/a		n/a		n/a	
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	n/a		n/a		n/a	
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable	n/a		n/a		n/a	

flood and drought risk management						
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A and C has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective S3: To conserve the distinct built heritage of the High Weald.

Rationale: To protect and preserve the character and setting of heritage assets (designated and non-designated); historic traditional buildings and built features distinct to the High Weald area, including the historic public realm (e.g., traditional signs, railings, milestones and paving treatments).

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification

1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Distinctive build heritage is an important part of the settlement component of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in unsympathetic development that would be detrimental to the landscape.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Distinctive build heritage is an important part of the settlement component of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in unsympathetic development that would be detrimental to cultural heritage.
3)To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	n/a		n/a	
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	n/a		n/a	
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Routeways

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective R1: To maintain the historic pattern, morphology and features of routeways.

Rationale: To maintain and restore a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands and identity, and is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways such as sunken lanes; and to avoid harming character of routeways with urbanising features.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C - Previous Objective R1: To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways.
Rationale: To maintain a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands and identity, and is a rare UK survival of an essentially medieval landscape; and to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B		Option C	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Routeways are an important component of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of or damage to historic routeways which would be detrimental to the landscape.	+	The omission of reference to 'morphology' may result in reduced effectiveness of this objective.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Routeways are an important component of cultural heritage.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of or damage to historic routeways which would be detrimental to cultural heritage.	+	The omission of reference to 'morphology' may result in reduced effectiveness of this objective.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	n/a		n/a		n/a	
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	n/a		n/a		n/a	

5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective R2: To protect and enhance the ecological function of routeways.
Rationale: To protect, and improve the condition of, the complex mix of small-scale habitats along routeways, including verges, for wildlife and nature recovery, and maintain routeway boundaries as part of a highly interconnected habitat mosaic.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C – Previous Objective R2: To enhance the ecological function of routeways.
Rationale: To protect and improve the condition of the complex mix of small scale habitats along routeways for wildlife, and maintain routeway boundaries as part of a highly interconnected habitat mosaic.

SEA Objective	Option A	Option B	Option C

	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	n/a		n/a		n/a	
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	n/a		n/a		n/a	
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	This option protects and enhances the interconnecting habitats of routeways.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to habitats along routeways.	+	This option only enhances the interconnecting habitats of routeways.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	This option protects and enhances the interconnecting habitats including flora and fauna along routeways.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to flora and fauna along routeways.	+	This option only enhances the interconnecting habitats including flora and fauna along routeways.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management			n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions			n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production			n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population			n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Woodland

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective W1: To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland.

Rationale: To ensure irreplaceable habitats and biodiversity loss are repaired for the benefit of future generations. To maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to preserve the high levels of carbon storage in woodland soils and biomass.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C - Previous Objective W1: To maintain the 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**.**

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**		**Option C**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Woodland is an important component of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which would be detrimental to the landscape.	++	Woodland is an important component of the landscape.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Woodland and its productive management are an important part of the cultural heritage of the area.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which would be detrimental to the cultural heritage of the area.	++	Woodland and its productive management are an important part of the cultural heritage of the area.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Woodland and especially ancient woodland are an important habitat.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which would be detrimental to habitats.	+	This objective omits restoration of woodland

4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Woodland and especially ancient woodland are an important habitat for flora and fauna.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which would be detrimental to flora and fauna.	+	This objective omits restoration of woodland
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	++	Woodland is important for soaking up rainfall and preventing flooding.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which could result in increased flood risk downstream.	++	Woodland is important for soaking up rainfall and preventing flooding.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	++	Woodland is important for protecting undisturbed soil and improving air and water quality. Its carbon storing abilities also help to maintain climate conditions.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which could result in harm to quality of soil, air, water and climatic conditions.	++	Woodland is important for protecting undisturbed soil and improving air and water quality. Its carbon storing abilities also help to maintain climate conditions.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	++	Wood is a key natural and renewable resource which can be used to replace less sustainable energy sources.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which would lose a natural resource and source of energy.	+	This objective omits woodland restoration which can play a key part in resource management
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	Woodland protects human populations against flooding and has beneficial impacts on health and wellbeing.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which would be harmful to human health and populations.	+	The objectives rationale omitted future generations
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective W2: To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.
Rationale: To increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland (including restoring plantations on ancient 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.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C – Previous Objective W2: To enhance the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.
Rationale: To increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland (including restoring plantations on ancient 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.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**		**Option C**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Woodland is an important landscape character of the High Weald	n/a		+	The objective omitted to mention protection
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	n/a		n/a		n/a	
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Woodland and especially ancient woodland is an important habitat.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which would be detrimental to habitats.	+	The objective omitted to mention protection
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Woodland and especially ancient woodland is an important habitat.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to woodland which would be detrimental to flora and fauna.	+	The objective omitted to mention protection
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management			n/a		n/a	

6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Options A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective W3: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.
Rationale: To protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	n/a		n/a	
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc.	++	Woodlands are relatively undisturbed so can contain significant archaeology.	-	No objective on this subject could result in loss or damage to archaeology in woodlands.

archaeology and architecture)				
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	n/a		n/a	
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	n/a		n/a	
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective W4: To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood 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, and to support a working countryside.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	+	Management of woodlands for timber helps to secure their future as an important part of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of or damage to unproductive woodland due to lack of management.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	?	Some intensive forestry operations could risk damaging archaeological features.	?	No objective on this subject could mean more unmanaged woodlands which may protect archaeological features.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	+	Some intensive forestry operations could risk damaging habitats. However, management methods such as coppicing add biodiversity to woodland.	-	No objective on this subject could mean more unmanaged woodlands with less diverse habitats.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna		Some intensive forestry operations could risk damaging flora and fauna. However, management methods such as coppicing add biodiversity to woodland.	-	No objective on this subject could mean more unmanaged woodlands with less diverse flora and fauna.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management			n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions		Wood can be used to replace less sustainable fuel but may also cause air quality problems if burnt when damp.	?	No objective on this subject could mean less wood used as fuel and more use of non-renewables.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage		Wood and timber can be used to replace less sustainable fuel and building materials.	-	No objective on this subject could mean less wood used as fuel and timber used for construction and more use of non-renewables.

sustainable energy use and production				
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Fieldscape and Heath

Option A – FH1: To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, 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, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, 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.
(Note: this objective remains unchanged from the 2019-2024 Management Plan)

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	?	The landscape has been formed by agriculture and needs it to continue to retain its character. However, some agricultural uses and buildings can have adverse landscape impacts.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in agriculture which could adversely impact the landscape.

2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	+	Agriculture is part of the cultural heritage of the High Weald, including skills and traditions of farm workers as well as buildings and archaeology.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in agriculture which could adversely impact on cultural heritage.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	?	Some types of agriculture can protect and enhance habitats, but more intensive forms can destroy habitats.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in agriculture. This could reduce habitats such as meadows but could also result in a less intensive use of land that would support different habitats.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	?	Some types of agriculture can protect and enhance habitats, but more intensive forms can destroy flora and fauna.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in agriculture. This could reduce habitats such as meadows but could also result in a less intensive use of land that would support flora and fauna.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	?	Impact depends on specific type of agricultural land management.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in agriculture. If land is managed for other purposes, then it could still protect water systems, but if it is not managed at all then water systems will become ineffective.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	+	Local food production avoids long-distance transport that produces air pollutants causing harm to health and the environment Some types of agricultural use, such as pasture, are good for storing carbon.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in agriculture. As with objective 5 above, the impact would depend on the type of use that replaces it.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	++	The production of food sustainably and locally protects natural resources and reduces food miles.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in agriculture which would require more food to be imported from elsewhere using more resources.
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	Local food production can avoid long-distance transport that produces air pollutants causing harm to human health.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in agriculture which would require more food to be imported from elsewhere producing air pollutants causing harm to human health.
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	Mitigation for potential adverse effects provided by guidance from the AONB Unit on agricultural land management practices that protect and enhance habitats, water systems and soils. Colour and design guidance can mitigate impact of new buildings.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Option A – Objective FH2: 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.
(note: this objective remains the same from the 2019-2024 Management Plan)

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Fields, especially those of medieval origin, are a key component of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of these fields which would significantly damage landscape quality.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	The historic nature of many of the fields in the High Weald contributes to the cultural heritage of the area.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a significantly reduction in the cultural heritage of the area.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Fields, especially unimproved grassland, contain diverse habitats.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of these fields which would significantly damage habitat diversity.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Fields, especially unimproved grassland, contain many types of flora and fauna.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of these fields which would significantly damage flora and fauna.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	++	Fields can absorb water, slowing flows into watercourses and preventing flooding.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of these fields which, especially when replaced by hard surfaces, could result in flooding.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	++	Fields store carbon, helping -to slow climate change and absorb water helping to mitigate its effects.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of these fields which, especially when replaced by hard surfaces, could reduce appropriate climate conditions.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	+	Fields can be used to grow energy crops which can replace other less sustainable sources of energy.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of these fields which would reduce opportunities for alternative energy sources.

8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	+	Fields are a valued part of the aesthetic enjoyment of the landscape, contributing to the health and wellbeing of the population.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of these fields to the detriment of human health and wellbeing.
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective FH3: To protect and enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.
Rationale: To improve the condition, landscape permeability and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, trees, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C – Previous Objective FH3: To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.
Rationale: To improve the condition, landscape permeability and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**		**Option C**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape			n/a		n/a	
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc.			n/a		n/a	

archaeology and architecture)						
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Fields, especially unimproved grassland, and heathland are diverse habitats, and their enhancement would support this objective.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of fields and heathland which would significantly damage habitat diversity.	+	Objective omits protection of fields and heath
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Fields, especially unimproved grassland, and heathland contain many florae and fauna and their enhancement would support this objective.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of fields and heathland which would significantly damage flora and fauna.	+	This objective omits protection of fields and heath
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective FH4: To protect individual archaeological features as well as and historic assets and pattern of fields and heath.
Rationale: To protect the historic environment of the AONB that includes the pattern of fields, and individual archaeological features.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C – Final Objective FH4: To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.
Rationale: To protect the historic environment of the AONB other than the pattern of fields: i.e., the individual archaeological features.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B		Option C	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape			n/a		n/a	
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	The archaeological features and historic assets and pattern of field and heath are an important part of the cultural heritage of the area.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.	+	The objective omits patterns of field and heath and refers to archaeology rather than archaeological features.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	n/a		n/a		n/a	
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	n/a		n/a		n/a	
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and	n/a		n/a		n/a	

ensure no adverse effects on population						
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Dark Skies

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective DS1: To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution, obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial, and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.
Rationale: To protect and maintain the existing dark skies within the High Weald for the benefit of all, including future generations for our health and wellbeing, and enjoyment, to increase our understanding and sense of place in the universe; and for the benefit of wildlife and to reduce energy consumption.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	+	Intrinsically dark skies are a landscape character of the High Weald	-	No objective on dark skies could result in the loss of intrinsically dark skies across the High Weald
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	n/a		n/a	
3)To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	n/a		n/a	

4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Protection of dark skies supports nocturnal species, to feed, breed and migrate, including rare and protected species.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of the species dependent on dark skies such as bats, moths and glowworms from the High Weald.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	+	Light pollution is detrimental to human health and wellbeing	-	No objective on this subject could be detrimental to human health and wellbeing due to increased levels of light pollution
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective DS2: To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald.
Rationale: Light pollution affects a wide range of nocturnal species, and those out during the day, from feeding to finding a mate and the ability to safely migrate. Light pollution is an additional stressor to habitat loss for already declining populations of many species across the High Weald.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	n/a		n/a	
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	n/a		n/a	
3)To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Protection from light pollution of habitats that are used by nocturnal species, such as field margins, hedgerows, woodland, especially ancient woodland	-	No objective on this subject could result in the deterioration of feed and breeding habitat used by species dependent on dark skies such as bats, moths and glowworms from the High Weald.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Protection of nocturnal species, including rare and protected species found across the High Weald such as bats.	-	No objective on this subject could result in the loss of the species dependent on dark skies such as bats, moths and glowworms from the High Weald.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a	
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	n/a		n/a	
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	

or cumulative effects of the above criteria.		
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**	

Perceptual and Aesthetic Qualities

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective PQ1: To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the High Weald's character and aesthetic qualities and to promote and facilitate contributions by communities and individuals to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald
Rationale: To help develop emotional connection to the landscape encouraging and enabling people to care for the High Weald and support its conservation.

Option B – No Objective on this subject.

Option C – Previous Objective OQ1: To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.
Rationale: To help develop emotional connection to the landscape encouraging people to care for the High Weald and support its conservation.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**		**Option C**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Protecting and enhancing the landscape including aesthetic qualities needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people understanding and caring for the High Weald to the detriment of its landscape.	+	Objective does not mention aesthetic qualities, and does not incorporate conservation and enhancement of character
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Protecting and maintaining cultural heritage needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people understanding and caring for the High Weald to the detriment of its cultural heritage.	+	Objective does not promote conservation and enhancement of character
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Protecting and enhancing habitats needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people understanding and caring for the High Weald to the detriment of its habitats.	++	Protecting and enhancing habitats needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.

4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Protecting and enhancing flora and fauna needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people understanding and caring for the High Weald to the detriment of its flora and fauna.	++	Protecting and enhancing flora and fauna needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	++	Protecting water systems needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people understanding and caring for the High Weald to the detriment of its water systems.	++	Protecting water systems needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	++	Safeguarding the quality of soil, air, water and maintaining appropriate climatic conditions needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people understanding and caring for the High Weald to the detriment of its soil, air, water and maintaining appropriate climatic conditions.	++	Safeguarding the quality of soil, air, water and maintaining appropriate climatic conditions needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	++	Protecting natural resources and encouraging sustainable energy use and production needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people understanding and caring for the High Weald to the detriment of its natural resources.	++	Protecting natural resources and encouraging sustainable energy use and production needs people who understand and care for the High Weald.
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	Increasing opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald adds to human health and wellbeing.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people understanding and caring for the High Weald to the detriment of their health and wellbeing.	+	Objectives does not mention promoting local community and individual contributions to protecting the High Well, which add to human health and wellbeing
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective PQ2: To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.
Rationale: To prevent the loss of contained green space, glimpsed and long views, and tree-canopied skylines, especially with regard to developments that fringe existing settlements in the High Weald, which would impinge on people's perception of greenness and rurality.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C - Alternative wording for OQ4: To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value.
Rationale: To ensure that the special qualities people value such as tranquillity, dark skies, sense of naturalness and clear air, are recognised and taken account of in AONB management.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B		Option C	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Protection and enhancement of the landscape includes perceptual and aesthetic qualities such as valued views, tranquillity and rurality.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less protection for these perceptual qualities.	++	Lack of clarity in wording reduces the positive impact.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Perceptual and aesthetic qualities include people' understanding of the cultural and historic significance of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less protection for these perceptual qualities.	++	Lack of clarity in wording reduces the positive impact.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	n/a		n/a		n/a	
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	n/a		n/a		n/a	
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	n/a		n/a		n/a	
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	n/a		n/a		n/a	

7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	The perceptual qualities are as important as physical landscape qualities to human health and wellbeing	-	No objective on this subject could result in less protection for these perceptual qualities.	++	The perceptual qualities are as important as physical landscape qualities to human health and wellbeing
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective PQ3: To foster and promote equitable access and informal enjoyment of the High Weald landscape and the integrated management of its resources for the enjoyment of natural beauty by all.
Rationale: To meet the demand for informal recreation from residents and those living close to the AONB, whilst ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment for this and future generations.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C – Final Objective OQ3: To develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty.
Rationale: To meet demand for informal recreation from residents and the nearly one million people living within 5km of the AONB, ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**		**Option C**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Protecting and enhancing the landscape needs people who are able to access enjoy, appreciate and	-	No objective on this subject could result in less opportunities for people to access the AONB appropriately, reducing the	+	Lacks clarity around equitable access.

		understand the character of the AONB. Developing equitable access to the AONB will support these opportunities.		chance that they will protect and enhance the landscape.		
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Protecting and maintaining cultural heritage should be available for all who appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing equitable access to the AONB will support these opportunities.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less opportunities for people to access the AONB appropriately, reducing the chance that they will protect and maintain cultural heritage.	+	Lacks clarity around equitable access opportunities to par-take in protecting culture and heritage
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Protecting and enhancing diverse habitats needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less opportunities for people to access the AONB appropriately, reducing the chance that they will protect and enhance diverse habitats.	++	Protecting and enhancing diverse habitats needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Protecting and enhancing flora and fauna needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less opportunities for people to access the AONB appropriately, reducing the chance that they will protect and enhance flora and fauna.	++	Protecting and enhancing flora and fauna needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable	++	Protecting water systems needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand	-	No objective on this subject could result in less opportunities for people to	++	Protecting water systems needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand

flood and drought risk management		the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.		access the AONB appropriately, reducing the chance that they will protect water systems.		the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	++	Safeguarding the quality of soil, air, water and maintaining appropriate climatic conditions needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less opportunities for people to access the AONB appropriately, reducing the chance that they will safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions.	++	Safeguarding the quality of soil, air, water and maintaining appropriate climatic conditions needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	++	Protecting natural resources needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less opportunities for people to access the AONB appropriately, reducing the chance that they will protect natural resources.	++	Protecting natural resources needs people who enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB. Developing and managing their access to the AONB will support these opportunities.
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	Equitable access to the AONB supports the health and wellbeing of those users.	-	No objective on this subject could result in less people accessing the AONB appropriately, reducing their opportunity to improve their health and wellbeing.	+	Access to the AONB supports the health and wellbeing of those users.
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Options A and C have the most positive environmental effects.**					

Land-based Economy and Rural Living

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective LBE1: To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.
Rationale: To sustain an economically viable land management sector, with a particular emphasis on sustainable and small-scale farming and forestry.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	?	The landscape has been formed by farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities, and needs it to continue to retain its character. However, some such uses can have adverse landscape impacts.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities which could adversely impact the landscape.
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities are part of the cultural heritage of the area, including skills and traditions of land-based workers.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities which could adversely impact cultural heritage.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	?	Some types of farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities can protect and enhance habitats, but more intensive forms can destroy habitats.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities. Impact would depend on the type of land use that replaced it.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	?	Some types of farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities can protect and enhance flora and fauna, but more intensive forms can destroy them.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities. Impact would depend on the type of land use that replaced it.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	?	Impact depends on specific type of land management.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities. Impact would depend on the type of land use that replaced it.

6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	?	Impact depends on specific type of land management.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in traditional land management activities. Impact would depend on the type of land use that replaced it.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	?	Impact depends on specific type of land management.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities. Impact would depend on the type of land use that replaced it.
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	?	Impact depends on specific type of land management.	?	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities. Impact would depend on the type of land use that replaced it.
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective LBE2: To reconnect settlements and residents with the surrounding countryside, and maintain and improve rural amenities and services that support communities within the context of the rural settlement pattern.
Rationale: To foster community life, and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the relationship with the surrounding countryside and wild species, that defines sustainable rural settlement.

Option B - No Objective on this subject.

Option C - Previous Objective S1: To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.
Rationale: To understand and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the relationship with the surrounding countryside and wild species, that defines sustainable rural settlement. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports land management objectives and AONB designation.

SEA Objective	Option A		Option B		Option C	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Greater connection between residents and the surrounding landscape will help to protect and enhance it.	-	No objective on this subject could lead to less understanding about the countryside which would be harmful to the landscape.	+	No mention of improving rural amenities which contribute to protecting and enhancing the landscape
2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Greater connection with the countryside includes understanding the cultural value of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could lead to less understanding of the cultural aspects of the countryside.	+	No mention of improving rural amenities allow better connection to the cultural landscape
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Greater connection with the countryside includes understanding the diverse habitats and how to protect and enhance them.	-	No objective on this subject could lead to less understanding of the diverse habitats of the countryside	+	No mention of supporting rural communities which contribute to protecting diverse habitats
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Greater connection with the countryside includes understanding the flora and fauna and how to protect and enhance them.	-	No objective on this subject could lead to less understanding of the flora and fauna around residents.	+	No mention of supporting rural communities which contribute to protecting species
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	++	Greater connection with the countryside includes understanding local water systems and how to protect and enhance them.	-	No objective on this subject could lead to less understanding of local water systems.	+	No mention of support to rural communities to help them protect water systems
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	++	Greater connection with the countryside includes how to protect and enhance soil water and air, and mitigate for climate change.	-	No objective on this subject could lead to as to how the rural landscape can mitigate and be resilient to climate change.	+	No mention of support to rural communities to help understand how their landscape and communities can mitigate and be resilient to climate change.

7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	Supporting local communities and allowing access to fair jobs and housing in rural communities supports wellbeing	?	No objective on this subject may be detrimental to health and wellbeing.	++	Supporting local communities and allowing access to fair jobs and housing in rural communities supports wellbeing
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**					

Option A – 2024 consultation Objective LBE3: To improve agricultural and forestry infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing and workspaces for land-based workers), along with skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.
Rationale: To foster land-based economic activities – including heritage conservation, sustainable tourism and outdoor education – that support conservation of the AONB. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports appropriate land management objectives and AONB designation.

Option B – No Objective on this subject.

SEA Objective	**Option A**		**Option B**	
	Score	Justification	Score	Justification
1) To protect and enhance the landscape	++	Better infrastructure connects residents to the surrounding landscape and will help to protect and enhance it.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in skilled land-based workers to the detriment of the landscape.

2) To protect and maintain cultural heritage (inc. archaeology and architecture)	++	Better infrastructure to the countryside allows understanding the cultural value of the landscape.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in skilled land-based workers to the detriment of the cultural heritage of the area.
3) To protect and where practical enhance diverse habitats	++	Better infrastructure in the countryside allows understanding of diverse habitats and how to protect and enhance them.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in skilled land-based workers to the detriment of diverse habitats.
4) To protect and enhance flora and fauna	++	Better infrastructure in the countryside allows understanding of the flora and fauna and how to protect and enhance them.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in skilled land-based workers to the detriment of flora and fauna.
5) To protect water systems and promote sustainable flood and drought risk management	++	Better infrastructure in the countryside includes protection of local water systems and how to protect and enhance them.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in skilled land-based workers to the detriment of water systems.
6) To safeguard the quality of soil, air, water and maintain appropriate climatic conditions	++	Better infrastructure in the countryside includes how to protect and enhance soil water and air and mitigate for climate change.	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in skilled land-based workers to the detriment of soil, air, water and maintaining appropriate climatic conditions.
7) To protect natural resources and encourage sustainable energy use and production	n/a		n/a	
8) To safeguard human health, wellbeing and ensure no adverse effects on population	++	Supports current and future generations to have a choice to live and work in diverse rural locations, in supported communities	-	No objective on this subject could result in a reduction in health and well-being of rural populations.
9) To avoid significant adverse effects generated through the interrelationships or cumulative effects of the above criteria.	No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.		No significant adverse effects generated by interrelationships or cumulative impacts.	
SEA Conclusion	**Option A has the most positive environmental effects.**			

High Weald AONB Management Plan

Review 2024-2029
Equality Impact Assessment

Final Version – February 2024

Prepared by:

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Name of the strategy or policy
High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

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Contents

From November 22nd 2023 all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. This change is endorsed by Natural England. The High Weald National Landscape is the new name for this protected landscape. The High Weald National Landscape remains an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty insofar as all policy, legislation and guidance applies to the designated landscape. For this reason, this document still refers to the High Weald AONB Management Plan. Reference is made in the document.

The statutory purpose of the designated landscape "to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape" remains unchanged.

Part 1 – Aims and implementation of the strategy or policy

1.1 What is being assessed?

a) Name of the strategy or policy.

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

b) Is this new or existing? *(Please delete as appropriate)*

Review of High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

c) What is the main purpose or aims of the strategy or policy?

The High Weald AONB Management Plan identifies and sets management goals for the key features of the landscape that have survived and form the essential basis of its natural beauty. Local authorities with land in an AONB, acting jointly in the case of AONBs crossing administrative boundaries, are legally obliged under 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', and to review this plan every five years.

d) Manager(s) and section or service responsible for completing the assessment.

Sarah Brotherton, Landscape Officer High Weald AONB Partnership.

1.2 Who is affected by the strategy or policy? Who is it intended to benefit and how?

The Management Plan should influence the actions of all those who manage land and/or impact on the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.

The main stakeholders are:

1) The 15 local authorities with land in the High Weald AONB*,

2) The other members of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee,

3) Other public and statutory bodies operating in the High Weald AONB,

4) Landowners in the High Weald AONB,

5) All those who live in, work in, or visit the High Weald AONB.

* Note not all local authorities within High Weald AONB boundary are in East Sussex, a number are in West Sussex, Kent and Surrey. However, the ESCC Equalities Impact Assessment is equivalent to the Equalities Impact assessments of West Sussex and Kent. All authorities assess on a core seven areas.

1.3 **Does the subject of this assessment impact positively or negatively on any of the following areas of people's lives (human rights)?**

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Life (capability to be alive)		x	
Physical Security (e.g., free from violence/fear)		x	
Health	x		
Education (learning and skills etc.)	x		
Standard of Living (independence, dignity and respect)		x	
Productive and valued activities (work, care and leisure)	x		
Individual, family and social life		x	
Participation, influence and voice (decision making)	x		
Identity, expression and self-respect		x	
Legal security		x	

1.4 How does the strategy or policy contribute to better community cohesion?

The High Weald AONB Management Plan encourages everyone to learn about, appreciate and contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. Involvement in activities such as volunteer conservation groups and farm clusters can bring people of different backgrounds and ages together to discuss and engage in a mutual interest, contributing to better community cohesion.

1.5 How is, or will the strategy or policy, be put into practice and who is, or will be responsible for it?

The High Weald AONB Management Plan is primarily a document owned by the 15 local authorities with land in the AONB. However, it also encourages participation by anyone who lives in, works in, or visits the High Weald.

1.6 Are there any partners involved? E.g., Primary Care Trusts, NHS Trust, voluntary/community organisations, the private sector?

The following partners are involved:

East Sussex County Council
Kent County Council
Surrey County Council
West Sussex County Council

Ashford Borough Council
Crawley Borough Council
Hastings Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Mid Sussex District Council
Rother District Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Tandridge District Council
Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Wealden District Council

Action in rural Sussex
Country Land & Business Association
Forestry Commission
National Farmers Union
Natural England

1.7 If yes, how are partners involved?

They are members of the High Weald National Landscape Partnership (formally known as the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee) https://highweald.org/about-us/joint-advisory-committee/

1.8 Is this project or procedure affected by joint commissioning or strategic planning activity e.g., Children's Act, Corporate Area Assessment etc?

No.

Part 2 – Consideration of data and research

2.1 List all examples of quantitative and qualitative data or any consultation information available that will enable the impact assessment to be undertaken.

Census 2021

2.2 Equalities profile of users or those intended to benefit from the strategy or policy.

In both the High Weald and England and Wales, there is a fairly even split of females and males – however there is a slightly higher number of females.

The High Weald has an older population compared to England and Wales with 26.5% of people aged 65+ in the High Weald, compared to 18.6% in England and Wales. This corresponds to the highest percentage bracket of the population in the High Weald are aged between 50 and 64.

The High Weald has a larger percentage (95.8%) of people classified as White, than the rest of England and Wales. This includes ethnicities that are classed under the broad category of White: English, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, Gypsy or Irish Traveller and Other White.

There is a consistently lower proportion of population in the High Weald who fall into other ethnic groups, compared to England and Wales. This is particularly evident in the Asian / Asian British and Black / African / Caribbean / Black British ethnic groups.

The majority of people (72.8%) in the High Weald have religious beliefs, of which the majority are Christian. However, the proportion of Christians is smaller in the High Weald than for England and Wales as a whole (42.2% and 46.2% respectively).

The proportion of the population with different religions does differ greatly between the High Weald and England and Wales. There is a far greater proportion of Muslims and Hindus in the High Weald, than England and Wales.

The High Weald has a higher proportion of people who are married (56.8%) compared to England and Wales as a whole. Nine percent of the High Weald population are divorced, with 6.6% widowed. There is a lower number of people who are single in the High Weald in comparison to England and Wales.

The majority of people in the High Weald (85%) are not limited in their day-to-day activities by a long-term health problem or disability under the Equalities Act. This is slightly higher than the proportion of the population affected in the whole of England and Wales.

Only 0.7% of the High Weald population report their health as ‘very bad’ which may limit their day-to-day activities. This is less than in England and Wales.

2.3 Evidence of complaints against the strategy or policy on grounds of discrimination.

None.

2.4 Have you carried out any consultation or research on the strategy or policy?

Yes: early public survey in spring 2022.

Formal Public Consultation ran from September 2023 to early November 2023, including publishing the Equalities Impact Assessment Issue 1.

If No, go to Part 3

2.5 What does the consultation, research and/or data indicate about the negative impact of the strategy or policy?

No negative impacts on equalities identified in consultation.

2.6 What does the consultation, research and/or data indicate about the positive impact of the strategy or policy?

No positive impacts on equalities identified in consultation.

Part 3 – Assessment of impact

3.1 Ethnicity: Testing of disproportional, negative, neutral or positive impact

a) From the evidence available, does the strategy or policy affect or have the potential to affect ethnic groups differently?

No

If No, go to 3.2

b) Identify the effect of this strategy or policy on different ethnic groups from information available.

c) How is the target group reflected in the take up of the strategy or policy?

d) If yes, do any of the differences amount to?

	Reason, evidence, comment
Barriers, negative impact or unlawful discrimination	
Neutral Impact	
Positive impact	

e) If there is a negative impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one ethnic group or for another legitimate reason?

3.2 Gender/Transgender: Testing of disproportionate, negative, neutral or positive impact

a) From the evidence available, does the strategy or policy affect or have the potential to affect men, women or transgender people differently?

No

If No, go to 3.3

b) Identify the effect of this strategy or policy on different gender groups from information available.

c) How are men, women and transgender people reflected in the take up of strategy or policy?

d) If yes, do any of the differences amount to?

	Reason, evidence, comment
Barriers, negative impact or unlawful discrimination	
Neutral Impact	
Positive impact	

e) If there is a negative impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one gender or for another legitimate reason?

3.3 Disability: Testing of disproportionate, negative, neutral or positive impact.

a) From the evidence available, does the strategy or policy affect or have the potential to affect disabled people differently?

No

If No, go to 3.4

b) Identify the effect of this strategy or policy on disabled people from information available.

Those with disabilities may find it harder to participate in actions that conserve or enhance the High Weald – for instance volunteering opportunities.

c) How are disabled people reflected in the take up of the strategy or policy?

If yes, do any of the differences amount to?

	Reason, evidence, comment
Barriers, negative impact or unlawful discrimination	
Neutral Impact	
Positive impact	

d) If there is a negative impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for disabled people or for another legitimate reason?

3.4 Age: Testing of disproportionate, negative, neutral or positive impact

a) From the evidence available, does the strategy or policy affect or have the potential to affect age groups differently?

No

If No, go to 3.5

b) Identify the effect of this strategy or policy on different age groups from information available.

c) How are the different age groups reflected in the take up of the strategy or policy?

d) If yes, do any of the differences amount to?

	Reason, evidence, comment
Barriers, negative impact or unlawful discrimination	
Neutral Impact	
Positive impact	

e) If there is a negative impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one age group or for another legitimate reason?

3.5 Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Heterosexual: Testing of disproportionate, negative, neutral or positive impact

a) From the evidence available, does the strategy or policy affect or have the potential to affect gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual people differently?

No

If No, go to 3.6

b) Identify the effect of this strategy or policy on gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual groups from information available.

c) How is sexual orientation reflected in the take up of the strategy or policy?

d) If yes, do any of the differences amount to?

	Reason, evidence, comment
Barriers, negative impact or unlawful discrimination	
Neutral Impact	
Positive impact	

e) If there is a negative impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual people or for another legitimate reason?

3.6 Religion, Belief: Testing of disproportionate, negative, neutral or positive impact

a) From the evidence available, does the strategy or policy affect or have the potential to affect religious, belief groups differently?

No

If No, go to 3.7

b) Identify the effect of this strategy or policy on different religious, belief groups from information available.

c) How are religious and belief groups reflected in the take up of the strategy or policy?

d) If yes, do any of the differences amount to?

	Reason, evidence, comment
Barriers, negative impact or unlawful discrimination	
Neutral Impact	
Positive impact	

e) If there is a negative impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one religious, belief or for another legitimate reason?

3.7 Carers: Testing of disproportionate, negative, neutral or positive impacts

a) From the evidence available, does the strategy or policy affect or have the potential to affect carers differently?

No

If No, go to 3.8

b) Identify the effect of this strategy or policy on carers from information available.

c) How are carers reflected in the take up of the strategy or policy?

d) If yes, do any of the differences amount to?

	Reason, evidence, comment
Barriers, negative impact or unlawful discrimination	
Neutral Impact	
Positive impact	

e) If there is a negative impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for another legitimate reason?

3.8 Other: Additional groups that may experience impacts - testing of disproportionate, negative, neutral or positive impact.

a) From the evidence available, does the strategy or policy affect or have the potential to affect other groups differently?

No

If No, go to Part 4

b) Identify the effect of this strategy or policy on different other groups from information available.

c) How are other groups reflected in the take up of the strategy or policy?

d) If yes, do any of the differences amount to?

	Reason, evidence, comment
Barriers, negative impact or unlawful discrimination	
Neutral Impact	
Positive impact	

e) If there is a negative impact, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for other group or for another legitimate reason?

Part 4 – Measures to mitigate disproportionate or negative impact or improve on neutral or positive impacts

3.9 If there is any negative impact on any target equality group identified in Section 3, is the impact intended or legal?

No negative impacts have been identified.

3.10 Specify measures that can be taken to remove or minimise the disproportionate or negative effect identified in Section 3. If none were identified in Section 3; identify how disproportionate impact or adverse effect could be avoided in future.

No disproportionate impact or adverse effect likely as the Management Plan just sets objectives for conserving and enhancing the landscape.

3.11 If there is no evidence that the strategy or policy promotes equality, equal opportunities or improves relations within equality target groups, what amendments could be made to achieve this?

None proposed.

3.12 If a neutral or positive impact has been identified, can that impact be improved upon (continuous improvement)?
What are the improvements that can be made?
Can they be applied elsewhere in the ESCC?

Projects coming forward that seek to implement the objectives in the Management Plan should have their own EqIA, especially where they involve public participation or access.

3.13 How will any amended strategy or policy be implemented, including any necessary training?

The Management Plan will be launched in 2024 with accompanying communications and training to be decided.

Part 5 – Conclusions and recommendations

3.14 Does the strategy or policy comply with equalities legislation, including the duty to promote race, disability and gender equality?

Yes
(please delete as appropriate)

3.15 What are the main areas requiring further attention?

None identified.

3.16 Summary of recommendations for improvement

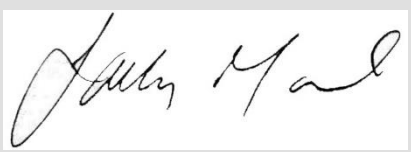
N/A

3.17 What equality monitoring, evaluation, review systems have been set up to carry out regular checks on the effects of the strategy or policy? *(Give details)*

AONB management plans is reviewed every five years.

3.18 When will the amended strategy or policy be reviewed?

The High Weald AONB Management Plan will be reviewed before 2024.

Date completed:	*29/2/2024*	**Signed by (person completing)**	**Sarah Brotherton**
		S Brotherton	**Landscape Officer for the High Weald AONB Management Plan**
Date:	*29/2/2024*	**Signed by (Manager)** 	**Sally Marsh** **Co-director**

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