

Agenda Item No: 7

Report To: CABINET

Date of Meeting: 10th January 2019

Report Title: High Weald

Report Author & Job Title: Ian Grundy, Principal Policy Planner

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Clokie, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development

Portfolio Holder for:

Summary: The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AoNB) has an adopted Management Plan that covered the period 2014 -2019. That Management Plan has now been reviewed and will cover the period 2019 – 2024. AoNB Management Plans are statutory documents under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and local authorities are required to publish an up to date plan that formulates the policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.

Key Decision: YES

Significantly Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

i. Adopt the revised High Weald AoNB Management Plan 2019-24

Policy Overview: AoNBs are designated by the government under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Part IV of the Countryside Rights of Way Act (2000) places a statutory duty on constituent local authorities of AoNBs to publish Management Plans by the 1st April 2004 and review them at five yearly intervals. This is the review of the Management Plan for the High Weald AoNB that will cover the period 2019 – 2024.

Financial Implications: The Council makes an annual financial contribution towards the running of the AoNB Management Unit. There is no additional cost to the Council of producing the Management Plan.

Legal Implications: None

Equalities Impact Assessment: Not required as no policy changes proposed.

Other Material Implications:

None

Exempt from Publication:

NO

Background Papers:

The High Weald AoNB Management Plan is available at this link
<http://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan/management-plan-review.html>

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Report Title: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan

Introduction and Background

1. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 requires local authorities with land in an AoNB to prepare and publish an up-to-date plan which “formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it. Where AoNBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the Plan. In the High Weald this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee on which the Borough Council is represented.
2. The Management Plan is relevant to many organisations and individuals. As a local authority policy document it guides local authority plan-making and decision-taking, but it also has a wider role. Where people engage with local authority services, the Plan can help them tailor their actions to comply with local authority policy, and support the care and conservation of the High Weald landscape.

Proposal/Current Position

3. Originally published in 2004 as a 20 year strategy, the High Weald Management Plan defined what natural beauty means in the High Weald which included identifying the key landscape character components that make the High Weald outstandingly beautiful and different to other landscapes. It was envisaged that major revisions of the Management Plan would not be necessary during this 20 year period and consequently there were relatively minor revisions in 2009 and 2014. In March 2017 the AoNB Joint Advisory Committee agreed to restrict this current version of the Management Plan to a minor review. The Plan is tightly focused on the purpose of the AoNB designation and the requirements of the CRoW Act. The Plan provides an objective, evidence based tool articulating what matters in terms of AoNB purpose and the fulfilment of their statutory duties.
4. The Plan includes:
 - A Statement of Significance defining the natural beauty of the High Weald
 - Character statements, including a list of key characteristics, describing the components of natural beauty that policy and actions should aim to enhance.
 - Data and information about the High Weald’s natural and cultural assets
 - A set of management objectives for the conservation and enhancement of the AoNB together with a monitoring framework for judging success
 - Aims and actions which indicate the ambitions of partners for themselves, and for others, and which guide resources and effort to where they are most needed
 - References to evidence and supporting information

Implications and Risk Assessment

5. The Borough Council is an active member of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, involved in the production of this Plan, and has a statutory duty to adopt and have due regard to it in its decision-making relating to the parishes of Newenden, Rolvenden, Tenterden, Wittersham, Stone-cum-Ebony and parts of Biddenden. Having said that, the proposed changes to the Management Plan come under the auspices of a relatively minor review and hence there are limited changes to the currently adopted Plan.
6. The Council recognises the strong landscape identity and character of the area, and the resultant cultural legacy. The development of permanent settlement in the High Weald emerged much later than in the rest of the borough due to its hard clays making agriculture difficult. The interconnectivity between the High Weald and the rest of the borough is longstanding and recognised by the Council and the vision presented in the Management Plan is supported.
7. The presence of intrinsically dark skies in the AoNB is demonstrated by global satellite radiance data and the Council is pleased to see recognition of this important natural feature in the Management Plan. This is supported in Ashford through the Dark Skies SPD, which provides guidance on external lighting to minimise the impact of obtrusive light on intrinsically dark landscapes.

Equalities Impact Assessment

8. Not required as no policy changes proposed.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

9. The Management Plan was the subject of extensive local consultation during its preparation during which the Council provided comments and feedback.

Other Options Considered

10. There is a statutory duty to prepare an AoNB Management Plan and hence there is no scope to avoid a Plan being prepared. There is the possibility for an individual authority to prepare its own Management Plan but this would lose the benefit of the AoNB Management Unit leading the Plan preparation process and the overall collaborative approach of the relevant local authorities.

Next Steps in Process

11. The Management Plan be formally agreed by the High Weald AoNB Joint Advisory Committee. Once adopted by the Council, it will be the Council's policy for the management of the AoNB area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.

Conclusion

12. The High Weald AoNB Management Plan 2019-24 has now been reviewed and builds upon the previous versions of the Plan. The revisions are relatively minor and

have been considered by the AoNB Joint Advisory Committee on which the Council is represented. The Management Plan should now be adopted.

Portfolio Holder's Views

13. The High Weald AoNB Management Plan sets out a strong vision and deliverable strategy for ensuring the continued conservation and enhancement of the AoNB. It will have a positive impact on the communities both within and surrounding the AoNB. The Borough Council has been fully involved in the revisions to the Management Plan which are relatively minor and I support its adoption.

Contact and Email

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