

Crawley Borough Council

Consideration Report for Delegated Decision by Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development

Expected Date of Decision: 08 March 2019

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

Report of the Head of Economy and Planning PES/310

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to secure approval for the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024, which is an update on the previous approved strategy.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development is recommended to:
- Approve The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 (as referred to in paragraph 5.5 of report PES/310) as the council's 'policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 As a small area of land within the borough is covered by the High Weald AONB designation, Crawley Borough Council is a member of the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee.
- 3.2 Under Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the council is required to publish and maintain a Management Plan for the AONB, in its role as part of the established Conservation Board. The legislation requires that these Management Plans are reviewed at intervals of not more than five years.
- 3.3 The Crawley Borough Local Plan¹, Policy CH10: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, sets the council's planning policy position in relation to the AONB. This policy requires the council, in determining development proposals which affect the designated Area, to conserve the natural beauty and setting of the High Weald AONB by having particular regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

4. Background

- 4.1 The High Weald AONB was first designated in 1983. It extends across four counties (Kent, Surrey, East Sussex and West Sussex) and includes 11 districts and boroughs, with a total land cover of 1,461km². Crawley lies to the north west of the designated area, with the land in the administrative boundaries (0.03% of the AONB is in Crawley; which totals 1.05% of the borough) to the south of the A264, at Pease Pottage, forming part of the AONB. Beyond Crawley, the AONB extends as far as

¹ Crawley 2030: Crawley Borough Local Plan 2015 – 2030, Policy CH10, pages 40-41 (2015) CBC: [Crawley 2030: Crawley Borough Local Plan 2015 – 2030](http://www.crawley.gov.uk/crawley2030) / www.crawley.gov.uk/crawley2030

Horsham to the west and to the east takes in much of Mid Sussex district, across to Tonbridge and the south-east coast at Rye.

- 4.2 The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) is primarily an advisory body (not a planning authority or an executive body) acting as a catalyst and facilitator in making recommendations to its constituent bodies and other organisations on policies and the allocation of resources in relation to the protection and enhancement of the AONB.
- 4.3 The partnership agreement between the JAC members sets out the 14 activities of an AONB Unit. The activities are undertaken within the context of the AONB Management Plan and a three-year business strategy. The 14 activities are in three sections: Management Plan; Advisory/Advocacy; and Monitoring. The High Weald AONB Unit is a small specialist team dedicated to the care and management of the AONB, and is jointly funded by local authorities and Natural England.
- 4.4 The Management Plan was first published in 2004, to cover a 20 year period to 2024. It has been reviewed every five years (second edition published 2009; third edition published 2014). This is the fourth edition agreed on 29th November 2018. The Management Plan has been prepared by the High Weald AONB Unit on behalf, and overseen by, the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- 4.5 The review has been undertaken over the preceding 18 month period. Feedback on the Draft High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 was collected between 13 June and 25 July 2018. The consultation focused on: The area's character – have they identified what makes the area distinctive and special? And on: What needs to be done – have they identified the activities that would most benefit the landscape and its communities over the coming five years?
- 4.6 Crawley Borough Council was consulted formally during this period, in addition to being invited to feed in technical and professional to the preparation process of the document at draft and post-consultation stages and as a member of the JAC. No comments were raised by this council during the formal consultation period, given the small area of AONB land within the borough.
- 4.7 The JAC agreed to the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 on 28 November 2018 and requested that the councils formally adopt it according to their own procedures before 31 March.
- 4.8 The report to the JAC and supporting papers and documents can be found on the following website link: <http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/joint-advisory-committee-papers/2018-2019.html>; report: [28 November 2018 JAC agenda & reports \(pdf, 1.64 MB \)](#) This sets out in detail the process taken in the review of the Management Plan (Item 7: pages 21 – 25).

5. Description of Issue to be resolved

- 5.1 The Management Plan was originally published as a 20-year strategy. It was envisaged that major revisions of the Management Plan would not be necessary during this 20-year period. However, local authorities/conservation boards are required to review the AONB Management Plan every five years, make any amendments they consider appropriate, and publish a report on the review.
- 5.2 The review process has consistently concluded that the AONB purpose has been retained and remains supported at the highest level in government. The decision to limit the reviews to relatively minor revisions in 2009 and 2014 was taken with this context in mind. Similarly, in March 2017, the JAC agreed to restrict the 2019-2024 version to a minor review.

- 5.3 On this basis, it is being updated to align with the five year renewal period and follows national guidance. The review has also taken into account the potential impact of Brexit on agri-environmental policy and the significant increase in development pressure on the AONB since the last review. While the character components and management policy objectives, the most important aspects of the Management Plan, remain broadly appropriate, other aspects of the Plan have needed a more substantive re-consideration.
- 5.4 The new Plan retains the same basic structure, being around AONB purpose, character and key components of natural beauty. Key amended areas include:
- The Statement of Significance has been expanded to set out that the natural beauty of the High Weald also includes 'Land-based economy and related rural life' and 'Other qualities' (expanded as perceptual qualities, features, and cultural associations that enrich the five character components).
 - These two subjects form two new chapters in the Management Plan, following guidance from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs that AONB Management Units needed to include focus on living working landscapes and communities and promoting public understanding and enjoyment.
 - The identification of the top five issues for each of the Character Components, and, whilst many of the Objectives remain essentially the same, the setting of new 5-year 'Proposed Actions' for a range of public bodies and for other stakeholders (as opposed to the previous 'targets'). These Proposed Actions are aligned with the purposes of designation and are supported in principle.
 - The inclusion of Key Characteristics (and supporting evidence) for each component of character.
 - The new Proposed Actions relating to 'settlement' makes reference to the emerging High Weald Design Guide (for new housing developments). This updated chapter will help to ensure that due regard is consistently given in planning decisions to conserving and enhancing the AONB across the area.
- 5.5 The High Weald Management Plan 2019-2024: [JAC Approved High Weald Management Plan 2019-2024 \(pdf, 12.67 MB\)](#) is accompanied by the following supporting documents:
- Monitoring Report: [HWMP2014 2019 Monitoring Condition of the AONB and Performance of the AONB MP August 2017 FINAL \(pdf, 1.16 MB \)](#)
 - Consultation Statement: [MPReview Consultation Statement CT November 2018 \(pdf, 518 KB \)](#)
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment: [HWMP2019 SEA Objective Assessment Table November Version \(pdf, 647 KB \)](#) & [HWMP Strategic Environmental Assessment Report November 2018 Version \(pdf, 684 KB \)](#)
 - Habitats Regulations Assessment: [HWMP HabitatRegulationScreening November Version \(pdf, 3.42 MB \)](#) & [HWMP Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Matrix November Version \(pdf, 328 KB \)](#)
 - Equality Impact Assessment: [HWMP Equality Impact Assessment November 2018 Version for JAC \(pdf, 509 KB \)](#)

6. Information & Analysis Supporting Recommendation

- 6.1 The AONB unit has managed the process for the past three versions of the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

- 6.2 AONB Management Plans are locally-owned and democratically accountable strategies, based on evidence, for looking after the designated areas in the interests of both people and nature. They are formulated to coordinate policy, investment and action in these nationally-important landscapes in order to achieve the legal purpose of '**conserving and enhancing natural beauty**' for the benefit of current and future generations.
- 6.3 The High Weald Management Plan 2019 – 2024 contains the following content:
- A statement of Significance defining the natural beauty of the High Weald, character statements, including a list of key characteristics, describing the components of natural beauty that policy and actions should aim to conserve and enhance;
 - Data and information about the High Weald's natural and cultural assets;
 - A set of management policies ('objectives') for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB together with a monitoring framework for judging success;
 - Proposed Actions which indicate the ambitions of partners for themselves, and for others, and which guide resources and effort to where they are most needed; and finally,
 - References to evidence and supporting information.
- 6.4 The AONB Management Plan provides the local planning authority with an objective, evidence-based tool articulating what matters in terms of the AONB purpose for the fulfilment of its statutory duties.
- 6.5 Councillor Ian Irvine is the Crawley Borough Council representative on the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee and confirms his support for the revised High Weald AONB Management Plan.
- 6.6 It is considered that the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 is a supportable and appropriate framework for the High Weald AONB, and may be adopted. The Plan does not represent a significant policy shift. The Plan has completed all of the statutory stages of a review and has been subject to significant public and expert engagement and scrutiny.

7. Implications

- 7.1 Crawley Borough Council is required by law (under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) to have a Duty of Regard for the AONB.
- 7.2 The S85 Duty of Regard applies to all functions, not just those relating to planning and is applicable whether a function is statutory or permissive. It is applicable to land outside as well as within an AONB, where an activity may have an impact on the AONB. The requirement is to 'conserve and enhance' and both aspects are required to be addressed.
- 7.3 Adopted Crawley Borough Local Plan Policy CH10 establishes the strategic planning framework under which the Management Plan should be considered as part of planning schemes. Appendix 2 of the Crawley Local Development Scheme 2019 – 2021 confirms that the High Weald AONB Management Plan document is to be adopted through delegated powers by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development.
- 7.4 No financial implications associated with the adoption of the High Weald AONB outside of the provisions made within existing budgets.
- 7.5 The legal implications are addressed in the report.

8. Background Papers

- [25 year Environment Plan \(Mar 18\)](#)
- [Draft Management Plan 2019-2024 Consultation Responses Report \(Nov 18\)](#)
- [Equality Impact Assessment Consultation Version \(Jun 18\)](#)
- [Habitat Regulation Screening Consultation Version \(Jun 18\)](#)
- [Strategic Environmental Assessment Consultation Version \(Jun 18\)](#)