

**Response to Councillor's Question Asked at the Full Council Meeting
Held on 22 February 2023**

Question: Many Crawley people enjoy the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Is the Cabinet Member aware of an application for Crawley to make a contribution to the management plan of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is he aware of what the Council's response was and the reason behind that response please?

Response: Crawley BC currently contributes £300 per year to the High Weald AONB* Partnership as part of an existing Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Partnership and fifteen local authorities. This requires the Partnership to produce a High Weald Management Plan on behalf of the authorities.

Crawley's £300 annual contribution is set out in the SLA and the amount is a fair reflection of the relatively very small proportion of the High Weald that sits within the Borough boundary – just 0.03% of High Weald AONB land. This existing SLA does not expire until the end of March 2024.

Crawley BC has been approached and asked to make a significantly higher financial contribution of £2,800 for financial year 2023-24, as part of a proposed "flat rate" increase of £2,500 across all fifteen local authorities. Officers have responded to inform the High Weald AONB Unit that we believe that such an increase would be contrary to the existing SLA, where the formula to determine the financial contribution of each local authority is largely based on the geographic coverage of the High Weald. An increase of £2,500 would be a rise of 833% and completely disproportionate.

Crawley BC officers have since met High Weald AONB Unit representatives and it was agreed that Crawley BC should continue to contribute £300 per year for 2023-24 in line with the existing SLA.

We will continue to have discussions with the High Weald AONB Unit regarding our annual contribution in future years in the lead up to agreeing the new SLA.

*Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty