

Crawley Borough Council

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

Expected Date of Decision 10 July 2024

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

Report of the Head of Economy and Planning: PES/462

1. Purpose

- 1.1. A small proportion of land within Crawley's administrative boundaries falls within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), to the south of the A264, at Pease Pottage. The Countryside and Rights of Way 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'**. Crawley Borough Council is a joint member of the High Weald Landscape Partnership¹ who undertake the council's statutory duties in relation to the AONB on behalf of the council.
- 1.2. The High Weald Landscape Partnership has produced the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029² on behalf of the 15 Local Authorities with land in the High Weald AONB, of which Crawley is one. It was agreed by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee on 27 March 2024 to be formally adopted by each of the Local Authorities.
- 1.3. The purpose of this report is to secure approval for the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029, which is an update of the previous strategy. Once adopted, this becomes the council's 'policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of its functions in relation to the AONB' and forms the statutory Management Plan for the High Weald AONB which falls within the borough of Crawley. This document updates and replaces the current High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 which was formally adopted by CBC in 2019.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development is recommended to:
 - Approve the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 as the council's 'policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of its functions in relation to the AONB'.

¹ Information on the Joint Advisory Committee can be found on the High Weald webpages: [Joint Advisory Committee - High Weald](#)

² The [High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029](#) can be accessed on the High Weald webpages. More information about the High Weald AONB Management Plan, along with all of the supporting documents, can be found on the High Weald webpages: [AONB Management Plan - High Weald](#)

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 adopted Crawley Borough Local Plan 2015-2030 (the “adopted Local Plan”), Policy CH10: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the emerging Crawley Borough Local Plan 2023-2040 (the “draft Local Plan”), Policy CL9: High Weald National Landscape, set the council’s planning policy position in relation to the AONB. Both versions of this policy require the council, in determining development proposals which affect the designated Area, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and setting of the High Weald AONB by having particular regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan.
- 3.4. The council’s Local Plan policies confirm that development must be in accordance with the 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), 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 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. Crawley Borough Council is a member of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee and the High Weald National Landscape Partnership. This undertakes the council’s statutory duties in relation to the AONB on behalf of the council.
- 4.3. 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.
- 4.4. The High Weald Management Plan was first published in 2004, to cover a 20-year period to 2024. It is required to be reviewed every five years (second edition published 2009; third edition published 2014; the fourth edition published 2019). The updated 2024-2029 Management Plan is the fifth edition, prepared by the High Weald AONB Unit on behalf of the 15 local authorities with land in the High Weald, and overseen by, the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- 4.5. Feedback on the Draft High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 was collected between 25 September and 5 November 2023. The consultation set out the vision and aim for the High Weald. The consultation also focused on the characteristics that define the landscape and beauty of the High Weald, these characteristics identified issues and themes that challenge and impact the High Weald.
- 4.6. Crawley Borough Council was formally consulted 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. A formal letter of consultation was sent to the chief executive. The council responded to the consultation, acknowledging the

work that went into the production of the plan. 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.
- 4.8. The emerging Crawley Borough Local Plan 2023-2040, contains Policy CL9 references the Management Plan. The adopted Local Plan contains a similar policy (Policy CH10) which makes reference to the management of the AONB Landscape within the borough of Crawley through the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

5. Description of Issue to be Resolved

- 5.1. The High Weald Management Plan is a statutory document which defines the natural beauty of the AONB and sets out a twenty-year strategy supported by five-year action and investment priorities for conserving this nationally important landscape.5.2 The Management Plan is required to be adopted individually by each of the Local Authorities with land within the High Weald AONB. The Management Plan will therefore be this Council's 'policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of its functions in relation to the AONB' (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000).

6. Options Considered

- 6.1. The two options for the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development to consider in this report are:
 - I) To approve the Joint High Weald AONB Management Plan as the council's 'policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of its functions in relation to the AONB';
 - II) Not to approve the Joint High Weald AONB Management Plan and instead for the Council to produce, publish and maintain its own Action Plan, in order to comply with Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- 6.2. Should a decision be taken not to adopt the Joint High Weald AONB Management Plan, then the Council would be required to prepare and publish a Management Plan for the small area of the borough which falls within the AONB designation. This would require significant resources for the very small area of the borough covered by this (1.05%). It would also be disproportionate to have a separate Management Plan for the 0.03% of the AONB within Crawley from the remainder, and vast majority, of the AONB.
- 6.3. The recommended option is therefore for the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development to decide to approve the Joint High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 for the reasons set out in this report.

7. Information & Analysis Supporting Recommendation

- 7.1. The High Weald AONB lies within the ward of Broadfield.
- 7.2. CBC is a member of the High Weald Partnership. The council has councillor representation on the Joint Advisory Committee.
- 7.3. This version of the Management Plan replaces the current adopted version 2019-2024. The council's [Local Development Scheme](#) (Appendix 2) confirms that the adoption of the High Weald AONB Management Plan falls within the Cabinet Member for Planning & Economy's Portfolio Holder Responsibilities in the Constitution's scheme of delegation. Previous versions of the High Weald AONB Management Plan have been approved under this delegation in 2019 and 2014.

- 7.4. The Management Plan 2024-2029 includes:
- A Vision for the future of the High Weald;
 - 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;
 - A set of programmes, principles for action and investment strategy for a range of cross cutting themes which address current and future major challenges;
 - References to evidence and supporting information.
- 7.5. The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024- 2029 is supported by the following documents:
- Consultation Statement.
 - Habitat Regulation Screening
 - Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Matrix
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)
 - SEA Objective Assessment table
 - Equality Impact Assessment
- 7.6. Conservation and enhancement of natural beauty is the primary purpose of AONB legislation. The High Weald AONB Management Plan is structured around 8 Core Character Components:
1. Natural systems (geology, soils, water and climate).
 2. Settlement.
 3. Routeways.
 4. Woodland.
 5. Fieldscapes and heath.
 6. Dark night skies.
 7. Aesthetic and perceptual qualities.
 8. Land-based economy and rural living.

8. Implications

- 8.1. 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.
- 8.2. 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.
- 8.3. The emerging Crawley Borough Local Plan 2023 – 2040 (Draft Local Plan), policy CL9: High Weald National Landscape establishes the strategic planning framework under which the Management Plan should be considered as part of planning schemes. There is a policy in the existing adopted Local Plan, CH10.
- 8.4. The Crawley Local Development Scheme 2024 - 2027 (Appendix 2) 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.
- 8.5. No financial implications associated with the adoption of the High Weald AONB outside of the provisions made within existing budgets.

9. Background Papers

- [High Weald Management Plan 2024 - 2029](#)
- [Strategic Environmental Assessment](#)
- [SEA Objective Assessment Table](#)
- [Habitat Regulation Screening](#)
- [Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Matrix](#)
- [Equality Impact Assessment](#)
- [Consultation Statement](#)

Report author and contact officer:

Sophie Gilbert (Trainee Planning Officer)

Email: sophie.gilbert@ Crawley.gov.uk

Phone number: 01293 438681