

## **ADOPTION OF THE HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019-2024**

REPORT OF: DIVISIONAL LEADER FOR PLANNING AND ECONOMY  
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Wards Affected: Those all or partly within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Ardingly and Balcombe, Ashurst Wood, Bolney, Copthorne and Worth, Crawley Down and Turners Hill, Cuckfield, East Grinstead Ashplats, East Grinstead Herontye, High Weald  
Key Decision: No  
Report to: Cabinet  
11<sup>th</sup> February 2019

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### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's approval for the District Council to formally adopt the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2019-2024.

### **Summary**

2. The first High Weald AONB Management Plan was published in 2004. Management Plans have to be reviewed every five years; this is the third review. The Management Plan is prepared by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee on behalf of all the local authorities with land in the High Weald AONB. Once adopted, it will become this Council's policy for managing the High Weald AONB and will be a material consideration in planning decisions.

### **Recommendations**

3. **Cabinet is recommended to:**
    - (i) **formally adopt the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024;**
    - (ii) **consider and approve the Habitats Regulations Assessment which supports the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024;**
    - (iii) **authorise the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee to submit the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024 to the Secretary of State and to publish the Management Plan 2019-2024 on behalf of the District Council.**
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### **Background**

4. An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an area of countryside designated by the Government to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. The High Weald AONB was designated in 1983 and extends across 11 District and 4 County areas.
5. Almost 50% of Mid Sussex District is within the High Weald AONB. Mid Sussex is the local authority with the fourth largest area of land within the High Weald AONB.

6. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee undertakes the preparation and review of the Management Plan on behalf of the 15 local authorities with land in the High Weald AONB. The Joint Advisory Committee also includes representatives from community, environment and land-based sectors.
7. The District Council as one of the 15 partner authorities makes an annual contribution of £5,600 towards the work of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee. The financial contribution is paid by all the local authorities with land in the High Weald AONB on a proportional basis. The District Council also directly inputs into the work of the High Weald, with Member representation on the Joint Advisory Committee and the Management Board, and officer representation on the Officer Steering Group.

### **Requirement to Prepare an AONB Management Plan**

8. Local authorities with land in an AONB are legally obliged under Section 89 of 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. Where AONBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the management plan.
9. Policy DP16 of the Mid Sussex District Plan seeks to only permit development within the High Weald AONB where it conserves or enhances natural beauty and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan.
10. Having an AONB Management Plan helps the District Council to fulfil its duty to have regard to biodiversity, as required by Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

### **High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024**

11. Published in 2004 as a 20-year strategy, the High Weald AONB Management Plan is reviewed every five years. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee launched the current review in 2017 to cover the period 2019-2024. Stakeholder workshops were held in May 2017 and public consultation was held in June and July 2018. At its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018, the Joint Advisory Committee approved the updated Management Plan 2019-2024 and recommended its adoption by partner authorities.
12. The Management Plan attached at Appendix 1 sets out the following:
  - Incorporates a Statement of Significance which defines natural beauty in the High Weald AONB;
  - Identifies five key components of character (geology, landform, water systems and climate; settlement; routeways; woodland; and field and heath) and the land-based economy and related rural life as comprising the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB. For each of these, the key characteristics and issues have been identified;
  - Sets out management objectives and associated indicators of success for each component as well as proposed actions which aim to guide resources and effort to where they are most needed.

13. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the Joint Advisory Committee is required to give notice to Natural England when it proposes to publish, adopt or review the Management Plan, and to take into consideration any comments that Natural England may make on the Management Plan.
14. Natural England has confirmed that the Management Plan 2019-2024 meets statutory requirements and that the constituent local authorities have, by acting jointly through the Joint Advisory Committee, produced a plan that formulates their policy for the AONB and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it. Natural England also considers the Management Plan has broadly followed the national guidance and represents a comprehensive strategy for the management of the AONB.
15. The Management Plan 2019-2024 is accompanied by several supporting documents including those required under other legislation, such as an Equalities Impact Assessment, a Consultation Statement, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment.
16. The findings of each of these assessments is summarised below:
  - The Equalities Impact Assessment concludes that the Management Plan complies with equalities legislation.
  - The Consultation Statement documents all the consultation activity carried out to inform the review of the Management Plan.
  - The Strategic Environmental Assessment concludes that the proposed objectives in the Management Plan have the most or equal positive environmental effects compared to their reasonable alternatives.
17. The Habitats Regulations Assessment, attached at Appendix 2, concludes that the Management Plan will not result in a likely significant effect on the integrity of the European sites either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Natural England concurs with the conclusions of the Habitats Regulations Assessment

### **Next Steps**

18. The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 is due to be published at the end of March 2019. Once approved and adopted by all the partner authorities, formal notification to the Secretary of State (Defra) of the adoption of the Management Plan is required to complete the process.
19. On its adoption, the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 will become the District Council's policy for management of the AONB, guiding policies and actions of the District Council. This will ensure that the District Council is meeting its statutory duty to conserve and enhance the AONB. It will also be a material consideration for planning applications within the High Weald AONB and help inform planning policy.

### **Other Options Considered**

20. The District Council has the option not to adopt the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024, but this would mean the District Council fails in its statutory duty to prepare and publish an AONB management plan.

## **Financial Implications**

21. The annual contribution of £5,600 which the District Council makes to the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee covers the cost of preparation and updating the Management Plan. No further costs are anticipated.

## **Risk Management Implications**

22. Should the District Council decide not to adopt the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 by the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, it would be in breach of the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to review the Management Plan every five years. The District Council would also be required to produce its own Management Plan for its part of the High Weald by the same date which would have considerable time and resource implications. It would also result in a lack of consistency in the policy context across the High Weald AONB.

## **Equality and Customer Service Implications**

23. It is considered that there are no equality and customer service implications.

## **Other Material Implications**

24. There are no other material implications.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

- The High Weald AONB Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024  
<http://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan/management-plan-review.html>

### **Appendix 2**

- High Weald AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Habitats Regulations Assessment  
<http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/joint-advisory-committee-papers/2018-2019.html>