

Rother District Council

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date:	22 April 2024
Title:	High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029
Report of:	Jeff Pyrah, Planning Policy Manager
Ward(s):	All, except Bexhill Wards
Purpose of Report:	To introduce the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED**: That the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024, reproduced at Appendix A, be recommended to Cabinet and full Council for approval and formal adoption.

Introduction

1. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities with land in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (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' (S89 (2)). Where AONBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the plan (S89 (11)(b)). In the High Weald, this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), acting on behalf of the 15 local authorities with land in the High Weald AONB.
2. The current AONB Management Plan was adopted by Cabinet on 11 February 2019. Each management plan covers a five-year period. This Plan will be the first edition of a new 20-year strategy, with a five-year implementation plan.
3. This new strategy takes account of current issues such as the biodiversity crisis, climate change, fairer access to nature, and development pressure. This means that the range of character components has broadened, and other aspects of the Plan have changed, including the inclusion of cross cutting themes: programmes, principles for action and an investment strategy 2024-2029.
4. The Planning Policy Manager has represented the local authority throughout the drafting process, as part of the officer steering group. He has collated responses from officers across departments and fed this into the process. He attended a full day workshop to provide informal feedback and provided written comments on behalf of Rother District Council during the formal public consultation on the draft Management Plan, which took place at the end of 2023. The overall objective for the Planning Policy Manager was to ensure

that the plan aligns with the Council's adopted development plan and the intended direction of the new Local Plan 2020-2040.

5. The preparation of the Management Plan has been overseen by the High Weald AONB's Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), which our Planning Committee Chair sits on. The JAC agreed the timetable for the plan in March 2022; agreed the content structure in November 2022; and recommended consultation on the draft Management Plan in March 2023.
6. On 27 March 2024, the JAC agreed the final Management Plan 2024-2029 and its supporting papers and recommended that individual local authorities formally adopt the Plan by the end of June 2024.

Analysis

7. The Management Plan incorporates introductions, facts and figures and a Statement of Significance before explaining the Core Character Components that underpin the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.
8. It sets out five cross-cutting themes:
 - Restoring Soil Health and Regenerative Land Management
 - Nature Recovery and Biodiversity
 - The Climate Crisis: Achieving Net Zero
 - People and Access
 - Planning and Development in the High Weald AONB
9. The Plan is supported by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA); Habitats Regulations Assessment; Equality Impact Assessment; and a Consultation Statement.
10. Note that the plan is not a development plan document, but it will be a material consideration in relation to the determination of planning applications.

Conclusion

11. The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029 has completed all of the statutory stages of a review and has been subject to public engagement and scrutiny. It has been agreed by the AONB's Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) as the final Management Plan 2024-2029. The JAC recommends that individual local authorities formally adopt the Plan by the end of June 2024. The Plan and its supporting documents will then be submitted to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Financial Implications

12. There are no financial implications for the proposals within this report.

Legal Implications

13. Failure to adopt the High Weald AONB Management Plan would mean that the Council would be in breach of the requirements of the CROW Act 2000 to review the Management Plan within five years.

Human Resources Implications

14. There are no Human Resource implications for the proposals within this report.

Environmental Implications

15. The adoption of the Management Plan will help to ensure the restoration and reinvigoration of the High Weald AONB as a cultural landscape for future generations to enjoy and for nature to thrive, while supporting the journey towards net zero (taken from the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's message within the Management Plan).

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Yes
Crime and Disorder	No	External Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	Yes	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	A AONB Management Plan 2024-2029