

# OUR SHARED OBJECTIVES

The High Weald AONB and the Forestry Commission will work together in partnership to deliver their shared priorities. We will do this by:

## Ensuring effective liaison

- We will hold an annual meeting between Forestry Commission and AONB staff, building on the regular liaison that has resulted from the South East AONBs Woodlands Programme.
- The Forestry Commission will provide officer representation on any relevant technical panels.
- The Forestry Commission will fully consult on the management of its own estate during the preparation of long-term Forest Design Plans.

## Assistance in the preparation of a revised AONB Management Plan

- The Forestry Commission will provide guidance on the review of the AONB Management Plan to ensure positive policies that reflect the particular characteristics of the High Weald, as well as the objectives of the England Forestry Strategy and the Regional Forestry Framework.

## Ancient woodland protection

- Building on the Wealden and Mid Sussex local authority surveys hosted by the AONB, we will continue to increase ancient woodland understanding and protection through working in partnership with local authorities and other key stakeholders to revise the Ancient Woodland Inventory for the High Weald.

## Targeting and promotion of incentives and resources

- Forestry Commission and AONB resources will be targeted at sustainable woodland management, focusing on areas of high biodiversity, access, and landscape importance. In particular, we will work with Butterfly Conservation and other partners in the Rother Woods, to provide support, advice and targeted grant assistance to land managers in this key butterfly area in the AONB.
- We will continue to working in partnership with the Woodland Trust on the project to restore plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) outside of existing delivery mechanisms, and to promote the wider findings and recommendations of this pilot.
- We recognise the need to support local markets and solutions for woodland management, and the wider benefits this can bring to local communities, and will continue to support and promote important examples such as the Hoathly Hill wood fuel initiative in the High Weald.

## Greater public awareness of woodlands and their usage

- We will work together to raise the public awareness of the role of trees and woodlands in the AONB, including their archaeological, cultural and ecological importance.
- We will work together to promote the appropriate and sustainable management of woodlands in the AONB, targeting both the public and woodland owners, and drawing on the Forestry Commission estate as an example of best practice.
- We will promote the benefits of woodland recreation, particularly to health.
- We will work to promote and enhance high quality woodland access provision in the AONB, building on Forestry Commission/ Countryside Agency-funded research on accessible natural greenspace.



## The High Weald AONB

The High Weald is an historic countryside of rolling hills draped with small, irregular fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes.

The High Weald was designated in 1983 to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. Covering part of four counties - East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent, and Surrey, it is the fourth largest AONB in England and Wales, covering 1,457 sq km. It is one of 12 AONBs in the South East, which together account for 31% of the region.



## The Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible for forestry in Great Britain. It works to ensure the protection and sustainable management of our woodlands.

The South East region's forestry framework, 'Seeing the Wood for the Trees' is the regional expression of the England Forestry Strategy. Produced in partnership with a range of stakeholders, it aims to provide the direction and context for the future development of woodlands and forestry in the South East.

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# A LOCAL ACCORD

## Between the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee and the Forestry Commission



# Key woodland issues in the High Weald

## A JOINT ACCORD

Following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) an accord was established between the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Forestry Commission in England.

The shared priorities were identified as:

- Securing an attractive and sustainable landscape
- Protection of existing woodlands
- Reversing the fragmentation of ancient and semi-natural woodlands
- Promoting appropriate management practices
- Gaining public confidence and support



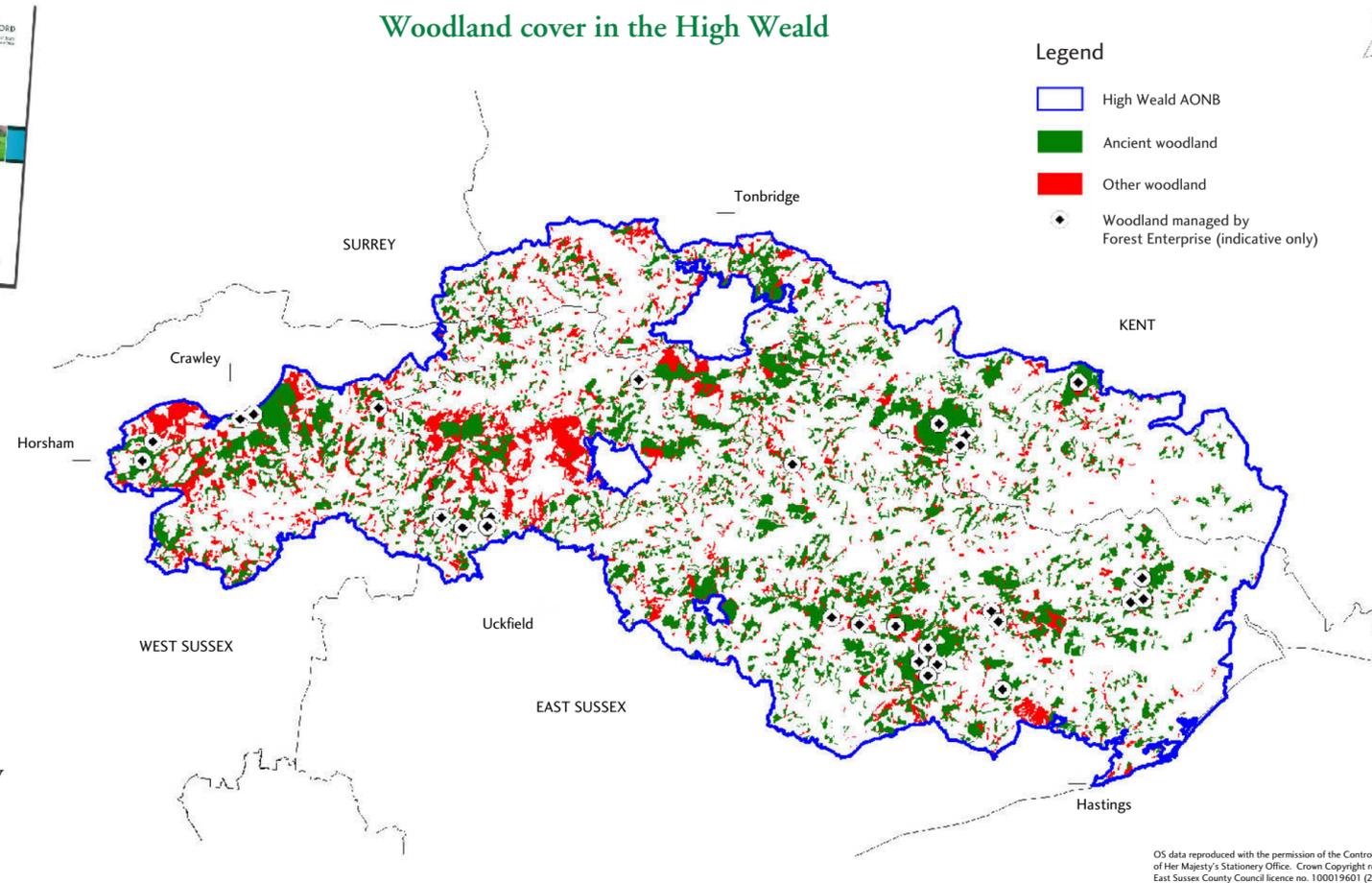
## A LOCAL ACCORD

The Joint Accord encouraged the establishment of local accords between individual Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the Forestry Commission where both parties agree that woodland issues are highly significant. These local accords seek to reflect the distinctive nature of each AONB, highlighting new opportunities for working together.

Following a number of woodland projects within the South East family of AONBs (supported jointly by the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Agency), it is now possible to identify the key issues included in this accord.

**The purpose of this accord is to describe how the High Weald AONB and the Forestry Commission will work together to meet their shared objectives**

### Woodland cover in the High Weald



The High Weald is one of the most heavily-wooded AONBs, with woodland providing almost 30% land cover. A particular characteristic of the AONB is the great extent of ancient woods, with the High Weald supporting double the amount of ancient woodland than any other AONB - some 7% of all the ancient woodland in England.

Characteristic woodland types include gill woodlands, shaws, and extensive areas of coppice which once provided renewable supplies of fuel for the Wealden iron industry. The long history of woodland use produced diverse, wildlife-rich woodlands, many of which are now under threat with the widespread decline in management.

The High Weald's woodlands are also rich in archaeological remains, including Roman bloomery sites, ancient boundaries, sawpits, hammer ponds and charcoal hearths. Many large Forest areas, dating back to early medieval times, still cover extensive areas of the AONB.

**The High Weald has 7% of all the ancient woodland in England**

The South East AONBs Woodlands Programme arose out of the Joint Accord between the National Association for AONBs and the Forestry Commission. Since 2003, it has worked with protected landscapes in the South East, including the High Weald, to help define woodland priorities, and put in place mechanisms for delivering agreed priorities. This work helped identify the four main woodland objectives set out in the High Weald Management Plan (2004). These objectives are:

- W1 Objective: To maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland
- W2 Objective: To enhance the ecological functioning of woodlands at a landscape scale
- W3 Objective: To protect the archaeology of AONB woodlands
- W4 Objective: To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets

Since the publishing of the Management Plan, the South East AONBs Woodlands Programme and the AONB have concentrated on the key woodland issues outlined below:

#### Key woodland species

There is a need to target the remaining populations of threatened woodland species in the AONB, particularly the pearl-bordered fritillary, a scarce butterfly which in the High Weald is now restricted to one area. A key focus is therefore on the Rother Woods in the south-east part of the AONB, where targeted land management advice, grants, and direct site management will help ensure the viability and expansion of declining butterfly populations.



#### Plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)

Over a third of the ancient woodlands in the High Weald are PAWS, with a considerable area of these falling outside grant schemes and management by conservation bodies. To address this, the AONB, the Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission are jointly funding a PAWS project officer, based at the AONB, to provide specialist management advice and support to landowners to enable the restoration of these sites to native woodland cover.



#### Increasing ancient woodland understanding and protection

The High Weald is a partner in the Wealden Ancient Woodlands Survey, which is updating and enhancing the Ancient Woodland Inventory for local authorities intersecting the AONB. Following a national pilot in Wealden District, the High Weald is working with the Forestry Commission to show how the survey can be used as a model for a wider revision of the Inventory.



#### New markets for woodland management

The lack of management in the woodlands of the High Weald has led to a heavy decline in species dependent on open woodland conditions. There is a need to work with partners to identify and promote new markets to support woodland management, such as wood fuel. The AONB and the Forestry Commission have helped support a wood fuel heating system in the High Weald, which provides an important demonstration of the viability and benefits of biomass.



#### Public access to woodlands

Woodland makes an important contribution to accessible land in the High Weald, comprising a large part of the accessible greenspace in the AONB. Work being carried out by the SE AONBs Woodlands Programme is helping the AONB and the Forestry Commission to prioritise areas for improving access provision as well as enhance existing access opportunities.

