

Mission: the purpose of this initiative is to reduce light pollution and protect the dark skies around Wadhurst and neighbouring areas of the High Weald National Landscape (formerly “AONB”) by becoming a certified Dark Sky Community within 3 years, for the benefit of multiple communities, ensuring beautiful natural dark skies for future generations.

Why do we need this project?

- “Inappropriate or excessive use of artificial light has serious environmental consequences for humans and wildlife”¹. The UK Government states² that artificial light “can be a source of annoyance to people, harmful to wildlife and undermine the enjoyment of the countryside or the night sky, especially in areas with intrinsically dark landscapes.”
- The High Weald is home to some of the darkest skies in the South East but light pollution is a growing issue in the AONB.³ Yet light pollution is the easiest and simplest type of pollution to fix because it is instantly reversible
- We need to ensure that light is directed to where it is needed, on the ground, rather than upwards where it is wasted and pollutes our dark night sky

Project goal: IDA certification

- The goal is to be certified as an IDA Dark Sky Community within 3 years, the first in the High Weald National Landscape
- We will work with Dan Oakley (IDA advocate and Dark Sky UK reviewer) to achieve certification

DarkSky UK certification criteria (UK chapter of the International Dark-Sky Association [IDA])

- We must have a dark sky policy that is enforceable by local UK planning authorities (i.e. embodied in District Council Local Plans and/or Parish Neighbourhood Plans)
- We must demonstrate community engagement and support
- We need a Lighting Plan to remediate public and private lights that don’t meet the standards
- We need case studies to demonstrate robust application of dark sky policy in the local planning process

Scope

- Five Parish Councils have committed to this initiative: Burwash (Rother); Goudhurst (Tunbridge Wells); Mayfield (Wealden); Ticehurst (Rother) and Wadhurst (Wealden). Other parishes may join later.
- These parishes are joining forces to:
 - align dark sky policies across the region, spanning 3 planning authorities: Rother and Wealden District Councils and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
 - share resources, experience, costs, best practices and lessons learned
 - coordinate communication with our communities and speak with a stronger voice with planning authorities
 - maximise the area covered by the dark sky certification
- Each Parish can operate at its own speed so the convoy does not have to travel at the speed of its slowest member

Policy and standards

- We will develop dark skies policy for adoption by Parish Councils into Neighbourhood Plans (or other local plans)
- We will review and feedback robustly and proactively on dark sky policies proposed by our local planning authorities
- Policy will make reference to multiple relevant standards and guidelines such as:
 - Rother, Wealden and Tunbridge Wells Local Plan dark sky policy (expected Q2 2024)
 - High Weald National Landscape Management Plan dark skies policy (expected March 2024)
 - High Weald National Landscape Lighting Guidance (expected summer 2024)
 - “Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP) Guidance GN01” standards
 - ILP / Bat Conservation Trust Guidance Note 08/18: “Bats and artificial lighting in the UK”
 - IDA DarkSky UK Guidelines

Enforceability

- We will work with Parish Councils to:
 - develop and adopt public dark skies policy into their Neighbourhood Plans
 - support community engagement activities
- We will engage Rother and Wealden District Councils and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to:
 - develop and adopt public dark skies policy into their Local Plans
 - apply Parish dark sky policies when evaluating planning proposals

¹ Sky UK; <https://darksky.uk/light-pollution/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/light-pollution>

³ <https://highweald.org/get-involved/dark-skies/>

- obtain letters of support confirming that Parish policies will be taken into account in planning decisions
- create local recent case studies of successful enforcement of dark sky policies by the planning authorities, showing how the planning process has prevented or reduced light pollution

Community engagement

- Examples of historical community engagement:
 - Wadhurst & District Astronomical Society conducted a dark sky survey⁴ conducted in 2012
 - Wadhurst Nature Recovery Network conducted a light metering survey in Dec '22
 - High Weald National Landscape and some parishes organised a Dark Sky festival in Feb '23
- This initiative will develop a community engagement programme across the region which will incorporate:
 - An annual Dark Skies festival organised collectively across the in-scope parishes
 - Annual dark sky walks organised individually by each parish
 - A unified social media presence to engage the public through a dedicated website and Facebook page linked to Parish websites, X (aka Twitter) and Instagram accounts
 - Educational content written on behalf of all published in village magazines/social media by each parish
 - Leaflet drops to inform the public especially priority light polluters
- We will seek “letters of support” to evidence community engagement from schools and shops etc

Remediation

- Conduct bi-annual light meter surveys to track progress and to identify light pollution hotspots
- Public lighting:
 - Work with Parish Councils to identify lighting assets and sources of public / community-owned light pollution
 - Develop remediation plans to retrofit public lighting to comply with policy
- Private lighting
 - Publish simple guidelines for local residents and businesses to encourage policy compliance
 - Identify sources of private light pollution
 - Engage lighting owners to reduce pollution, encourage community involvement to apply peer pressure

Critical success factors

1. A parish councillor must be willing to lead policy development and approval; to secure District Council planning authority support; and to sponsor development of a Parish Lighting Plan
2. A local coordinator of a group of volunteers willing to organise activities such as lighting surveys, dark sky festivals, walks, village magazine publications, social media updates, schools contact etc

Risks

1. District and Parish Council elections in May 2027 could change the stakeholders and delay the initiative – this risk is mitigated by setting a 3 year timescale so we complete in the year (2026) before local elections
2. If all parishes seek certification as a bloc, there is be a risk that if one parish fails all parishes may fail – this risk will be mitigated through individual certification requests, subject to discussion with the IDA

Funding:

1. Funding may be required in due course to create a web presence, for printing leaflets, hiring event venues etc – costs have not yet been estimated
2. Funding may be sought by sharing costs among participating Parish Councils or other sources such as Sussex Lund

Document versions

Date published	Version	Updates	Published to
15 Oct 2023	0.1	First draft	Cllrs Pat Smith, David Shairp, Claire Moore and Phil Moore (Wadhurst PC) Sam Nicholas (High Weald National Landscape dark sky coordinator)
31 Oct 2023	0.2		Sam Nicholas; Dan Oakley (independent dark sky consultant); Cllr Pat Smith
13 Nov 2023	0.3	Dan Oakley feedback	Sam Nicholas Cllr Teresa Killeen (Ticehurst PC) and Caroline Donegan (Wild About Ticehurst)
18 Nov 2023	0.4	Sam Nicholas feedback Add Ticehurst	Cllr Pat Smith (Wadhurst PC); Cllr Teresa Killeen (Ticehurst PC) Wild About Wadhurst, Ticehurst, Battle, Brightling, Broad Oak, Burwash, Crowhurst, Dallington, Mayfield, Ticehurst, Warbleton
16 Jan 2024	0.5	AONB re-branding; CSFs 3-year timescale Add Mayfield & Burwash	Cllr Teresa Killeen (Ticehurst PC) and Caroline Donegan (Wild About Ticehurst)
26 Jan 2024	0.6	Enriched comms plan Funding needs Add Goudhurst	Wild About Battle, Brightling, Burwash, Crowhurst, Dallington, Etchingham, Goudhurst, Horam, Ticehurst, Wadhurst; Darwell Conservation Area; Heathfield Environmental Group; Mayfield Community Action Group; Rother Northern Parishes. High Weald National Landscape. IDA.

⁴ <https://wadhurstastro.co.uk/newsletters/Wadhurst%20Dark%20Sky%20Village%202012.pdf>

