

Item 5. Wrekin Forest Partnership

1. Summary

This paper updates members on proposals to create a 'Wrekin Forest Partnership', and puts forward draft Terms of Reference for this, showing how it links to the AONB's structure.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Management Board on 4 September 2007 supported the vision for "a permanent structure which befits the Wrekin's importance" and the examination in more detail by relevant partners of how this could be done. Shropshire Wildlife Trust convened a small meeting of key partners on 9 October to present the priorities of the almost complete Wrekin Forest Conservation Plan. At this meeting it became clear that there was general support for the formation of a 'Wrekin Forest Partnership'. In many ways, this was the 'missing link' for the Conservation Plan, providing a structure both to underpin and oversee its implementation.
- 2.2. Because of our experience and the importance of links to the AONB Partnership, we undertook to write a first draft of Terms of Reference for the proposed Wrekin Forest Partnership, and these are given in Appendix 1. Maintaining this new group will require a real commitment on the part of Shropshire Wildlife Trust (who are likely to continue to be the host organisation for a dedicated Wrekin Forest Project Officer), with support from ourselves and the local authorities. Comments from members of the Board on these draft Terms of Reference and on their implications for the AONB Partnership are welcomed.
- 2.3. A public meeting is being held on 3 December 2007 to launch the Wrekin Forest Conservation Plan, including the intention (now incorporated in the Plan's actions) to form the new Partnership. Further detailed comments on the Plan have recently been given by the AONB Team to the Wildlife Trust, and these will help to strengthen the links with the AONB and its own Management Plan. The coverage in the Wrekin Forest Conservation Plan of a wider area than this part of the AONB means that there is a wider variety of actions proposed. The importance of the Wrekin itself as the dominant feature should not however be undermined by the consideration of a wider area and the use of the 'Wrekin Forest' terminology. From our perspective, the priorities must remain conservation of the key features within the AONB (e.g. the hillfort, geology, woodlands), appropriate management of visitor pressure and improved opportunities for community involvement. The proposal for a new café/toilets may provide facilities which visitors want, but does not in itself contribute much to AONB purposes. Indeed it has potential to draw resources away from these priority activities described above. As the most significant built development foreseeable in this part of the AONB, a number of issues remain to be considered properly, such as the potential for it to add to existing traffic and parking problems at Forest Glen. In planning terms the question will be whether this is the right development in the right location.

3. RECOMMENDATION:

The Management Board is requested to support the formation of the Wrekin Forest Partnership, and comment on the draft Terms of Reference and points raised about the Conservation Plan.

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Appendix 1 WREKIN FOREST PARTNERSHIP, DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Remit and Status

- 1.1. The Wrekin Forest Partnership aims to bring together relevant partners to work together for the sustainable natural, cultural and economic future of the 'Wrekin Forest' (described below), in the county of Shropshire and the Borough of Telford & Wrekin.**
- 1.2. The Partnership will oversee the implementation of the Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Management Plan. It will help to develop and deliver actions, and provide a forum for discussion of issues and co-ordination of activity.**
- 1.3. The Partnership is unincorporated and is not a legal entity.**
- 1.4. The core of the Wrekin Forest area is within the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a national designation with a dedicated structure and staff to coordinate action through strategy and projects. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will formally be a Working Group of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, which is the body formed by five local authorities to fulfil their legal duty to co-ordinate management of the AONB. Work of the Wrekin Forest Partnership will be reported to the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and related closely to the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan. The Wrekin Forest Partnership is essentially a devolved structure retaining a strong link to the AONB, and fulfilling some of its co-ordinating roles at a local level.**
- 1.5. The Partnership will not initially hold or expend funds itself, but its work will be supported through key partners including Shropshire Wildlife Trust, the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and the local authorities. The Partnership will examine possible structures for the best long-term benefit of the area, such as a free-standing charitable trust.**

2. The Wrekin Forest area

- 2.1. The Wrekin Forest area is defined in the Wrekin Forest Landscape Management Plan. It is centred on the Wrekin hill, and bounded to the north by the M54, to the south by the River Severn floodplain, to the east by the edge of Telford at Horsehay and to the west by the minor road running through Upper Longwood and Rushton.**

3. Working principles for the Wrekin Forest Partnership

- 3.1. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will support voluntary initiatives aimed at working together that contribute to the landscape conservation of the Wrekin Forest.**
- 3.2. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will be a representative group with a strong advisory role offering a consensus building function for the future landscape conservation of the Wrekin Forest. The Partnership will seek to support the employment by one of its member organisations of a dedicated Project Officer for the Wrekin Forest, and will advise on the work and priorities for that Officer.**
- 3.3. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will seek to support the continued protection of the designated landscape elements, to enhance and extend where possible and promote complementary research and monitoring throughout the Wrekin Forest.**
- 3.4. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will support the recommendations of the Wrekin Hills Geodiversity Plan, facilitate future review and monitoring of geological conservation,**

seek opportunities to enhance the management arrangements for the geological resource and promote wider understanding of the geodiversity of the Wrekin Forest.

- 3.5. The Wrekin Forest Partnership aims to support the positive management of wildlife throughout the Wrekin Forest.
- 3.6. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will work to support the aims of the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan in regard to protecting threatened habitats, seeking opportunities to restore or create wildlife habitats, support appropriate management, promote public understanding and conduct survey work and condition monitoring.
- 3.7. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will support and promote environmentally sustainable agriculture through the development of beneficial collaborations , information sharing and advice and public education.
- 3.8. The Wrekin Forest Partnership aims to support the active conservation of the archaeological heritage of the Wrekin Forest.
- 3.9. The Wrekin Forest Partnership aims to support the preservation, conservation and promotion of public understanding regarding the rich industrial history of the Wrekin Forest.
- 3.10. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will promote, support and enhance the vital relationship between the Wrekin Forest and the urban communities of Wellington and Telford. The Partnership will seek to support the development of a wider Green Space Strategy which includes the Wrekin Forest and the Green Network of Telford.
- 3.11. The Wrekin Forest Partnership aims to support the development of an integrated high quality multi-user network of trails that supports positive exploration and enjoyment of the Wrekin Forest. A key consideration of any access strategy within the Wrekin Forest will remain the conservation of the natural character of the area.
- 3.12. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will support community wide initiatives to promote a cleaner, safer natural environment, seek to develop projects that contribute to raising public awareness of environmental issues, and provide a forum for Wrekin Forest-wide debate on environmental pressures.
- 3.13. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will promote public understanding and appreciation of the natural, cultural and historical resources of the Wrekin Forest through supporting new research, literature and educational initiatives.
- 3.14. The Wrekin Forest Partnership will promote the positive use of the Wrekin Forest for the purposes of health, leisure and recreation to a new and wider audience.
- 3.15. The Wrekin Forest Partnership aim to promote and support opportunities positively to engage and involve the general public in the conservation of the Wrekin Forest.

4. Membership

- 4.1. Initially, the Group will comprise:

Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
Borough of Telford & Wrekin
Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Shropshire County Council
Natural England
Forestry Commission
A representative of All Friends Round the Wrekin
A representative of Wellington Town Council
One or more representatives of Parish Councils in the Wrekin Forest area
Up to 3 individual community members

Up to 3 farmers/ landowners

- 4.2. The Partnership may invite guests to attend meetings for a particular topic. Members of the Partnership will undertake to promote the conservation and sustainable management of the Wrekin Forest, attend meetings whenever possible and, if no longer able to attend meetings on a regular basis, to step down or to seek another representative. Organisational members must have a significant material or operational interest in the area and have adequate resources to support effective membership. Individual members must demonstrate commitment in an area of interest relevant to the remit of the Partnership, and be resident in or near to the area.
- 4.3. The Partnership will review its membership every two years, and may co-opt new members.

5. Operation

- 5.1. It is intended that the Partnership be given adequate structure without being burdened by formality. The Group will endeavour to operate by communication and consensus, reflecting its main role of co-ordination and consultation rather than as a decision-making body.
- 5.2. The Partnership will meet three times a year, or as agreed by the membership. One meeting a year will normally be an open public meeting. A Chair and Vice-Chair will be nominated annually or as necessary by the members of the Partnership.
- 5.3. The Wrekin Forest Project Officer of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust will provide administrative support. Agendas and any papers will be circulated at least a week before meetings. Members wishing to include items on the Agenda should try to give adequate notice to the Chair or responsible Officer. Organisations may send alternative or additional representatives to meetings, with the agreement of the Partnership's Chair.
- 5.4. Updates on activity of the Group will be given periodically to the AONB Partnership. Minutes and papers of the Group will be made available on the Shropshire Hills AONB website and circulated to people not belonging to the Partnership who wish to be kept informed of its work.