

## **BRIEFING NOTE ON USE OF THE 'SHROPSHIRE HILLS' IDENTITY**

**This briefing note outlines the position of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership (formally approved 8 February 2005) that the consistent use of the 'Shropshire Hills' identity in promotion, and developing its association with high environmental quality and standards of environmental management, is likely to benefit both conservation and the economy of the area.**

**Any party promoting or describing the area is encouraged to do so in ways compatible with developing this identity and positive environmental associations with it.**

### **Strategic background**

- The Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2004-9 (a statutory document) identifies as a key issue "*the low level of public awareness of the AONB and its special qualities*" and proposes actions to overcome this. This is because raising awareness of the AONB and its special qualities will build greater support for conservation.
- The Tourism Strategy for Shropshire (Stevens & Associates for Shropshire County Council, 2004) recognises the 'Shropshire Hills' as an important sub-unit of Shropshire's county identity with regard to tourism.

### **Rationale**

Consistent use of the 'Shropshire Hills' identity by a wide variety of parties will bring benefits to the AONB and to conservation, but will also bring wider benefits. The Protected Landscapes Branding Forum conference report (Countryside Agency, Oct 2004) stresses the importance of a well-recognised and consistent identity for an area in the context of promoting local products, either to tourism markets or to local people. It should be our aim that both local people and visitors recognise and have an affinity with the 'Shropshire Hills' identity, and that in respect of tourism and local products this identity is associated with a high quality environment, sustainability and quality. Developing recognition of this identity and associations is likely to support development of the area's tourism economy in a sustainable way (i.e. with economic, social and environmental benefits).

A basic premise for the development of any brand, be it of a landscape or a more traditional consumer product, is consistency of message. The use of a single product name is an important initial stage in developing this consistency, including avoidance as far as possible of other brands or identities which may detract or compete with this. In the context of the Shropshire Hills, examples of such other identities include 'Secret Hills', 'South Shropshire', 'South Shropshire Hills', and 'Blue Remembered Hills'. These terms

obviously do have legitimate uses, but care should be exercised in their use in relation to the AONB in order to avoid confusion.

**We believe that the ‘Shropshire Hills’ is the best consistent identity to use. As well as fitting with the strategic and policy context of management of the area, it is also a genuine, evocative identity, which matches well with people’s perceptions of the area.**

Generic use of ‘Shropshire Hills’ without ‘Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ or ‘AONB’ attached will be the most appropriate in many cases, and sometimes has the advantage of not needing to refer exactly to the designated area (i.e. the boundaries can be ‘blurred’).

### **Examples**

Some promotion activity already fits very well with this approach. The AONB Partnership has encouraged other initiatives to align better with it, and will continue to do this.

Examples of current and recent initiatives by partners in support of this include:

- A joint ‘Shropshire Hills’ events leaflet in 2005 and 2006 produced by the AONB, Discovery Centre, National Trust and Acton Scott Historic Working Farm.
- A deliberate move by Shropshire County Council to using the name ‘Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre’ for the facility at Craven Arms, and a lowering of the profile of the ‘Secret Hills’ brand. (Recent literature and the new entrance displays reflect this change, but some signage may not be replaced for some time for cost reasons).
- Promotion of the Shropshire Hills Shuttles (bus service).
- The National Trust’s countryside work in the area operates under a ‘Shropshire Hills’ banner.
- Erection of signs showing ‘Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ on certain ‘A’ roads leading into the AONB.
- Inclusion of a ‘Shropshire Hills’ context within current interpretation proposals for a number of sites within the AONB.
- The 2006 Shropshire Hills Farmers Markets and Food and Drink Festivals promotion leaflet. This brings together events in a number of market towns in and around the AONB.

### **Notes on correct description of the AONB.**

Where the AONB is specifically mentioned, it is preferable that this is done so correctly, and the notes below may assist in doing this.

- The correct title of ‘Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ should be used. The words have capital letters as it is an official designation.
- In general the acronym ‘AONB’ would only be used after title has been used in full, in order to aid understanding. Care should be taken to avoid common mistakes such as ‘ANOB’.

- It is not correct to say that a particular location (e.g. Carding Mill Valley, Brown Clees) 'is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. Rather it is 'within the Shropshire Hills AONB'.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has 38 members including local authorities, statutory bodies, voluntary and private sector bodies representing interests including conservation, land owning and management, business and recreation. The Partnership is supported by a small staff team. For further information on this topic please contact the team using the details above.

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