

Executive Summary - Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-14

This is the second statutory Management Plan for the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a legal designation covering 23% of Shropshire with the principal purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty. The Plan has been prepared and endorsed by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, with formal observations made by Natural England. The Plan has been formally approved by the constituent local authorities, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

‘The principal purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.’

The Shropshire Hills AONB is nationally important, and its key **special qualities are the diversity and contrast of its landscape, its hills, farmland, woods and rivers, the important geology, wildlife and heritage they hold, plus scenic quality and views, tranquillity, culture and opportunities for enjoyment.**

The character and quality of the Shropshire Hills landscape are relatively stable, and continue to be of high importance. However, **the overall condition and trends of the special features and qualities of the Shropshire Hills AONB are mixed.** Improvements in some areas linked to a significant scale of conservation activity are accompanied by declines in other aspects. Land management practices remain a crucial determining factor, alongside wider economic and social factors.

The Management Plan’s Vision is that: **The natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills landscape is conserved, enhanced and helped to adapt by sympathetic land management, by co-ordinated action and by sustainable communities; and is valued for its richness of geology, wildlife and heritage, and its contribution to prosperity and wellbeing.**

The AONB designation is not about preventing change, but **managing change in a positive way** and securing maximum benefit for the area. The Management Plan defines the following strategic priorities to guide action for 2009 to 2014, relating to the Vision above but also reflecting the high priority for action on climate change:

Valuing, conserving and enhancing what we have

Conserving habitats, heritage and quality; appropriate and high quality development

Keeping the Shropshire Hills countryside thriving

Land management, especially farming; sustainable communities

Shifting to low carbon

Taking the right action to mitigate climate change

Adapting for the future, working alongside nature

Landscape scale conservation; functioning ecosystems; social and economic adaptation

Helping people to connect with the AONB

Awareness; enjoyment and wellbeing; community involvement

Policies are defined on a variety of topics (see full list in Appendices), seeking to provide direction and guide activity in relation to the AONB. Public bodies are legally required to ‘have regard to the purposes of AONBs in carrying out their functions’ (Section 85, Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000). Some of the Policies are intended to complement and support formal planning policies in existing Plans, and in the Local Development Frameworks for Shropshire and for Telford & Wrekin.

Partnership is key to delivery of the Management Plan, and the actions of many people support the AONB, especially farmers, landowners and the local community. **The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership** aims through the Management Plan to provide co-ordination, advice and assistance, and believes that the primary environmental aims of the AONB will be best achieved by close integration with social and economic interests. The prioritised Actions which are set out to deliver the Objectives of the Plan over the next five years are mostly (but not exclusively) focused on organisations which are part of the AONB Partnership. The Partnership currently has 36 members, along with a small staff team who play a co-ordinating and facilitating role and also implement some of the Actions directly. Progress will be monitored through reporting at the regular meetings of the AONB Partnership, and the Management Plan Actions will be updated and progress reported on annually. Further information is available at www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk.



Summary of AONB Management Plan Policies

Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-14

These are formally approved as policies of Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council. N.B. The Management Plan does not define policies which duplicate existing planning policy at a national, regional or local level. Formal planning policies are the strongest mechanism for protection of the AONB, and a summary of those relevant to the AONB is kept up to date at www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk. The policies defined below are complementary to existing planning policies (see note at page 19).



POLICY 1. Organisations which regulate designated sites and features, environmental quality and amenity should make full use of available measures to ensure the highest standards appropriate to a nationally protected landscape are achieved in the AONB. A supportive and awareness-raising approach should be used with landowners where possible, but mechanisms for legal enforcement should also be used where necessary in more serious cases. Known 'blackspots' and problems should be addressed and tackled, but consideration given to the secondary purposes of AONBs to have regard for the needs of rural industries and local communities, and to promote sustainable development.



POLICY 2. Consideration of the purposes of designation in all decisions affecting the AONB should reflect sustainability and the full range of special qualities defined in the Management Plan as well as landscape character and visual amenity.

POLICY 3. Even with small structures not requiring planning permission, care should be taken to avoid loss of wildness. On many hills and in more secluded valleys, especially where there are few man-made objects, this will mean a preference for no structures at all. In cases where structures are essential, their location and design may need to be modified to reduce the impact on wildness.



POLICY 4. Farm diversification enterprises need to be in harmony with environment and not degrade this resource, which also provides an important economic asset for the future. The potential impacts of business-related traffic to and from the property will be an important consideration, including cumulative effects.

POLICY 5. Small scale quarrying to supply local materials for restoring traditional buildings and structures is supported, subject to careful consideration of environmental factors, including the conservation value of former quarries where these may be reopened.

POLICY 6. Opportunities created by technological advance should be sought to remove or reduce the prominence of hilltop telecommunications structures.

POLICY 7. New overhead cables should be avoided where possible, with emphasis given to undergrounding or off-grid options.

POLICY 8. Design of new agricultural buildings including location, structure and materials should be of a high standard appropriate to the AONB. Efforts should be made to improve existing buildings where these are of a poor standard.

POLICY 9. Exceptionally where a significant adverse impact associated with development cannot be avoided, appropriate mitigation measures including habitat creation or community benefits, should be sought.

POLICY 10. The siting, design and specification of new developments for tourism and recreation should be to high standards of environmental sensitivity and sustainability. The following guidelines are recommended:

- Single developments of more than around ten accommodation units are less likely to be supported in small settlements and open countryside.
- Large parks of static caravans, cabins or chalets are likely to be intrusive. Smaller sites with good landscaping are preferable, and facilities for touring caravans and camping generally have a low impact as there are fewer permanent structures.
- Built facilities for recreation should only be allowed where their location and the activities they support are compatible with the special qualities of the AONB.

POLICY 11. Road improvement schemes within and outside the AONB should not increase noise pollution or emissions from traffic. Approaches such as speed management schemes may, for example, be more appropriate than road widening. Potential impacts within the AONB of proposed road improvement schemes beyond the boundary should be considered.

POLICY 12. Road management and improvement schemes in the AONB should minimise landscape impact and avoid urbanisation of rural roads, e.g. through sensitive and appropriate design and use of materials, and avoiding unnecessary signage clutter.

POLICY 13. The provision of any new public car parking should be in scale with the setting and capacity of roads used to reach the location. Larger car parks should generally be situated nearer to settlements or larger roads. Where informal roadside parking is improved to alleviate traffic problems on smaller roads, care should be taken to avoid adding to traffic levels. Design should be appropriate to a rural setting, e.g. stone surfacing, use of timber for edging and signs.

POLICY 14. The Shropshire Hills should remain a priority area for agri-environment funding, and farmers should be actively encouraged to utilise the options that best contribute to the AONB Management Plan's aims.

POLICY 15. Broadleaved woodland comprising native species should be expanded, and especially restored on Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and Plantation on Wood Pasture (PWP).

POLICY 16. Where woodland and forestry felling is taking place, opportunities should be sought to improve design and landscape sensitivity of plantations. Reversion to open habitat should be targeted to locations where landscape benefits and potential for high value habitat (e.g. heathland) are greatest.

POLICY 17. Any new or replacement coniferous planting should follow the highest standards of design guidelines in relation to landscape and amenity, nature and heritage conservation and resource protection.

POLICY 18. Tranquillity should be taken fully into account in both strategic and specific decisions. Proposals having a significant impact on tranquillity in the AONB should be prevented where possible.

POLICY 19. Expansion of airports or alterations to flight path corridors which increase the volume or impacts of air traffic over the AONB should not be allowed.

POLICY 20. A principle of 'quiet enjoyment' should apply, and activities which are in keeping with this encouraged. Recreation activities which are inherently noisy or intrusive should be discouraged, and where possible prevented, e.g. facilities for such activities not allowed through the planning system.

POLICY 21. Recreational off-road use of motor vehicles should not be encouraged or promoted within the AONB. Voluntary measures and pro-active work with users are recommended to minimise the impact of legal off-road use of motor vehicles on the landscape and on people's quiet enjoyment of the countryside. Where the impact on the AONB is significant however, measures including traffic regulation orders restricting legal use should be used. Illegal motorised activities should as far as possible be prevented, and pro-active support given to the Police.

POLICY 22. Events in the AONB such as concerts, festivals, and challenge walks should be planned (e.g. in location, timing and scale) to minimise environmental impact, and regular events should not be allowed or encouraged to grow to a scale where problems arise. Event organisers should seek advice at the planning stages to enable this.

POLICY 23. Infrastructure associated with countryside access should be sensitively designed, and appropriate materials should be used, e.g. stone for surfacing of a type appropriate to the location, preference for wooden signposts and gates on rights of way, rural character in the specification and signage of cycle routes.





POLICY 24. Farmers and land managers should be supported as the main stewards of natural beauty, and for their vital role in maintaining the Shropshire Hills landscape. Policies and public funding relating to farming and forestry should recognise this and help to support ways of farming which generate these public environmental benefits.

POLICY 25. Environmental Stewardship priorities should support a shift back towards more mixed systems of farming especially in the uplands (e.g. by allowing a proportion of arable cropping and hay meadows). Advisory services should make better links with business approaches such as selling direct into local markets, which are also of benefit to the AONB.

POLICY 26. Countryside attractions and walks should be linked where possible to settlements where services and public transport facilities exist and can be promoted, helping to maximise economic benefits, especially from day visitors.

POLICY 27. Tourism activities which draw on the special qualities of the area without harming them should be especially encouraged. This may include development of access infrastructure (e.g. off road cycle routes, rights of way), use of public transport, historic and natural sites, interpretation to help aid understanding, enterprises based specifically on the special qualities of the AONB (e.g. wildlife watching, landscape painting, walking festivals) and cultural events.

POLICY 28. Lowering carbon emissions from the area is an over-riding priority, and should influence all areas of decision making. Energy conservation should be given the highest priority, and should always accompany renewable energy generation. Low carbon community initiatives are supported. In addition to carbon from energy use, the ability of land management to reduce greenhouse gas emissions should be optimised.

POLICY 29. Integration of energy efficiency and renewable energy will be encouraged in all development – new or refurbishment, and of any scale.

POLICY 30. Renewable energy developments in the AONB should generally be of a small scale appropriate to local use. Larger scale energy developments will be more suitable outside the AONB, e.g. linked to market towns where transport links are better, closer to larger scale demand, etc.

POLICY 31. Small scale domestic renewable installations (e.g. solar panels) are encouraged and AONB designation should not be used as a reason against these. The design and installation of these should take account of visual amenity. Greater sensitivity may be required in Conservation Areas and on Listed Buildings, but even in these circumstances, effort should be made to enable energy benefits to be achieved.

POLICY 32. Biomass energy based on existing resources in the area, such as woodfuel and agricultural by-products, is particularly compatible with the AONB and is strongly supported.

POLICY 33. Establishment of energy crops should avoid harm to biodiversity, water quality and availability, and where larger and longer-lived than normal agricultural crops, should take account of visual amenity (e.g. following forestry design guidelines regarding scale and shape of compartments including in relation to landform, structural diversity and edge treatments).

POLICY 34. There should be no development of wind turbines (other than in accordance with permitted development rights) within the 'High Open Moorland' and 'High Volcanic Hills and Slopes' Landscape Types in the AONB.

POLICY 35. Proposals for wind turbines and associated infrastructure within the AONB should take account of factors including landscape character, visual amenity, biodiversity, heritage, recreation, and overall sustainability (including cumulative impacts), and the following guidelines:

- Within 100m of buildings (excluding Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas), one or two wind turbines of up to 12m to blade tip are likely to be acceptable within the AONB.
- Turbines of over 25m to blade tip, or groups of more than two turbines, are not likely to be acceptable within the AONB.
- Wind turbine proposals should be linked to local energy needs and energy conservation measures. Community benefits should relate to energy in preference to amenity or other measures.

POLICY 36. Decisions on proposals for wind turbines and associated infrastructure outside the AONB should take account of the potential impacts within the AONB, especially the extent of visibility and significance of viewpoints affected, and potential cumulative effects with existing structures.

POLICY 37. Promotion of the area for tourism should aim to minimise car travel. Towns and locations best served by public transport should receive the main promotion as 'gateways' to the Shropshire Hills, in preference to locations where access is only possible by car.

POLICY 38. Pro-active adaptation to climate change, focusing on wildlife and natural processes, is essential to retaining the natural beauty of the AONB and must be given a high priority.

POLICY 39. Existing areas of high quality habitat must be retained, and networks developed of higher quality habitat through targeted improvements on privately owned land.

POLICY 40. Opportunities should be should be taken to strengthen the integrity and identity of the Shropshire Hills as an area of exceptional landscape value. Consistent use of the 'Shropshire Hills' identity should be given greater prominence in tourism and other forms of promotion, along with the special qualities of the AONB and opportunities for visitors to adopt a sustainable approach.

POLICY 41. Opportunities and promotion aimed at both visitors and the local community should encourage people to experience the AONB's countryside more fully in ways which are not damaging (e.g. through walks and activities away from cars and roads, through appreciating wildlife and heritage).

POLICY 42. The management of the wider Wrekin Forest area is crucial to the integrity of the Wrekin itself within the AONB. The landscape quality of the wider Wrekin Forest area should be protected as far as possible, and the management of the Wrekin integrated with this surrounding area. The Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Management Plan is a locally relevant and detailed framework for the area and is formally endorsed by the AONB Management Plan.

POLICY 43. The Wrekin Forest Partnership provides a vital local forum for this important area, and should be supported and its links to the AONB Partnership maintained. The Wrekin Forest Partnership needs to develop as a long-term structure linked to permanent funding for a dedicated staff resource to take and co-ordinate action on the ground.



Summary of AONB Partnership Positions



Note that these are in addition to Management Plan Policies and other policies, such as through planning, which protect the AONB.



AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 1 The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership does not believe that the benefits of formally amending the boundary are justified against the considerable costs and resources this would entail. The Partnership will work, and encourage its partners and others also to work, in ways which will strengthen the integrity and identity of the Shropshire Hills as an area of exceptional landscape value. The Partnership will focus its work strongly on the designated AONB area, but will work in a flexible and pragmatic way in relation to the AONB boundary, to secure the maximum benefit for the Shropshire Hills. (see www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk for full statement approved Feb 2008).



AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 2 An approach of smaller, low-key tourism developments designed in sympathy with local character will blend better into the area and spread economic benefits more widely than larger facilities. Tourism businesses will be supported to take a sustainable approach and encourage their visitors to do likewise.

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 3 In recognition of its unique character, prominence to visitors and the juxtaposition of residential properties with the highest quality landscape, the AONB Partnership advocates the designation of Cardingmill Valley as a Conservation Area.

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 4 Because the vitality of the local agricultural economy is so integrally linked with the natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills, the AONB Partnership will actively support appropriate and sustainable forms of farming and diversification enterprises where these are compatible with the AONB designation.

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 5 The model for the economy of the Shropshire Hills should be of environment-led regeneration, in which a pattern of relatively small-scale dispersed enterprise will be key to maintaining the right balance.

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 6 Where market priced housing is used to generate finance for affordable housing within the AONB, it is preferable that the market priced housing is outside the AONB.

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 7 Where affordable housing is allowed when other forms of development would not be, in order to meet social need, the standards of sensitivity to the AONB should not be compromised, and are expected to be higher than outside the AONB.

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 8 The Partnership supports community low carbon initiatives and will take a view of wind turbine proposals based on a range of sustainability criteria as well as visual aspects.

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 9 Land within 5km of the AONB boundary is unsuitable for large scale windfarm development, and should be excluded from any Search Areas. (The definition of 'large' used in this Position is that used by TAN 8, i.e. developments of 25MW and over).

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 10 The Partnership supports permitted development rights for appropriate microgeneration, but believes the current moves to extend permitted development rights could allow some wind turbine developments which would have an unacceptable impact on the landscape of the AONB. The Partnership does not support permitted development rights in the AONB for multiple micro wind turbines and for those sited away from existing development (e.g. further than 100m from buildings), and if these are introduced, will work with the planning authorities to explore the case for an Article 4 Direction.

AONB PARTNERSHIP POSITION 11 Strategies for transport affecting the AONB should not be solely informed by a 'predict and provide' model of increasing capacity to deal with increased traffic flow. The need for road upgrades and improvements which could have detrimental effects on the AONB may be avoided by use of other measures.