



Sustainability Appraisal of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Draft Management Plan 2009 – 2014

Non-technical Summary

December 2008

The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a national designation covering a quarter of Shropshire. The Management Plan is a statutory document outlining priorities for the future of the area. Alongside the review of the Management Plan, a process of Sustainability Appraisal examines the interactions between policies in the draft Plan and a broad range of environmental, economic and social issues. The purpose of this is to look at any potential negative effects arising from the Plan on these wider issues, and see how alternative approaches can reduce any conflicts.

The draft AONB Management Plan has five strategic priorities:

- **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**
Conservation across the landscape; functioning ecosystems; social and economic adaptation
- **Helping people to connect with the AONB**
Awareness; enjoyment and wellbeing; community involvement

The full draft Management Plan and Sustainability Appraisal report are available at www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk. This brief non-technical summary outlines some of the principal issues and possible alternatives emerging from the Sustainability Appraisal.

The Appraisal process shows that the approaches of the Management Plan are generally strong for sustainability, and there are many more positive interactions between environmental, economic and social aspects than negative ones. The Plan provides an important means to navigate some of the key issues for the area.

EFFECTS ON OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES, AND ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- Current policies protecting the landscape prevent larger scale **wind energy development** which could be effective in lowering carbon emissions.
Allowing large scale wind energy development would reduce this conflict, but at the expense of the nationally protected landscape. The Management Plan is strong on alternative approaches to lowering carbon emissions, including concentrating wind energy development outside protected landscapes, vigorously pursuing energy conservation to reduce demand, encouraging renewable technologies which are more compatible (especially woodfuel), and optimising carbon storage in soils and trees.
- **Renewable energy** technology needs to be carefully applied to avoid damage to biodiversity, heritage, landscape and resources.
Good information and guidance will be key to achieving this.
- In the longer term, **climate change** will intensify conflicts between basic human needs (e.g. food, energy) and maintaining nature and landscape.
Demonstration is necessary to show that food and energy production is compatible in the area with maintaining landscape and nature.

EFFECTS ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES, AND ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- AONB designation does **prevent some forms of development**, potentially limiting economic progress. However the high quality of the AONB's **environment is also an economic asset** which can be sensitively used and may be damaged by inappropriate development.
Alternatives lie largely in the balance of how protective policies and decisions are. Optimising and publicising the positive economic effects of the environment will be very helpful in influencing attitudes.
- As a largely very rural area, **people are very dependent on transport by private car**. Policies aiming to limit the impact of transport and traffic on the area need to avoid negative social and economic consequences.
Influencing patterns of behaviour will be a long term process and will require significant investment and commitment to alternatives. There is evidence of the economic and social value of reducing transport, and the level of homeworking is high and increasing in the area.
- High standards of protection of the AONB may exacerbate problems of **affordability of housing**, especially by making the area more attractive to wealthier incomers.
The measures to reduce this conflict lie partly beyond the scope of the Management Plan, but suggest that more radical policies for funding affordable housing, such as those adopted by South Shropshire District Council, are justified. Affordable housing should be allowed in the AONB where other forms of development would not be, but high standards of design need to be maintained.
- The **higher standards, e.g. of design**, sought in the AONB may add to costs. An emphasis on quality in tourism provision risks excluding those on lower incomes.
This may be somewhat overcome by good guidance and early consideration. Some design aspects do not affect cost, and where higher costs are incurred there are likely to be some benefits to the local economy (e.g. through using local materials). Provision for low cost accommodation which meets good environmental standards e.g. campsites, hostels, should be supported.