

Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership response to Craven Arms Area Action Plan: Issues and Options

A. Response to specific questions.

Question 1: Do you think the spatial objectives are appropriate for the Craven Arms Area? Are they clear and well defined and relate well to the Community Strategy?

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership feels the objectives are appropriate for Craven Arms and particularly wishes to support objectives 8 and 11. These two objectives support and reinforce the purpose of designation of the Shropshire Hills AONB.

Question 2: Do you agree with the statement 'To enable Craven Arms to develop in a sustainable way as a growth centre for the District'

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership supports the principle of focussing growth on those areas of the District with existing facilities and services. This reduces both the need for development in other, more sensitive locations and the need to travel.

Question 3: Which option (high, medium or low growth) would you prefer the council to adopt?

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership supports option 2 (medium growth). This option reflects the current position of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (WMRSS). Option 1 (high growth) would involve the development of site 8 (to the east of Newton). This site is adjacent to the AONB boundary and any development is likely to have an adverse impact on the AONB. Option 3 (low growth) is not in line with the WMRSS and is thus not supported.

The Partnership recommends that the indirect effects of extra traffic generation on the Shropshire Hills AONB under all 3 options be considered carefully at the preferred options stage of this Plan. The tranquillity of the Shropshire Hills AONB is one of its special qualities. Increased traffic levels are likely to have an adverse effect on this.

Question 4: Which of the options (for; the conservation of important features; building design; increasing open space and creating wildlife habitats ;and increasing the amount of car parking in Craven Arms) would you prefer the council to adopt as policy?

4.1 Key Issue 'To conserve the important features which give Craven Arms and the surrounding area its identity and distinctiveness.' The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership suggests that option 2 '*Continue with the existing policies that conserve and protect the countryside by focusing most development in Craven Arms*' is amended to include a remit for the development of previously used land in other settlements.

We suggest also that this option be extended to specify that **all** development is well designed, respects local distinctiveness and is in keeping (in terms of scale, mass, size and the use of materials), with its local environment.

4.2 Key Issue 'To make sure buildings fit with their surroundings'. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership suggests that the options be amended, combined and extended. The policy might then read:

Ensure that all development respects and takes into account any town or village design statement or parish plan (where these exist) and any design guidance from the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership. All new development should be well designed, respect local distinctiveness, demonstrate a commitment to sustainability principles and be in keeping (in terms of scale, mass, size and the use of materials), with its local environment. Innovative approaches which adhere to all these principles will be welcomed.

4.3 Key Issue 'To increase and improve community open space (including churchyards) and create wildlife habitats.'

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is disappointed to see that although the key issue mentions wildlife habitats, the options presented focus on open space provision and make little reference to biodiversity. Where wildlife is mentioned, in option 1, it is presented very much in the terms of meeting the needs of the increased numbers of households, rather than conserving and enhancing wildlife species and habitats for their own sake, or as a valued contributor to quality of life.

We suggest that open space and wildlife habitats are two separate issues and should be treated as such in this Plan. Wildlife conservation and enhancement (or biodiversity) issues are a key component of sustainability. Where crossover exists, this should be acknowledged (open space can provide good wildlife habitats and areas of value for wildlife can offer valuable recreational and health opportunities) but each needs its own set of policies. In dealing with wildlife issues, we recommend that the approach of conserving, maintaining, enhancing and linking be taken and that this be widened to include the whole of the Plan area, not just Craven Arms.

We have no comments on the options for increasing car parking as there is unlikely to be any significant effect on the AONB.

Question 5: Which of the options (providing variably skilled and higher paid jobs and supporting farmer markets/local food) would you prefer the council to adopt as policy?

Key issues 'Providing jobs that suit a variety of skills and that are better paid' and 'To support farmer's markets and other food initiatives'. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership feels that parts of these sections could be combined or clarified as follows:

Option 1 is supported with the proviso that new development under aspect (D) is restricted to previously developed land within the other settlements in the Plan area. Aspect (A) of option 2 could then be combined with option 1, to ensure that new buildings are constructed with sustainability in mind.

We suggest that aspects (B) and (C) of option 2 are principles in their own right which should be combined to make a new Key Issue to replace '*To support farmer's markets and other food initiatives*'. It would thus read 'To support and develop the local environmental economy'. This could then form the headline for the next section and allow for the development of policies which;

- support and encourage farmer's markets
- support and facilitate on-site farm shops which sell produce both from that farm and other locally produced goods, not necessarily food.
- promote and support sustainable tourism based on the environmental assets of the area - particularly that which is farm based or utilises practices which in themselves conserve and enhance the landscape

- promote and support businesses based on environmental technologies – biomass and bio-fuel production and the renewable energy sector for example.

In option 3, the AONB Partnership supports aspect (B) – an extension to the allocated site.

We have no comments to make on option 4 as none of the alternatives are likely to have a significant effect on the AONB.

B. General comments

1. Keeping the Local Development Framework current

Section 1.1 (pages 4 and 5) describes the Local Development Framework. This section should reflect the current situation with other Development Plan Documents, in future versions of this Action Plan. For example, the Core Strategy Issues and Options document has already been consulted on and the SCI is at submission stage.

2. The Shropshire Hills AONB as a visitor attraction and access to the area.

Section 2.1.10 (page 10) states that '*The Shropshire Hills will have become major visitor attractions*'. We assume that this refers to the Shropshire Hills area, rather than the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is not able to support a vision statement that the Shropshire Hills will have become major visitor attractions. The AONB Management Plan and our recent position statement on sustainable tourism describe how tourism must be developed very sensitively in the Shropshire Hills to avoid damage to the special qualities of the AONB.

Section 2.1.11 states that '*At the same time, through careful management and partnership, in particular with the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty office and others, substantial improvements will have been achieved in **accessing** and conserving the special qualities of the SHAONB and the rest of the South Shropshire countryside.*' Whilst we welcome the opportunity of joint working, we feel that the emphasis of the last part of this sentence is wrong. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. Access to the area is important, but the overall remit must come first. We suggest that the latter part of this sentence be re-worded to:

.....substantial improvements will have been made in conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the Shropshire Hills AONB (see also point 4 below for terminology) and in promoting sustainable access to this area and the rest of the South Shropshire countryside.

3. Clarity of text when referring to spatial objectives

Section 2.2 (page 10) and section 3.0.3 (page 13) need to be clear about which documents they relate to in any future versions of this Plan. Reference is made to the Spatial Strategy for the LDF – should this be the spatial objectives of the Area Action Plan?

4. Terminology for the Shropshire Hills AONB

Reference is made to SHAONB throughout the Plan. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has an agreed position statement on the identity of the AONB. This states 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.

We ask therefore that the term Shropshire Hills AONB be used in most places in any future document, except for the following:

In paragraph 2.1.11 the phrase '*At the same time, through careful management and partnership, in particular with the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty Office*' should be amended to read Partnership. In paragraph 3.2.3 the second bullet point should be amended to read

- Support the aims and objectives of the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan (last two words added)

5. Clarity over the status of Shropshire Hills AONB

Paragraph 4.1.3 sets the context for Craven Arms. We recommend that the following text be inserted in future versions of this plan:

'Two thirds of South Shropshire lies within the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is a national designation aimed at conserving and enhancing the most valued landscapes in England and Wales'.

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