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LCA Study of Shropshire Hills AONB Boundary

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Quality Assurance – Approval Status

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Section 1 Introduction and Methodology

- 1.1 Waterman CPM (WCPM) has been instructed by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership to undertake an assessment of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) boundary. This assessment forms the first stage in the boundary review process which will comprise a number of exercises including local authority consultation, public consultation, the identification of a draft revised boundary and a final boundary designation.
- 1.2 The original Shropshire Hills AONB designation was made in 1959 and has not been reviewed since the original designation. In their Board paper AP04/25, Annex 2 the Countryside Agency (CA) identify the Shropshire Hills AONB as a landscape designation which has known pressures for boundary review. This paper prompted the AONB Partnership to undertake this review.
- 1.3 The purpose of this assessment is to identify broad areas of land around the existing AONB perimeter where it is considered that the boundary could be reviewed and amended. While the emphasis is generally on the identification of land for inclusion, it is of note that there may be instances where the landscape condition has deteriorated or there was inconsistency in the original boundary alignment, leading to recommendations for deletions.
- 1.4 This report aims to identify those areas around the perimeter of the AONB which could be subject to a boundary change on account of the following reasons:
 - Additional land outside the existing boundary is found to meet the natural beauty criterion and should be included;
 - The boundary has not been consistently aligned at the original 1959 designation and changes are required to ensure consistency of approach (note in some cases this could result in land being de-designated); and
 - The landscape has deteriorated in quality since 1959 and no longer meets the natural beauty criterion.

Legislation

- 1.5 The CA has a statutory obligation to designate land as AONB under legislation defined within the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 Part IV – Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty section 82:

- “Where it appears to the Countryside Agency (in this Part referred to as ‘the Agency’) that an area which is in England but not in a National Park is of such outstanding natural beauty that it is desirable that the provisions of this Part relating to areas designated under this section should apply to it, the Agency may, for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area, by order designate the area for the purposes of this Part as an area of outstanding natural beauty; and
- Where it appears to the Countryside Council for Wales (in this Part referred to as ‘the Council’) that an area which is in Wales but not in a National Park is of such outstanding natural beauty that it is desirable that the provisions of this Part relating to areas designated under this section should apply to it, the Council may, for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area, by order designate the area for the purposes of this Part as an area of outstanding natural beauty.”

1.6 The legislative provision to alter AONB boundaries once designated is available to the CA under section 83 (7) and to the Secretary of State under section 83 (8) of the CROW Act 2000:

- “(7) An order under section 82 may be revoked or varied by a subsequent order under that section; and
- (8) Without prejudice to the powers of the Agency or the Council to vary an order under section 82, the Secretary of State (as respects England) or the National Assembly for Wales (as respects Wales) may by order vary any order under that section made by the Agency or the Council; and subsection (1) applies to any order under section 82 made by the Secretary of State or the Assembly by virtue of this subsection with the substitution for references to the Agency of references to the Secretary of State and for the references to the Assembly.”

1.7 The purposes and objectives of AONBs are set out in the ‘National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949’ and can be summarised as follows:

- The primary purpose of AONB designation shall be the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty;
- Recreation will not be a factor for designation but AONB designation should be used to meet the demands of recreation as far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of forestry, agriculture and other users; and
- In pursuing the objectives of the designation, account should be taken of the need to safeguard agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and the economic and social needs of the local communities.

1.8 Of recent significance is the decision by the High Court to quash the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs decision to include estate managed land within the New Forest National Park. The judge concluded that both the planning Inquiry Inspector and the Landscape Assessor involved had used ‘watered down’ tests to justify the

designation of the land as part of the National Park. The judge commented that “**whilst cultural and historical factors...were relevant to understanding how a particular tract of countryside had evolved to its present state, they were not relevant when it came to deciding whether it possessed the necessary quantity of natural beauty so as to justify designation as a National Park**”. As the judge further commented it was not what factors should be taken into consideration to designate National Park but what factors may lawfully be taken into consideration.

- 1.9 There is no statutory definition of ‘natural beauty’. It is of note that nowhere in England can be classed as ‘natural’ and indeed, the international categorisation for protected landscapes classifies the National Parks of the UK as Category V, ‘cultural landscapes’. **“Since the concept of relative naturalness is by nature, a relative one there will be a spectrum with the ‘wildest’ areas at one extreme”**. This of course raises the issue of managed land, such as parkland, that clearly possesses visual attractiveness although has been worked by man to create an ‘ornate beauty’ rather than that of a natural one. The ambiguous nature of the statutory criterion and the failure of more recent statutory legislation to define the term leave its interpretation open debate.
- 1.10 This issue clearly has potential implications for the AONB boundary review process, where changes may be required to the principles of natural beauty assessment. However, it is considered that any change to the principles involved could be accommodated at a later stage after this initial review. For the purposes of this report, the principles contained within The CA’s Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Guidance for England and Scotland¹ is used as a basis on which to assess natural beauty.

Methodology

- 1.11 WCPM’s approach to the Shropshire Hills AONB boundary review process is based on the evaluation of landscapes for designation, derived directly from the Statutory Criteria for AONB’s as set out in The CROW Act 2000. This requires an assessment of natural beauty and consideration of whether it is desirable to designate according to the terms of the legislation.
- 1.12 WCPM used a methodology for the Shropshire Hills AONB boundary review process that was based on the methodology used for the recent South Downs National Park designation. The methodology follows four stages:
- Stage 1: Statutory criteria, Agency policy & application in the Shropshire Hills;
 - Stage 2: Deskwork and Technical Advice;
 - Stage 3: Fieldwork; and

¹ The Countryside Agency (2002) Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, University of Sheffield and Land Use Consultants

- Stage 4: Recommendations.

Stage 1: Statutory Criteria, Agency Policy & Application in the Shropshire Hills

- 1.13 The statutory criteria for AONB designation in the CRoW (2000) Act are the only valid criteria by which an AONB can be designated and must form the basis of any judgements that are made in relation to an extension to the existing AONB. This requires an assessment of natural beauty and consideration of whether it is desirable to designate according to the terms of the legislation. The desirability to designate was not assessed as part of this contract.
- 1.14 Arising from the need for a number of designation reviews, the CA developed criteria which are used to assess boundary review proposals. In May 2005, the CA agreed to be guided by four tests when considering proposals for boundary variations. The four tests are summarised below, as they relate to the Shropshire Hills AONB:
- a) **INTENT:** Are the reasons for the proposed modification consistent with the statutory purposes of AONB designation? (i.e. are any proposed changes consistent with the purpose 'to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills');
 - b) **EVIDENCE:** Does convincing and reliable evidence exist that all of the land proposed within an amended boundary to the Shropshire Hills AONB area meets the statutory criteria for AONB designation?
 - c) **BENEFITS:** Does the scale and range of public benefits that potentially could be realised by the proposed modification give particular weight to the need for designation? and
 - d) **PRIORITY:** Are there circumstances which require this case to be given a higher priority than others, when programming its execution?
- 1.15 Items a), c) and d) are not dealt with as part of this contract. Consultation and decisions on the merit and priority of a boundary change will be undertaken once the boundary review has been completed. It is therefore only b) that is relevant to this contract and the test that drives this commission.
- 1.16 WCPM's approach to the Shropshire Hills AONB boundary review is described below. It is based on the CA's approach to defining National Park boundaries, adopted in February 2000 but adapted to suit AONB's and more specifically the Shropshire Hills AONB.
- Areas of high landscape quality should be included within the area of land identified for designation (Note: Landscape quality includes visual and intangible features and values. It embraces natural beauty,

wildlife and cultural heritage. It is interpreted as the extent to which the landscape demonstrates the presence of key characteristics and the absence of atypical or incongruous ones, and by its state of repair and integrity. This is in line with the CA's approach to landscape assessment);

- Areas to be included may be of differing landscape character: quality will be the key determinant rather than uniformity (Note: A variety of landscape character is an important factor in the overall amenity of AONB. Usually however there will be some unifying factors, such as land use, ecosystems, historical or cultural links which bring differing character areas together to be included into an AONB);
- Boundaries should include land and settlements which contribute to the rural economy and community life within the AONB and to the AONB's special qualities and purposes. Such areas should however be excluded where activities there, in particular urban or industrial development, conflict with or outweigh the essential values of the AONB;
- Wherever possible, an easily distinguishable physical boundary should be chosen (Note: This is both for administrative reasons and for the convenience of the visiting public. Roads and railways frequently provide such a boundary);
- Where local Government boundaries follow suitable lines, it may be administratively convenient to adopt them. In the majority of cases, however, they will be unsuitable;
- Towns or villages should not normally be cut in two by an AONB boundary: inclusion or exclusion should normally depend on their contribution as a whole to the character and purposes of the AONB;
- Unsightly development on the edge of an AONB should generally be excluded, although the possibility of its modification or screening should not be overlooked where the immediately surrounding country claims inclusion;
- Land allocated in adopted development plans to be worked for the quarrying and mining of important deposits on the margins of an AONB, such as those at Wenlock Edge, should normally be excluded from the AONB unless the land will be restored to a land use and quality which contributes to AONB purposes. This approach will also apply to major industrial and commercial developments for which land is allocated in adopted development plans at the time of designation;
- Features of scientific, historic or architectural value (e.g. Nature Reserves, important archaeological sites and Ancient Monuments) which are situated on the margins of an AONB should be included where practicable; and
- The boundary should not be regarded as a sharp barrier between areas of differing quality. In most situations there will be a transition of landscape character and quality across a sweep of land: the

boundary chosen should be an easily identifiable feature within this transition. (Note: Where the landscape is undergoing transition, in terms of both its character and quality such that pockets of land which do not meet the statutory criterion become increasingly frequent, a judgment will be made in line with the approach to defining AONB boundaries identified above. Significantly, the boundary should be drawn within the transition, not outside or on the edge of it. Occasionally this may result in some small areas of high value landscape being excluded from the AONB. When pockets of lesser quality land undermine the value of the broad sweep of landscape under scrutiny, the landscape as a whole is considered to no longer meet the statutory criterion).

- 1.17 WCPM first determined in broad terms that an area of land meets the natural beauty criterion for designation.
- 1.18 The approach to assessing landscapes for natural beauty is set out in 'Landscape Character Assessment' Guidance for England and Scotland (2002), where two stages are identified, namely characterisation and evaluation.
- Characterisation involves identification and description of the broad landscape character areas (LCAs) and key characteristics. This stage was previously undertaken by Shropshire County Council as part of the Landscape Description Unit (LDU) process. The LDU's were used to inform the assessment process undertaken by WCPM; and
 - The evaluation stage forms the core of this review. Thirteen areas were identified for evaluation in relation to the Statutory Criterion for designation (Natural Beauty).
- 1.19 The CA's LCA Guidance for England and Scotland defines the principles, approach and assessment of natural beauty, which includes an assessment of the relative value of the landscape. The guidance identifies a range of criteria for assessing this value which are summarised below:
- Landscape Quality: the intact-ness of the landscape and the condition of features and elements within it;
 - Scenic Quality: the term that is used to describe landscapes which appeal primarily to visual senses;
 - Rarity: the presence of rare features and elements in the landscape, or the presence of a rare landscape character;
 - Representativeness: whether the landscape contains a particular character; and/or features and elements, which is felt by stakeholders to be worthy of representing;
 - Conservation Interests: the presence of features of particular wildlife, earth science or archaeological, historical and cultural interest can

add to the value of a landscape as well as having value in their own right;

- Wildness: the presence of wild (or relatively wild) character in the landscape which makes a particular contribution to sense of place;
- Associations: with particular people, artists, writers, or other media, or events in history; and
- Tranquillity: a composite feature related to the low levels of built development, traffic, noise and artificial lighting.

- 1.20 It is of note that some of these factors are of a qualitative nature and thus cannot be quantified. The assessment of landscape quality is therefore open to interpretation and subjectivity. Whilst the LCA guidance provides a framework for the assessment of natural beauty and WCPM's landscape professionals are trained to make judgements supported by clear evidence and reasoned argument, there will undoubtedly be some subjective judgment involved. WCPM have followed these guidelines, applying the criteria to the areas under consideration in order that a reasonable and robust justification of decisions taken can be made.
- 1.21 During the fieldwork stage of assessment, WCPM judged the areas identified for further review against the natural beauty factors outlined above. Whilst the area may not meet all of the above factors there should be a high level of concurrence if an area is regarded as being of 'outstanding' natural beauty and warrant inclusion within the AONB. Whilst differing character areas may be included within the designation, incongruous features within them should be limited if the area is to be regarded as outstanding.
- 1.22 It is clear from the variety of landscape types that are included within the current Shropshire Hills AONB that the overall character of the Shropshire Hills is more than just the hills themselves, although the hills are generally considered to be the dominating presence within the area. A number of landscape character areas included in the existing AONB have unifying factors to the "core" area of the hills, which include geological, historical, land-use, cultural and visual links. The inclusion of other landscape character areas such as Clun Forest and The Severn Valley is dependent on not only the statutory criterion, but also that these areas have demonstrable unifying links with the Shropshire Hills. For example where there are visual links to the hills, an area may 'borrow character' from the hills.
- 1.23 The extent to which 'borrowed character' is influential in decision making can be dependant on proximity of the area to the hills. If a landscape character area has weak unifying links with the Cleve Hills, Long Mynd, Stiperstones Ridge or Wenlock Edge for example then it has by definition weak associations with the Shropshire Hills. Such an area may have attractive, or even outstanding, natural beauty but it would not merit inclusion within this specific AONB because it is not unified with the core 'essence' of the Shropshire Hills landscape type. However, this land may merit designation as a separate AONB in its own right. Upper Corve Dale is

an example within the existing AONB of how an area can merit inclusion within the AONB on account of its natural beauty and 'unifying links'.

- 1.24 A number of market towns and villages around the existing AONB boundary were assessed to establish whether they merit inclusion.
- 1.25 Villages were assessed in terms of:
 - Their distinctive and/or historic character; and
 - Their integration with the surrounding landscape.
- 1.26 Towns on the edge of the boundary were individually assessed according to:
 - Integrity of the historic core which contributes to the Shropshire Hills identity;
 - Scale, visual impact, location and type of adverse or intrusive development;
 - Whether the landscape surrounding the settlement meets the statutory criterion; and
 - The relationship (visual, historical, socio-economic) of the town to the surrounding landscape.
- 1.27 Where a settlement does not merit inclusion within the AONB, the CA's approach to the identification of a boundary in the urban fringe area was used. In these areas, the following aspects were considered:
 - Does the landscape meet the statutory criterion for designation? if so
 - Does the landscape read as part of the wider Shropshire Hills landscape?
 - To what extent does the urban edge impact on the surrounding landscape?
 - Are there opportunities to mitigate adverse or intrusive built-up areas where the landscape itself merits inclusion? and
 - Is the land associated with uses which are more urban than rural in character?
- 1.28 Where scientific, historic or architectural designations occurred in areas where the boundary was under review, they were given consideration. Local designations were also given consideration on the basis that they can often be an indicator of an extensive tract of good landscape quality.

Stage 2: Deskwork

- 1.29 A series of desk-work exercises were undertaken including:
- A review of the designation history of the AONB to identify all areas originally proposed for inclusion and to review decisions made in relation to the inclusion or exclusion of these areas in 1959;
 - A review and analysis of the landscape character assessment information, desk based and field data collated as part of the Shropshire LCA LDU's;
 - The identification of all relevant designations in the areas under review;
 - The study and analysis of tranquillity maps;
 - The study of OS 1:50,000 and 1:25,000 maps to explore initial potential boundary review options and their implications; and
 - The study of aerial photography to provide further information following field assessment.
- 1.30 WCPM's analysis of the findings of the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) based project "The Living Landscapes Project"² commissioned by Shropshire County Council identified the Land Description Units (LDUs) present within the Shropshire Hills AONB and adjacent areas. A scale of 1:50 000, the equivalent of Level 2 in the "Living Landscapes Project", was identified as providing a suitable level of detail for the purposes of this assessment. This analysis enabled WCPM to identify the LDUs present within the AONB boundary and compare and contrast them to those of adjacent areas with potential for inclusion.
- 1.31 To assist with the targeting of the field review, consultation with the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Shropshire County Council and the Countryside Agency was undertaken on January 5th 2006.
- 1.32 The data collected and analysed during the desk study stage was used to define thirteen broad areas for boundary review at the field stage.

Stage 3: Fieldwork

- 1.33 WCPM undertook a number of site visits to assess the landscape within each of the thirteen areas identified for particular scrutiny (see **Plan 2768/17** – Boundary Review Sections). These visits were undertaken in January and February 2006 and included general observations of the core of the AONB to gain a clearer understanding of the character and quality of the AONB as a whole.

² University of Reading (2002) The Living Landscapes Project: Land Characterisation.

- 1.34 In the field the landscape within each of the thirteen areas identified for review, was tested against the statutory criterion. The criterion was assessed across broad sweeps of land in order to take into account the scale at which the landscape is perceived and used. Occasionally this included individual fields or parcels of land along the boundary where issues were localised. Judgments were made within the context of the wider landscape setting, and never in isolation.
- 1.35 The field evaluation was recorded on field survey sheets and a photographic record was obtained where appropriate.
- 1.36 Where access allowed, the alignment of the existing boundary was assessed in terms of its definition on the ground. Given the broad nature of the assessment, this exercise was not undertaken along the whole boundary. However, sufficient observations were made to identify inconsistencies in approach. This will be subject to more detailed scrutiny at the boundary definition stage.
- 1.37 The field assessment was undertaken by car and on foot, access being via road and public rights of way. This was sufficient to assess the land at this stage in the process. It is noted that aerial photography was not used to provide further information on inaccessible areas at this stage. However, at the more detailed boundary definition stage, aerial photography is recommended to identify suitable boundaries where access is not possible.

Stage 4: Recommendations

- 1.38 WCPM's recommendations for boundary review are contained within this report. These recommendations comprise the findings of the initial review which forms the first stage in the whole boundary review process. This report identifies those areas around the perimeter of the AONB which could be subject to a boundary change on account of the following reasons:
- Additional land outside the existing boundary is found to meet the natural beauty criterion and should be included;
 - The boundary has not been consistently aligned at the original 1959 designation and changes are required to ensure consistency of approach (note in some cases this could result in land being de-designated); and
 - The landscape has deteriorated in quality since 1959 and no longer meets the natural beauty criterion.

Section 2 Designation History

- 2.1 The concept of protecting England and Wales's finest landscapes was first considered in 1929 with the establishment of the National Park Committee chaired by the Rt. Hon Christopher Addison. The 'Addison' Committee, as it became known, reported to the Government in 1931 suggesting areas that could tentatively be given statutory protection due their inherent landscape quality³. The Report showed that no consideration was given to the Shropshire Hills from either witnesses to the committee or by local authorities whose area the hills fell within.
- 2.2 'National Parks in England and Wales' by John Dower in 1945, commonly known as 'The Dower Report',⁴ sought to build on the Addison Report and define areas within England and Wales of high landscape quality worthy of statutory protection. Dower placed the core of the Shropshire Hills in his Division C list 'Other Amenity Areas NOT Suggested as National Parks'. Although Dower deemed the Shropshire Hills unworthy of National Park status he did recognise them to be of significant landscape value, suggesting that they be designated as 'Other Amenity Areas' in order to safeguard their landscape beauty. The area identified by Dower in his report stretched from the Welsh border in the south west across Shropshire to include the Stiperstones, the Long Mynd, Caer Caradoc, Wenlock Edge, the Clee Hills and the intervening dales. To the north the Wrekin was excluded as were the Clun Forest Hills to the south west.
- 2.3 The 'Report of the National Parks Committee'⁵ or the 'Hobhouse Report' (after Sir Arthur Hobhouse, chairman of the National Park Committee) published in July 1947 listed 52 conservation areas, largely based on those 'Other Amenity Areas...' identified by Dower, as possible areas for statutory protection. The Hobhouse Report had recommended that areas should be judged upon their landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational qualities.
- 2.4 The Shropshire Hills were included within this list of conservation areas covering a similar area to that outlined by Dower with two principal differences:
- The Hobhouse Conservation Area included a small area of the Corndon Hill, an outlier of the Stiperstones group of hills upon the border of England and Wales; and
 - The Clun Forest Hills were omitted and grouped with the Radnor Forest Hills in a cross border conservation area 'The Clun and Radnor

³ The National Park Committee (1931) Report of the National Park Committee, The Treasury, Cmd 3851, HMSO.

⁴ Dower, J. (1945) National Parks in England and Wales, Cmd 6628, HMSO.

⁵ The National Parks Committee (1947) Report of National Parks in England and Wales, Cmd 7121, HMSO.

Forests'. By combining these two areas under one conservation area Hobhouse regarded the Clun Forest uplands as being of similar landscape character to the rolling, and partly wooded plains of Radnor Forest across the Welsh border.

- 2.5 The first reference to the designation of both the Shropshire Hills and the Clun and Radnor Forests as AONBs came in a paper⁶ written by Sir Patrick Duff in 1953. The 'National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949'⁷, gave the legislative power to designate AONBs, and created a need to prepare a list of possible AONB candidates for future consideration. Both areas were excluded from Duff's first list but were within his second list of twelve, 'chosen for their beauty'. However the areas within Shropshire identified by Duff were considerably smaller in extent than those proposed by Dower and Hobhouse; including 'Stretton and Wenlock only' and 'limited' areas of the Clun and Radnor Forests on the English/Welsh border.
- 2.6 A further paper⁸ in March 1954 following increased awareness of the need for AONBs suggested twelve possible 'first choices' for AONB designation and included the Shropshire Hills (Stretton and Wenlock) but not the Clun and Radnor Forests. However, the NPC decided after consideration to designate The Gower, the Surrey Hills and the Lleyn Peninsular (with a later addition of the Quantocks) as the preliminary AONBs in England and Wales.
- 2.7 It was not until 1956 that the NPC announced its intentions to specifically designate the Shropshire Hills as an AONB. Significantly, no reference was made to the Shropshire section of the Clun and Radnor Forest area which as a Hobhouse conservation area had been identified as a future potential AONB in previous papers.
- 2.8 Following their decision to pursue designation of the Shropshire Hills as an AONB the NPC sought consultation with the Shropshire County Planning Officer, Mr Bennet, seeking his informal views on the subject of the extent of the anticipated AONB. Mr Bennet proposed two alternatives:
 - The inclusion of the 'Shropshire Hills proper; and
 - Including both the Shropshire Hills and the Clun and Radnor Forest area.
- 2.9 Mr Brunsdon Yapp, commissioner to the NPC, favoured the option of joining the two areas based on Hobhouse's Conservation Area plus the inclusion of the town of Ludlow and the prominent hill of the Wrekin to the north.

⁶ Duff, P. (1953) Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Note by Chairman, NPC/G/118.

⁷ Department of the Environment(1949) National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, HMSO.

⁸ National Parks Commission (1954) Paper NPC/G/178 "Note on AONBs" HMA/LJW/TGM/5.4.54

- 2.10 Following a surveying party of three NPC commissioners and one field advisor in May 1957 the boundary was agreed and formal consultation with local authorities was authorised.
- 2.11 The boundary proposed by the NPC differed from that of the Hobhouse Shropshire Conservation Area in two respects:
- By including parts of the Onny and Kemp valleys and the shapely hills in the Hopesay area to link the Shropshire Hills and Clun Forest Hills; and
 - By including the isolated whaleback hill of the Wrekin and a short section of the Severn Valley by means of a narrow isthmus of land extending north east along the Wenlock Edge escarpment and the Dale below.
- 2.12 Copies of the proposed boundary and accompanying formal NPC consultation letter were sent to the ten local authorities affected by the proposed AONB designation.
- 2.13 Only one comment was received from the local authorities. Wenlock MBC suggested the boundary should be extended (between Buildwas and Iron Bridge in the Severn Valley) to include Benthall Edge, Tick Wood and Wyke. After deliberation by NPC this area was found to be 'not up to the required standard'⁹ and the NPC proceeded to designation.
- 2.14 The only other comments of interest were by CPRE calling for:
- The inclusion of the lower Corve Dale linking Wenlock Edge with Brown Clee;
 - The addition of the lower valleys of the West and East Onny in keeping with the inclusion of their upper reaches; and
 - The boundary to be drawn on the Welsh border 'for the sake of tidiness as well as to link up the hills to the north and south'¹⁰.
- 2.15 These late comments were not considered by the NPC and were not repeated at the public advertisement stage.
- 2.16 The order was signed and the seal affixed on 29th July 1958. and the Shropshire Hills Designation Order was later confirmed without modification on 11th March 1959.
- 2.17 It was noted by the Minister of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) that land to the south of the Shrewsbury – Worcester railway line had a measure of natural beauty but that it was not of higher quality than that of

⁹ National Parks Committee (1958) Minutes of 89th Meeting of NPC (1298) held on 26 March 1958.

¹⁰ Letter from Herbert Griffin, CPRE General Secretary to NPC giving the views of Mr JH Hunt of the Cyclists' Touring Club, an organisation linked to CPRE. (Folio 81 NPC file AB/33A – TNA file COU/1/344.

the lower Corve Dale which the NPC had omitted from the proposed AONB. It was also noted that the area around Tick Wood may be included but in view of the lengthy and complex consultation process involved in making modifications it was deemed unnecessary to pursue its inclusion.

2.18 In all, the designation of the Shropshire Hills AONB, the eighth AONB to be confirmed in England and Wales, had taken 32 months with a relatively straight forward consultation process due to the early close working with Shropshire County Planning Officer, the ability of MHLG to rely on the judgements made by the NCP and perhaps the fact that no one had raised the issue of a cross border AONB extending into Wales to link either the Radnor Forest or Corndon Hill to the AONB.

2.19 There has been no review of the Shropshire Hills AONB boundary since its original designation in 1959. Unfortunately the then Countryside Commission's review of AONB boundaries in the 1980s was cancelled prematurely due to the costs involved. Thus the boundaries of the Shropshire Hills AONB have remained unchanged since its initial designation although more accurate mapping techniques has 'increased' the size of the AONB from 777 square kilometres to 804 square kilometres.

Section 3 General Overview of the Shropshire Hills AONB

- 3.1 The Shropshire Hills AONB designation encompasses two of the character areas identified by the Countryside Agency in 'The Character of England Map' namely the 'Shropshire Hills' and the 'Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills'. These character areas are described below.

Shropshire Hills Character Area (Area 65)

- 3.2 The Shropshire Hills character area covers the eastern section of the AONB from Clee Hill in the south to the Wrekin in the north, the Stiperstones in the west and to Craven Arms in the south west.
- 3.3 The character of the area can be summarised by the dominant pattern of south west to north east ridges, scarps and intervening valleys. The main ridges include Wenlock Edge, The Long Mynd and the Stiperstones range which run for many miles and dominate the surrounding landscape. These hills, with the exception of Wenlock Edge, are characterised by their steep sides and rounded 'whaleback' appearance; the isolated hill of the Wrekin being a classic example. The summits of the higher hills are often crowned with moorland whilst the lower slopes give rise to dense woodland and networks of small rough pastoral fields.
- 3.4 The intervening dales are low lying and often undulating. They support pastoral grazing and larger arable fields in the wider valleys. The dales are often sandwiched between the intervening ridges that dominate the lowland landscape.
- 3.5 Settlement is often concentrated along the streamline of the escarpment or nestled within folds of the hills and ridges. Much of the larger settlement sits upon the flat plains at the foot of the dales where the land opens out.

Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills (Area 98)

- 3.6 The Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills character area encompasses the western extremity of the Shropshire Hills AONB from Craven Arms in the south east, to Bishop's Castle in the north east, to the Welsh border in the west.
- 3.7 The area is typified by the rolling, rounded upland hills divided by narrow incised valleys widening to the east. Hedges reach up to enclose most hill tops although patches of heathland and unenclosed upland grassland remain. The unimproved pasture is sometimes in a patchwork with the smooth greens of improved grassland and occasional arable land.

- 3.8 The heads of the valleys are narrow and deeply incised with woodland on the steepest slopes. Whilst further downstream beyond the AONB boundary they widen to significant floodplains. On the lower slopes there is a generally regular pattern of large fields cut through by small streams, often with drifts of streamside woodland.
- 3.9 What little settlement exists is concentrated within river valleys in the form of small towns and villages between the rolling upland hills. These are often planned medieval settlements where the original single street plan dominates, such as Bishop's Castle and Clun. Stone castles are prominent landmarks and the conical mounds of mottes are conspicuous on the lower edges of the river valleys. Settlement is also sporadically scattered in isolated dwellings around the sheltered upper valleys.
- 3.10 A more detailed landscape assessment at the County or Local level has not yet been completed and thus WCPM subdivided these broader landscape character areas into more detailed areas as follows:

Shropshire Hills

- 3.11 The Shropshire Hills and Valleys dominate the landscape character of the AONB. Here a complex series of hills, ridges and valleys are predominant within the landscape, mirroring the north east south west orientation of Wenlock Edge. The Stretton Hills, the Long Mynd and Stiperstones, with their hummocky foothills and open windswept summits, are dominant features within the landscape and provide another mark of the transition between lowland Midland plain to the uplands of Wales. This is a high quality landscape of ridges and dales serving to complement each other in the overall landscape context. The moorland summits are a rare landscape environment and often are protected under statutory designations whilst the lowland dales often contain tranquil river valleys and irregular pastoral fields of high scenic quality.

The Wrekin

- 3.12 The AONB is dominated at its northern tip by the isolated whaleback hill of the Wrekin. This single impressive isolated hill with distinct ridge-like profile and densely wooded slopes dominates the surrounding landscape and is instantly recognisable from many miles away. The Wrekin itself rises from the small scale neighbouring landscape of streamside copses and arable fields of the Severn Floodplain to an imposing feature with a summit of barren rocky outcrops and coniferous plantation. The Wrekin is an iconic feature within the landscape and provides exhilarating panoramic views over the surrounding low lying landscape and back to the core of the Shropshire Hills. The windswept summit and rocky outcrops add to the untamed nature of the Wrekin whilst also providing an escape and detachment from the surrounding urban areas to the north.

The Severn Valley

- 3.13 The Severn Valley Character Region, between the Wrekin and Wenlock Edge, is an intimate landscape comprising of the meandering River Severn through undulating topography. The river flows through a broad, flat bottomed valley which rises gently to the north to form an apron to the Wrekin. The floodplain itself is marked by alders and gappy hedgerows and individual trees are present amongst arable and pastoral fields. This lush lowland landscape is one of subtly changing colours and has an abundance of parkland situated on the higher slopes. The small irregular pastoral fields with well developed hedgerows form a high quality cohesive landscape in a scenic riverside setting. The overall ambience is one of intimacy and tranquillity.

Wenlock Edge

- 3.14 Wenlock Edge runs south west from the Wrekin linking it to the core of the AONB. This area's character comprises the Wenlock Edge escarpment with its prominent wooded scarp slope and the sharply contrasting arable and pastoral dales. To the west the flat valley bottoms of the broad dales stretch in a pattern of regular arable fields to the Stretton Hills. To the east the Hope Dale and Valleys landscape type and Dip Slope landscape type produce a backdrop of narrow valleys with a distinct band of dark woods in the Hope Dale and open agricultural land on the dip slope. Wenlock Edge is a dominant landscape feature across Shropshire, its wooded scarp slope forming a belt of mature woodland extending from the core of the AONB. The mature mixed woodland is of high scenic quality whilst the limestone geology of the ridge provides an abundance of fossilised specimens.

Clee Hills

- 3.15 To the south east of Wenlock Edge the upland character of the Clee Hills is prominent. Marking the beginning of the transition to Welsh Uplands, the Clee Hill region contains some of the highest hills in the county and contrast to most other hills within the AONB in that they take the form of ridges and plateaux. The transition of the open hill summits to that of the small pastures and scattered settlements on the slopes below reflects the mining and quarrying opportunities which drew 'pioneers' to the area. The windswept moorland of the Clee Hills is a rare and wild landscape. This treeless landscape provides an excellent example of an extensive upland heathland with many cultural links to Shropshire's mining heritage.

Clun Hills

- 3.16 The south western extremity of the AONB is dominated by the Clun Forest character area. This comprises of rolling uplands and the deeply incised River Clun that cuts through them. Although labelled the 'Clun Forest' the word forest refers to the area's status as a Royal Hunting Forest during the medieval period. Today much of the Clun Forest is a farmed landscape with moorland and scrub and few woodland areas. The shallow, domed hills of the Clun rolling uplands are relatively regular in height and of similar character to those of the Welsh Hills of Powys further west rather than those of the core of the AONB. Rough pasture with patches of heath

signifies the completion of transition from lowland arable and pasture to windswept hilltops and is in complete contrast to the intimate, wooded, narrow river valleys that cut through the rolling uplands.

Section 4 Review of Boundary Sections

- 4.1 Following desktop analysis, thirteen areas (see **Plan 2768/17** Boundary Review Sections) around the boundary were identified for further scrutiny. This section provides a review of each of these areas, drawing on the findings of the desktop assessment and WCPM's field observations. The description of each section takes place in two parts.
- 4.2 The first describes the Landscape Description Unit (LDU) within the area as identified by the GIS based 'The Living Landscapes Project'. A general description of the LDU(s) is given, taken from the 'Natural, Physical, Ecological, Cultural, Settlement and Land' attributes contained within the GIS database – the equivalent to a level 2 or 1:50000 scale.
- 4.3 The second part describes the area in question from actual field observation, including notes on its own inherent characteristics as well as the wider landscape context. Any significant settlement contained within the area is described in a separate section at the end of the field observations.
- 4.4 In addition, this section should be read in conjunction with **Appendices 1, 2 and 3**, where each boundary section is reviewed against the natural beauty criteria (**Appendix 1**), statutory designations are identified (**Appendix 2**) and tranquillity mapping is illustrated (**Appendix 3**).

1. The Wrekin

LDU Description

- 4.5 The LDU of the Wrekin describes this landscape as a high hill (over 300m) with impoverished soils supporting dry heath and moor at the summit. There is sparse settlement within the area, being classed as unsettled (wildland). Ancient woodland occupies the slopes of the hill whilst areas of secondary and recent woodland at the summit are present. Only the Wrekin itself is contained within the boundary.
- 4.6 To the west the land is described as rolling lowland of other till/plateau till with gleyed soils. Settlement is moderately dispersed within small villages. Large farm estates on neutral damp pasture are present with coverts and tree groups.
- 4.7 To the north the urban core of Telford is dominant. The land is rolling and undulating with gleyed soils upon clay and chalky till.

- 4.8 To east the land is upstanding/undulating with other hard rocks and gleyed soils. There is moderate dispersal of settlement within small villages, small farms and trees and woodland are also present.
- 4.9 South of the Wrekin the LDU is of rolling lowland with other hard rocks and gleyed soils. There is humic (peaty) drift with neutral (damp) pasture. Settlement is moderately dispersed with large farm estates and ancient woodland.

Field Observations

- 4.10 The Wrekin is an isolated outcrop of volcanic rocks at the northern tip of the Shropshire Hills AONB. At approximately 400 metres above sea level the Wrekin dominates the landscape and affords spectacular panoramic views over the surrounding countryside. The steep slopes of the Wrekin are covered in dense birch and oak woodland whilst the summit areas are open and windswept with bracken and heather clinging to the thin soils. A pine plantation occupies a small area on the western flank partially screening a communications antenna. The boundary currently includes the whole of the Wrekin, being drawn very tight around the hill itself and including a small section of the River Severn floodplain to the south linking the hill to Wenlock Edge and the core of the AONB further south.
- 4.11 Historically the Wrekin was an important hill fort, the remnants of which can still be identified, although today a residential property that appears to have acted as café in the past is the only permanent settlement that exists upon the site.
- 4.12 The path from the road to the summit remains popular with walkers. It is of note, however, that the popularity of the area has led to increased pressure on the footpath network with signs of erosion. A golf course is present on the northern tip of the Wrekin, separated from the main body by a minor road within a deep cutting. This area also bears the scars from old quarrying.
- 4.13 The Wrekin allows spectacular panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. To the south east the wooded ridge of Wenlock Edge can be traced back to the hills at the core of the AONB. To the west a vast plain of arable fields extends to the horizon with some evidence of industrial activity in the form of quarrying and adjacent processing plant. The urban core of Telford and its associated development and transport networks dominate the landscape to the north of the Wrekin. These are urban features that do not possess 'natural' qualities and therefore cannot meet the natural beauty criterion for AONB designation. Due to the flat topography of the urban area to the north of the Wrekin it also lacks visual associations to the core of the AONB. The significant contrast between the urban landscape to the north and the natural landscape to the south is apparent along the line of the M54.
- 4.14 Little Wenlock to the east of the Wrekin is surrounded by large arable fields and contains a number of modern houses. There are also a number of industrial units approaching the village from Telford as the urban fringe encroaches westward. The boundary currently excludes the village.

2. Severn Valley

LDU Description

- 4.15 Three Landscape Description Units cover the Severn Floodplain area. Two of these are described as vales and valley bottoms of glacial drift whilst the other is rolling lowland of fluvial drift. These conditions form humic (peaty) drift supporting wet (neutral) pasture. Settlement is moderately dispersed within small villages. Farm estates are generally large although they are smaller within the rolling lowland LDU. Some continuous ancient woodland exists as well as individual pockets of coverts and tree groups.

Field Observations

- 4.16 To the east lies the undulating topography of the narrow floodplain of the River Severn. Here, moderately sized fields are bounded by wooded hedgerows and abundant areas of mature woodland creating a tranquil and high quality landscape. The area contains attractive properties such as the appealing settlement of Leighton with its traditional buildings and pleasant riverside setting. However the dominance of the Ironbridge Power Station is a significant detractor within the landscape. The four cooling towers and tall stack of the coal fired plant dominate the landscape due to their physical height. The boundary at present excludes the power station, which opened in 1932, skirting east of the complex to include the Severn floodplain and the numerous coppices contained within it.

3. Wenlock Edge

LDU Description

- 4.17 Wenlock Edge LDU is described as sloping with shallow rocky soils with a covering of ancient woodland. Settlement is planned and contains large farm estates. This sloping landscape leads to one of rolling lowland of beyond the AONB boundary.
- 4.18 To the west of Wenlock Edge outside the boundary the LDU is again one of rolling lowland with other tills and gleyed soils. Settlement is also dispersed with small farms and trees and woodlands present.
- 4.19 To the east the topography outside of the boundary is upstanding/undulating turning to rolling lowland with deep sand/loamy soils. These provide good arable land with some rough pasture. Settlement is moderately dispersed with small villages, large farm estates and the presence of ancient woodland.

Field Observations

- 4.20 Wenlock Edge is a ridge stretching approximately 20 miles across Shropshire from The Wrekin in the north to Craven Arms in the south. The

ridge itself is an important geological site with an abundance of fossils located within the limestone strata. The steep gradients of the scarp slope on the western side of Wenlock Edge are densely covered with mature trees, many of which are under National Trust management. This is a dramatic feature within the landscape and forms a continuous band of raised woodland that stretches from the north of the AONB to its core in the south. The wooded belt of the scarp slope is in contrast to that of the dip slope to the east which comprises of a complex topography of hills and valleys with relatively little woodland in comparison. Further west from the scarp slope the land flattens out into a relatively flat wide valley containing the Harley Brook before rising in a ridge again at Kenley. Here the boundary follows the Harley Brook south west from the Severn floodplain to include the steep wooded band of Wenlock Edge and the fields to the west that slope gently to Harley Brook within the valley floor.

- 4.21 The Harley Brook valley contains a series of medium sized fields and several woodland blocks, generally following tributaries that flow into the Brook at the valley's lowest point. The valley possesses a different character to that of Wenlock Edge and demonstrates visual links to the prominent ridge line. The abundance of individual trees and well developed hedgerows within the valley borrows character from that of the dense woodland of Wenlock Edge and serves to define the ridge within the wider landscape context. The two landforms serve to complement each other demonstrating the combination of ridge and dale that is a characteristic of the Shropshire landscape.
- 4.22 The valley rises again at Kenley to face Wenlock Edge. Here the character of the land mirrors that of the opposite AONB with an abundance of woodland and small well defined fields with woody hedgerows. There are isolated dwellings within the valley; the main settlements being the small linear hamlet of Kenley on the ridge and Hughley, contained within the AONB, at Kenley Common. All of the area to the west of the Harley Brook is currently outside the AONB boundary.
- 4.23 To the East of Wenlock Edge the topography forms a complex series of low lying hills and undulations before giving way to gently sloping arable farmland. The boundary is drawn tightly to the eastern edge of Wenlock Edge generally following the tree line in a south westerly direction and excluding the land to the east.
- 4.24 Whilst the woodland of Wenlock Edge remains intact many of the trees further east have been removed to increase arable crop production although the hedgerows that remain are quite substantial. There is little settlement within the area, the main evidence of human influence being the large scars left by quarrying activities on the eastern flank of Wenlock Edge.
- 4.25 Much Wenlock is a relatively large settlement to the east of Wenlock edge, outside the AONB boundary. Despite an attractive historic core with vernacular buildings the town has experienced modern development at its fringes and the surrounding landscape has been subject to significant intrusion from the A458 and urban fringe activities.

4. Church Preen and Surrounds

LDU Description

- 4.26 The AONB boundary at Church Preen and its surroundings splits 2 LDUs, parts of which are included within the AONB. These are described as sloping low hills and rolling lowlands respectively. Humic (peaty) drift results in rough pasture in one and neutral (damp) pasture in the other. Settlement is dispersed and planned in each and both have small farm estates with thinly scattered ancient woodland.

Field Observations

- 4.27 The settlement of Church Preen lies to the west of Wenlock Edge and is split by the current AONB boundary. The surrounding area has slightly undulating topography and contains mixed farmland, divided by hedgerows and trees and several small woodland coppices. There are views to the wooded scarp of Wenlock Edge to the south east and Nethewood Copse to the north west. The tree lined Hughley Brook lies to the south of the village near Easthopewood. The village of Church Preen itself is an attractive village with a strong sense of enclosure created by the woodland and trees associated with Preen Manor. There are areas of unmanaged land at the Falls Farm and Kenley Common that detract from the overall landscape quality.

5. North of All Stretton

LDU Description

- 4.28 The AONB boundary splits the LDU that stretches from Church Stretton northward along the A49. The landscape within the LDU is described as vales and valley bottoms whilst its form is of undulating lowlands. The cultural characteristics of the LDU are predominantly urban although there are areas of good arable land.

Field Observation

- 4.29 The area north of Church Stretton comprises large, flat arable fields. There are few trees and much of the hedgerow network has been removed to increase agricultural production. Settlement is concentrated along the features of the A49 and the railway line within the valley. As a consequence development is linear in nature with warehousing and gardening outlets following the line of the road. There are a number of run-down and derelict units and roadside refuse is widespread. Visual links are maintained to the Lawley within the AONB to the east. Closer to the AONB at All Stretton the land begins to undulate and borrow character from the surrounding countryside to the east.

6. South and East of Clee Hill

LDU Description

- 4.30 Clee Hill is described as an area of sloping hills, hard (Caledonian) rocks and impoverished soils. This supports neutral (damp) pasture with secondary/recent woodland and some planned wayside settlement.
- 4.31 The land to the south of Clee Hill, outside the boundary, is a sloping one of humic (peaty) drift and rough (dry) pasture. The soils are shallow and rocky with dispersed settlement and thinly scattered trees.
- 4.32 To the east of Clee Hill, also outside the boundary, the land consists of other hard rocks creating upstanding/undulating topography with deep sand/loamy soils. The humic (peaty) drift creates good arable land. Settlement is dispersed with small farm estates and some areas of trees and woods.

Field Observations

- 4.33 The low plateau moorland of Clee Hill occupies the south eastern most extremity of the Shropshire Hills AONB. At approximately 533m at its summit, Clee Hill is a treeless landscape of windswept heather and bracken that provides panoramic views of the surrounding countryside on a clear day. Clee Hill has significant historic value in the mining history of Shropshire being an important site of dolerite extraction for road aggregate. All the quarries within Clee Hill are of significant size although they are relatively unobtrusive and are designated Special Sites of Scientific Interest due to their geological value. The AONB boundary includes the whole of Clee Hill and encompasses in part some of the undulating ridges that extend from it, although the boundary does not stretch to the flatter land beyond these undulations.
- 4.34 The land to the south of Clee Hill is an intricate arrangement of steep ridges and valleys radiating south. The area has a network of small field patterns with well developed hedgerows although there are some larger arable fields south of Knowle. Woodland is present within the steep valleys, usually following the course of streams draining from Clee Hill. The complex nature of the topography results in limited views back to the moorland of Clee Hill. The few settlements that do exist are small hamlets such as Whitton and Nash. The mature trees and kept grasslands of Whitton Park estate, included within the AONB, and at Court of Hill, outside of the AONB, have a managed parkland appearance although some patches of scrubland exist at Whitton Chase further south of the boundary.
- 4.35 To the east of Clee Hill the land slopes steeply away from the AONB boundary to Hopton Wafers and the Mill Brook. The undulating topography and sunken lanes with dense hedgerows create an intimate landscape. Visual links to Clee Hill are again limited in places due to the topography. Here the boundary follows the ridge line of the upper slopes of Mill Brook including the lower slopes of Clee Hill but not the steep valley of the brook.

7. North of Ludlow

LDU Description

- 4.36 The AONB boundary splits the LDU north of Ludlow following the ridge line of the escarpment. Here the land is described as vales and valley bottoms, with other hard (Palaeozoic) rock and deep sand/loamy soils. Humic (peaty) drift creates good arable land with large farm estates and moderate dispersal of settlement within small villages.

Field Observations

- 4.37 The land north of Ludlow contains the wide, low lying flood plain of the Corve Valley and the associated steep escarpment ridge that runs south east to the north of Ludlow. Land within the floodplain is relatively flat with a regular pattern of large arable fields within the valley floor, whilst dense woodland covers the steeper escarpment slopes. There remains a network of wooded hedgerows and individual trees within the floodplain. The ridgeline within the boundary of the AONB, is visible from within the valley although the western ridge becomes increasingly detached from the floodplain as you head south.
- 4.38 Scattered hamlets exist upon the ridge within the AONB and the ancient village of Stanton Lacy with its C11th church and historic architecture sits amongst large arable fields within the floodplain east outside of the AONB. The urban area of Ludlow has significant impact upon the surrounding landscape at the lower reaches of the Corve Valley. Whilst Ludlow retains its historical core with many buildings of merit the town has experienced considerable expansion on its fringes. Modern residential development and industrial units have spread from the core eastwards to abut the A49 and there has been an extension of urban fringe activities northwards into the surrounding countryside, including Ludlow golf course, Ludlow race course and associated, shelter belt planting and fringe activities.

8. Corve Dale

LDU Description

- 4.39 The landscape of the Corve Dale (the upper reaches of which are included within the AONB whilst the lower are excluded) is one of vales and valley bottom lowlands. The river alluvium deposits create good arable land with large farm estates and unsettled meadows and marsh. Further down the valley there is moderate dispersal of settlement within small villages. Other trees are thinly scattered throughout the dale.

Field Observations

- 4.40 The Corve Dale is a wide river valley running south west, adjacent to the southern stretches of Wenlock Edge. The upper reaches of the dale are bounded by the associated escarpment slopes that run parallel to the

river in the valley bottom. The undulating topography and small irregular field patterns make the upper reaches of the Corve Dale a high quality landscape as shown by their inclusion within the AONB. There are strong visual links to the enclosing valley slopes that encompass the dale and complement the dale in geomorphologic terms. Although at the northern edge of the boundary in the Corve Dale, at a field level, there has been some hedgerow removal resulting in large arable fields.

- 4.41 Further south the dale opens out becoming wider and flatter although visual links to the eastern escarpment ridge still remain. The AONB boundary follows the ridgelines, creating a meander in the boundary, and excluding the lower Corve Dale floodplain in between. The dale is much less undulating here and the field patterns are larger and more regular. Many of the hedgerows and woodland have been removed to increase agricultural production.
- 4.42 There is sparse settlement in the upper Corve Dale, within the AONB boundary, with a dispersed pattern of small hamlets and individual properties. Numerous historic structures punctuate the area within the upper dale including towers at Broncroft and Holdgate and the remnants of a motte and bailey fort south of Brookhampton.
- 4.43 Further south, within the lower Corve Dale outside the AONB boundary, the settlements become more nucleated within small villages such as Diddlebury and Culmington. Whilst these have attractive cores and historic churches they also contain modern residential properties on the fringes and some industrial units are noticeable around Culmington.

9. Craven Arms

LDU Description

- 4.44 The landscape surrounding Craven Arms, outside of the AONB boundary, consists of rolling and undulating lowlands and vales and valley bottoms. The rich fluvial and glacial drifts give rise to deep brown sand/loamy soils that support large estates of mixed farming. Other trees are scattered thinly throughout the landscape.
- 4.45 Within the boundary, to the north of Craven Arms, the land is again of lowland river valleys. The gleyed soils produce neutral (damp) pasture with wet pasture and marsh. Settlement is moderately dispersed within small villages and large farm estates with trees and woods are present.

Field Observations

- 4.46 Craven Arms sits at the southern end of Wenlock Edge upon the narrow floodplain of the River Onny which borders it to the east. The AONB generally follows the lower slopes of hills to the west of the settlement and to the east the river valley, creating a wedge northwards into the AONB excluding Craven Arms. East of the river the land undulates with pastoral fields interspersed by woodland including Strefford Wood and Norton Camp Wood on the steeper gradients. To the west, the topography of the land is relatively flat. The removal of hedgerows has resulted in the creation of large arable fields and there is a lack of woodland within the area. The growth of Craven Arms has initiated the incursion of modern residential developments and some industrial units into this area due to the lack of suitable sites further east.
- 4.47 Further south of Craven Arms there is relatively sparse settlement development, within small villages and hamlets. The landscape also remains relatively flat with large arable fields. The boundary follows the lower slopes of hills in the chain of Bucknell Hill, Hopton Titterhill and Clunbury Hill including the rolling uplands to the west whilst excluding the flatter land of the Clun floodplain to the east.
- 4.48 North of Craven Arms within the AONB boundary around Wistanstow the topography is also relatively flat and the area has seen the expansion of large arable fields. Due to the characteristics of the area visual links west to the AONB are limited and the A49 has a significant intrusion locally on the landscape.
- 4.49 Craven Arms itself has seen the proliferation of modern development most notably in the form of industrial units. There are also residential developments in progress to the west of the town.

10. South of Clun Forest

LDU Description

- 4.50 The landscape to the South of Clun Forest comprises the wet pasture and marsh land within the River Teme valley. Settlement is moderately dispersed with large farm estates. Scattered trees are also present.
- 4.51 To the north of Knighton, within the AONB boundary, the land comprises sloping low hills with shallow rocky soils. Humic (peaty) drift results in rough (dry) pasture with ancient woodland and dispersed settlement.
- 4.52 It is of note that the LDU descriptions do not extend to the south of the River Teme valley as these areas are in Wales and are not covered by the data which is limited to the County of Shropshire.

Field Observations

- 4.53 The landscape south of Clun Forest is characterised by the narrow floodplain of the River Teme and the steep hills that enclose it to the north and south. The AONB boundary follows this deeply incised river valley including the Clun Uplands to the north whilst excluding the Welsh hills to the south. The hills within Wales are densely wooded with moorland vegetation on the higher slopes. Irregular pastoral fields support the rough grazing of sheep. There are considerable areas of coniferous plantation upon the hills although these are in no greater quantities than those contained within the AONB. The overall consequence is the merger of the hills into the Clun Uplands within the AONB boundary and with the Hereford Hills to the south east to form an expansive landscape of rolling uplands and deeply incised river valleys with limited settlement and a sense of remoteness and tranquillity.
- 4.54 The relief of the land has resulted in development being concentrated in the river valley floor including the railway and A4113, although the impact of these is relatively localised due to the topography. Isolated dwellings exist south of the boundary with most development concentrated in the village of Bucknell where the presence of some industrial units is also apparent. Development has also spread along the railway line in the form of modern residential development.
- 4.55 Knighton is wedged within the deeply incised River Teme between the Clun Uplands and Welsh Hills on the Anglo/Welsh border. The settlement itself contains a number of attractive timber buildings that follow the narrow winding roads up the steep valley. Knighton has, however, experienced some modern development, most notably new residential properties on the fringes of the settlement.

11. Land to the North and West of Clun Forest

LDU Description

- 4.56 Land within the AONB boundary at Clun Forest consists of high hills (over 300m) and plateau summits. The hard (Caledonian) rocks give rise to neutral (damp) pasture with planned settlement and large farm estates of plantation woodland.
- 4.57 Further northwest, outside the AONB boundary, the sloping/valley sides of the low hills results in impoverished soils with large farm estates and some ancient woodland. Settlement is dispersed.

Field Observations

- 4.58 The landscape to the west of the AONB boundary is identical in character and quality, comprising broad wooded hills and moorland intersected by a series of wooded valleys. Settlement is sparse giving rise to a distinct sense of wilderness and tranquillity.

- 4.59 The land slopes north west from the Clun Forest within the AONB to the A489 in Wales. The AONB boundary follows the Welsh boundary, including the Clun Forest Uplands to the south whilst excluding the lower slopes of the hills and flat plains beyond to the north. The lower slopes outside the AONB boundary comprise an intricate patterning of small field parcels interspersed with woodland and intersected by narrow lanes. Here settlement is dispersed and there are long views across the valley to Corndon Hill and the Stiperstones to the north.
- 4.60 Flatter land within the A489 valley is occupied by large arable fields increasing in size closer to the main road. North of the A489 the land is occupied by large arable fields giving rise to a flat and featureless landscape. There is sparse settlement on the lower slopes itself with only a few individual dwellings present; most of the population of the area being concentrated along the A489.

12. Bishop's Castle and Surrounds

LDU Description

- 4.61 Here the topography is of lowland vales and valley bottoms all outside the AONB designation. Fluvial drift deposits give rise to deep sand/loamy soils that support large estate farmlands of mixed farming. The area has a moderate dispersal of settlement contained within small villages. Tree cover is mostly in the form of estate plantations within coverts and tree groups.
- 4.62 Within the AONB boundary, surrounding Bishop's Castle, the topography is of sloping low hills with thin soils supporting dry heath and moor and rough dry pasture. Settlement is dispersed with large farm estates of mixed farming. Ancient woodland is present although on the steeper gradients the land is open and uncovered.

Field Observations

- 4.63 Bishop's Castle is a relatively large settlement outside the Shropshire Hills AONB and adjacent to the Welsh border. The boundary follows the hills that surround Bishop's Castle creating a meander in the boundary excluding the settlement. To the east the land is fairly undulating in a series of small rounded hills. North east, towards Lydham, the land is relatively flat with the occurrence of large arable fields, although there is a well developed hedgerow network that encapsulates them. However, visual links to the AONB are strong due to the surrounding hills that encompass the town, such as Heath Mynd to the north and the Long Mynd further to the east.
- 4.64 Further to the north east of Bishop's Castle, outside the AONB, the principal landform of the Long Mynd, which forms the boundary of the AONB, becomes increasingly dominant on the surrounding landscape. Here the land begins to undulate and field sizes decrease and become more

irregular. Small woodland blocks and individual trees also become more frequent. Settlement is sparse, concentrated within small hamlets such as More and Hardwick, whilst traditional features such as sunken windy lanes add to the character of the area. This is a transitional landscape that draws on the character of the Long Mynd and relates to the core of the Shropshire Hills AONB.

- 4.65 Bishop's Castle itself contains a number of historic buildings such as the Church of St John the Baptist and several timber buildings as well as remnants of the castle. The town, however, has experienced some development mainly in the form of industrial units that follow the line of the A488.

13. Corndon Hill and Land West of Stapeley Hill

LDU Description

- 4.66 Corndon Hill, beyond the AONB boundary, is described as a high hill (over 300m) of hard (Caledonian) rocks with impoverished soils resulting in dry heath and moor. Settlement is planned with small farms and some secondary/recent woodland also present.
- 4.67 The Stiperstones range further to the northeast and contained within the Shropshire Hills AONB boundary is also classified as high hills (over 300m) of hard (Caledonian) rocks. Soils are impoverished supporting dry heath and moorland. The area is relatively unsettled with unclosed wildland and some secondary/recent woodland outcrops.

Field Observations

- 4.68 The massive outcrop of Corndon Hill with its distinctive profile is a continuation of the primarily quartzite Stiperstones range that run north eastward from Wales into the Shropshire Hills AONB. The hill itself dominates the surrounding landscape by means of its bulk and jagged rocky summits that pierce the skyline. The thin soils produced by the steep gradients and hard rock fashion an upland heathland environment of bracken, heather and rough pastoral grassland with an abundance of dense hedgerows.
- 4.69 Settlement is sparse upon Corndon Hill, the main dwellings concentrated in the historic hamlet of Old Church Stoke, the buildings of which are built from locally quarried stone. The area also has an abundance of historic features including a 13th Century church tower, ancient cairns and hill fort remnants.
- 4.70 Slightly to the north of Corndon Hill, to the west of the Stiperstones range is the River Camlad valley. Here the landscape flows down from the Stiperstones range, in a series of undulations before reaching the densely wooded river channel and the dramatic Marrington Dingle. Although the surrounding fields are moderate in size they have a developed network of

hedgerows punctuated by numerous individual trees. Visual links are strong to the Stiperstones range although these are occasionally lost due to the undulating topography. This is an intimate landscape of undulating topography and wooded valleys providing a contrast to the openness of the Stiperstones range to the east. Land to the west of the A490 becomes increasingly less undulating and as a consequence large arable fields become more prolific.

- 4.71 The town of Church Stoke lies at the tip of the Stiperstones range within Wales, south west of Corndon Hill. The settlement is relatively large in size and has numerous modern housing developments and industrial units at its fringes.

Section 5 Key Issues

- 5.1 The desktop review and field assessment identified a number of issues which should be addressed as part of the boundary review process. These are described in detail below.
- 5.2 The boundary at present generally follows clearly defined physical features in accordance with the Countryside Agency's approach. Whilst this provides a clear boundary it is not always the most appropriate boundary at the field scale and gives rise to inconsistencies in approach.

Splitting Settlements

- 5.3 The first key inconsistency to be identified relates to splitting settlements. The CA's approach to defining the boundary clearly states that towns or villages should not normally be cut in two. However, during field assessment it was noted that the existing boundary often runs through the centre of a settlement. In some cases, such as at Ditton Priors on the eastern boundary, the historic core of the settlement is included while more modern development (the trading estate in this instance) lies outside the boundary. However, in other instances, such as at Burwarton to the south, the historic core is split, the church lying outside the boundary.



The village of Ditton Priors is split by the AONB boundary, including the historic core whilst excluding the trading estate to the east. (AONB boundary shown in



The village of Burwarton is also split by the boundary, excluding the historic church to the east. (AONB boundary shown in red)

- 5.4 Further desktop analysis identified a potential 36 settlements that would appear to be split by the existing boundary. These are listed below, following the boundary in a clockwise sequence from the northernmost tip at The Wrekin.

Easthope	Onibury
Brockton	Winstanstow
Ditton Priors	Long Meadowend
Cleobury North	Aston on Clun
Burwarton	Hopton Castle
Farlow	Bedstone
Crumpsbrook	Bucknell
Hoptonbank	Knighton
Doddington	Wentnor
Knowbury	Priest Weston
Farden	Rorrington
Bitterley	Snailbeach
Bouldon	Pontesford
Tugford	Wrentnall
Munslow	Church Pulverbatch
Aston Munslow	Woolstaston
Diddlebury	Church Preen
Corfton	Garmston

Omission of Land that Meets the Natural Beauty Criterion

- 5.5 The second inconsistency relates to the exclusion of land that meets the natural beauty criterion. During field assessment it was noted that, in a number of instances, the land outside the boundary is of the same character and quality to that which lies inside the boundary. This scenario occurs along the western boundary at the base of the Long Mynd near Myndtown where the boundary follows the road, severing the distinctive moorland landscape of the lower slopes of the Long Mynd.



Inclusion of Land that does not Meet the Natural Beauty Criterion

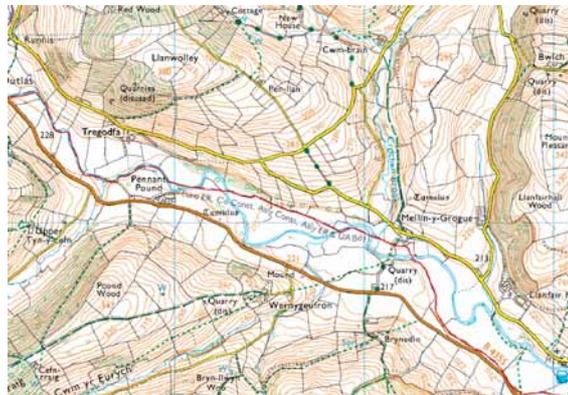
- 5.6 Elsewhere a reverse scenario was identified, resulting in land which does not appear to meet the criteria being included in the boundary. This was observed to the north east of Ludlow where the boundary follows the road between Roundthorn and Bitterley. In this instance large fields with limited

links to the nearby Clee Hill are present both inside and outside of the boundary.

Administrative boundaries

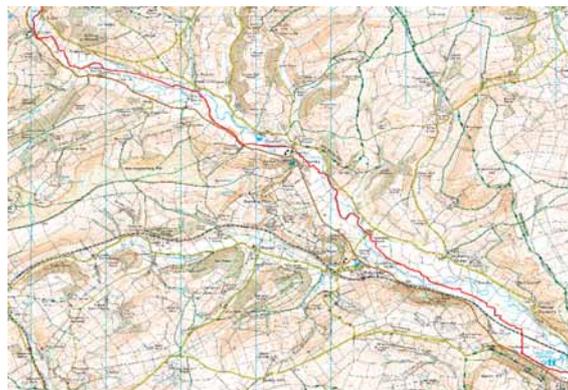
5.7 A large part of the western boundary of the AONB follows the Welsh border, giving rise to two key issues:

- The boundary does not follow clearly definable features on the ground in this area. For example to the north west of Knighton, the Welsh boundary takes a circuitous route, which follows the River Teme in part, but for the majority of its length, it meanders to the north and south of the watercourse, neither following field boundaries or any other distinct features on the ground.



The boundary in the western extremity of the AONB follows the Anglo/Welsh border which itself follows no easily distinguishable physical feature on the ground. (AONB boundary shown in red)

- The boundary does not define the extent of land that meets the natural beauty criterion. In this instance, the moorland landscape of Clun Forest within the boundary, extends with no apparent change in character or quality across the boundary into Wales. Similarly, the distinctive ridge of Corndon Hill, which is geologically related to the Stiperstones and visually related to the Long Mynd, is excluded further north, as are the lower slopes of the Rowls east of Chirbury, which comprises a distinctive ridge and wooded ravine.



The Clun Uplands included within the AONB boundary to the north flow into the Welsh Hills south west of the boundary with no apparent change in landscape character. (Boundary is shown in

Boundary aligned with Clearly Definable Features

- 5.8 Suitable physical features include roads, railway lines, tracks, urban edges, rivers, streams, treelines and hedgerows. In certain places the boundary follows footpaths, such as south of Rabbit Warren Plantation in the Severn floodplain. These features are generally not suitable for the boundary as they do not always follow physical features on the ground and are often not recognised as official rights of way.

Section 6 Recommendations

- 6.1 This section details WCPM's recommendations for further assessment and review. The main issues surrounding each study area are identified and explained. While each boundary area is different there are some core issues which arise in several areas. These issues should be reviewed as a whole to ensure there is consistency of approach around the boundary.

The Wrekin (see Plan 1 (2768/01))

- 6.2 The whale back hill of the Wrekin forms a prominent and distinctive feature within the wider area. It comprises an attractive mix of wooded slopes and windswept upland and its influence extends well beyond the boundary of the existing AONB. Despite some detractors present within the surrounding landscape there exists the potential to extend to the boundary to include some of the lower slopes that are an integral part of this feature.
- 6.3 The north west boundary for example is currently drawn along the edge of the woodland that covers the upper slopes of the Wrekin. However, the lower slopes comprise an attractive mix of small pastoral fields and quiet lanes which have a distinct sense of place, given the striking wooded backdrop. WCPM would therefore recommend extending the boundary in this area. Wrekin Course would appear to be a suitable boundary line, at least in part with field boundaries perhaps being more appropriate further south, east of Rushton.
- 6.4 To the east, the landscape is influenced by quarrying and the associated detractors serve to lower the quality of the landscape beyond the boundary. There are however some areas that could be considered as part of an extension, including land to the west of the village of New Works which is a continuation of the woodland to the west and is designated as a Scheduled Monument.
- 6.5 In a number of areas around the Wrekin, the boundary does not currently appear to follow any clear features on the ground. These areas are highlighted on Plan 1 (2768/01) and should be assessed at the detailed boundary mapping stage.
- 6.6 The boundary along the eastern edge follows a circuitous path in the vicinity of Maddocks Hill. This would appear to be accurate based on the presence of a disused quarry and large fields in the area.
- 6.7 Areas further from the Wrekin to the north east and north west comprise a flat and relatively featureless plain which is heavily influenced by the

urban development of Telford and the M54. These areas do not meet the natural beauty criterion and are not recommended for inclusion.

Severn Floodplain (see Plan 2 (2768/02))

- 6.8 Part of the Severn Valley is included in the existing AONB boundary. It was noted as an anomaly at the desk study stage, given that only a short section of this character area was included and in landscape and geological terms it is poorly related to the core of the AONB. On plan it would appear that this inclusion was one of convenience to link The Wrekin with Wenlock Edge and incorporate both features within the AONB. However, field assessment confirmed the area to be a high quality, intimate landscape comprising a meandering river flanked by wooded valley slopes. The area includes the attractive parkland of Leighton Hall and Buildwas park and stretches south to incorporate the wooded hills and river valley of Sheinton Brook. It is of relevance that visual links to the core of the AONB are limited due to the nature of the topography and extent of woodland in the area. However, the presence of the River Severn brings a sense of place to the area.
- 6.9 The inclusion of Farley Quarry would appear to be an inconsistency in the boundary in this area. The quarry is located near the eastern boundary of the existing AONB and is not therefore surrounded by high quality landscape. However, woodland surrounds the works, effectively screening it from view. WCPM recommend that the boundary is reviewed in this area. The associated woodland is not subject to any designation and the area does not form part of the attractive assemblage of valley and woodland associated with Sheinton Brook to the west. Any plans for restoration of the landscape should be considered at the detailed boundary stage.
- 6.10 It is noted that Tick Wood, outside the boundary to the east is a high quality wooded, designated as a SSSI. Although of high quality, this area is closely associated with the Power Station and has very weak links to the core of the AONB.
- 6.11 It is also of note that the boundary does not appear to follow a clearly definable feature on the ground to the south of Rabbit Warren Plantation. This should be addressed as part of the boundary review and consideration given to the inclusion of the landscape comprising the Scheduled Monument and Moat Plantation to the south.

Wenlock Edge (see Plan 3 (2768/03))

- 6.12 The wooded escarpment of Wenlock Edge forms a prominent feature and provides a distinctive back drop to the rolling valley of Hughley Brook to the east. The AONB boundary currently follows the line of Hughley Brook and includes the lower slopes of the scarp with its distinctive linear fields

that slope down towards the brook. This attractive combination of field parcels, divided by hedgerows and trees is given a strong sense of place by its association with the wooded scarp resulting in a high quality landscape worthy of designation.

- 6.13 Of consideration here, is whether the boundary has been drawn at the appropriate point in the transition from the dramatic wooded scarp to the rolling landscape to the west. Beyond Hughley Brook the field patterning changes to a more irregular patterning with a variety of field shapes and sizes predominantly divided by hedgerows and trees. The escarpment still has a relatively strong influence on the landscape beyond the brook. WCPM recommend that the land towards Kenley is reviewed in more detail at the next stage with the possibility of extending the boundary to include both sides of the brook valley within the AONB. However, it is of note that the sense of relative wildness is increasingly reduced as the land stretches away from the scarp, the landscape being clearly managed for agriculture.
- 6.14 The village of Hughley is currently included within the AONB. This sprawling village contains a caravan park, a nursery and an equestrian centre and is surrounded by scrubby, unkempt fields and some paddocks. WCPM recommend that the inclusion of this village and the surrounding land is reviewed as part of the assessment of the wider area to the west of Wenlock Edge.
- 6.15 To the east of Wenlock Edge despite complex topography the land has been degraded due to modern agricultural practices and the visual influence of quarrying on the eastern edge of the escarpment. Without the dominance of the wooded scarp the landscape to the east is not outstanding and does not meet the natural beauty criterion.
- 6.16 It is of note that the boundary splits an SSSI along the eastern edge of the scarp, excluding an area of designated land between the woodland edge and the B4371. Although this area is affected by quarrying, there appears to be an inconsistency in approach, some designated quarry areas being included while others are excluded. This should be reviewed in more detail, again bearing in mind any plans for future restoration of the land and the screening effect of the woodland.

Church Preen and Surrounds (see Plan 4 (2768/04))

- 6.17 The landscape at Church Preen comprises a mix of medium sized fields, divided by hedgerows with trees and woodland copses. There are views to the wooded scarp of Wenlock Edge and the area contains the tree lined Hughley Brook. Church Preen itself is an attractive village with a strong sense of enclosure created by the woodland and trees associated with Preen Manor.
- 6.18 There would appear to be some inconsistency in the boundary alignment in this area with little to distinguish some of the land outside the boundary from land within. WCPM recommends that consideration be given to the

inclusion of this land given its range of qualities and views to Wenlock edge. However, it is acknowledged that the landscape surrounding Church Preen does not have strong links to the core of the Shropshire hills and therefore the area's exclusion may well be retained after further assessment.

- 6.19 To the north of Church Preen, the boundary broadly follows the northern edge of Netherwood Coppice and is drawn tightly around the contours to the east of Causeway Wood. The land between Causeway Wood and Langley Hall was reviewed in this area and found to consist of large regular, open fields with limited topographical interest and an absence of field boundary hedgerows. This land does not meet the natural beauty criterion and the WCPM recommend the boundary alignment is retained in this area.
- 6.20 As illustrated on **Plan 4 (2768/04)**, there are a few sections of the boundary that do not appear to follow clearly defined features on the ground. This should be addressed as part of the boundary review and consideration given to local realignments.

North of All Stretton (see Plan 5 (2768/05))

- 6.21 The boundary follows the edge of the moorland landscape of The Lawley, to the north east of All Stretton which quickly changes to landscape of relatively large arable fields with few features of interest. Despite the strong backdrop of 'The Lawley', the landscape is not of sufficient scenic quality to meet the natural beauty criterion. It is noted that although Penkridge Hall is of cultural and architectural value it does not, when assessed with the surrounding landscape, meet the natural beauty criterion.
- 6.22 Along the route of the A49, the landscape is punctuated by linear, piecemeal development which detracts from the quality of the surrounding area. However, the valley between the Long Mynd and Stretton Hills gradually narrows as one travels south, creating a distinct sense of enclosure brought about by the steep topography of the adjacent hills. The dramatic topography creates a distinct sense of place.
- 6.23 The boundary is currently drawn to the north east of All Stretton where the valley narrows significantly. It was noted that the surrounding hills start to have a significant impact on the character of the landscape slightly further north, and the possibility of extending the boundary by a short distance in this area should be investigated.
- 6.24 One inconsistency to the north of the Lawley was identified where, as identified on **Plan 5 (2768/05)**, the boundary does not follow any easily identifiable features on the ground.

East of Clee Hill (see Plan 6 (2768/06))

- 6.25 To the east of Clee Hill the boundary is currently drawn along the road. It includes the relatively wild and tranquil upland plateau and lower moorland slopes but also the patchwork of small fields and holdings associated with Hoptonbank and Doddington. These areas do not display the same 'wilderness' characteristics as the moorland, and they fall just outside the SSSI designation that protects a large part of Clee Hill.
- 6.26 The land to the east of the boundary consists of undulating topography, generally sloping towards Hopton Wafers. This is an intimate landscape which comprises small to medium sized fields, divided by hedgerows and trees and intersected by a series of brooks which emerge from springs on Clee Hill to the east. The landscape forms the lower slopes of the Clee Hill plateau and although it does not display the same wilderness qualities, it is a transitional landscape which is closely linked to the moorland to the west. When approaching Clee Hill from the east on the A4117, the steep climb up Hopton Bank creates a sense of arrival. This area therefore forms a distinct setting to Clee Hill and WCPM recommends it is reviewed with the potential for inclusion, especially given the inclusion of similar land to the south of Clee Hill.
- 6.27 Also of note in this area, is the Catherton Common SSSI in the vicinity of Crumpsbrook that is split by the AONB boundary. The scenic and landscape quality of the excluded SSSI land should be assessed as part of the boundary review.
- 6.28 There is some potential to extend the boundary to Hopton Wafers within the Mill Brook valley.

South of Clee Hill (see Plan 7 (2768/07))

- 6.29 The landscape to the south of Clee Hill forms a transitional landscape from the relatively wild upland landscape with moorland habitat to an undulating region of irregular field patterns interspersed with wooded valleys. The boundary is currently drawn at Knowlegate and Knowbury and includes an area of relatively steep topography containing Gorstley Rough, Knowle Wood and the scrubby parkland landscape of Whitton Court. The landscape to the south comprises a similar mix of undulating fields interspersed with wooded valleys although the field sizes increase slightly in size. WCPM recommend that some consideration should be given to the possibility of a revised boundary drawn further into the transitional area to the south.
- 6.30 It is of note that there are no visual links back to Clee Hill from this area, either inside the boundary or outside due to the nature of the topography and intervening woodland.
- 6.31 It is also recommended that the area around Knowbury is reviewed. The boundary in this area follows the road, splitting the settlement and

including an area of dispersed settlement that is not surrounded by high quality landscape.

North of Ludlow (see Plan 8 (2768/08))

- 6.32 The impact of Ludlow is significant on the surrounding landscape with the encroachment of the urban fringe in to the countryside and the presence of large arable fields. The boundary immediately to the north of the town is aligned along field boundaries between Middleton and Wigley (Hilltop School), before heading north along the road. Initial assessment has identified the land immediately north of the boundary as potentially not meeting the natural beauty criterion. The landscape in this area comprises large arable fields with an absence of traditional hedgerow boundaries or any landscape features of note. It is recommended that the boundary is reviewed in this area at a later stage.

Corve Dale (see Plans 9 (2768/09) and 10 (2768/10))

- 6.33 The Corve Dale is a wide, relatively flat, river valley with a network of hedgerows and historic buildings. The upper area is currently included in the AONB, while the lower section is excluded. Field assessment identified some minor differences between the included and excluded sections although it is difficult to establish a strong reasoning for the alignment of the existing boundary.
- 6.34 The first point of note relates to the quality of the included land at its northern end. It would appear that the landscape has experienced some degradation south of Weston in the form of hedgerow removal and agricultural intensification. The resulting large arable fields, lack intimate qualities and have few features of interest. In addition, the area appears remote from the core with no strong links to the hills to either the east or west. It is considered that this area no longer meets the natural beauty criterion and the boundary should be reviewed in more detail in this area.
- 6.35 In the vicinity of Stanton Long, Brookhampton, Holdgate and Tugford, the dale has an intimate character, with undulating topography, small, irregular field parcels, hedgerows with trees and good visual links to the ridgeline to the east and high ground to the west. The farmsteads and villages have retained their historic character and there is a sense of tranquillity along the quiet, winding lanes. While the dale is clearly attractive in this area, there is a distinct working agricultural character which detracts from any 'sense of wildness'. In addition, while there are visual links to the ridgelines to the east and west, these ridges are not immediately distinctive and as a result the area lacks a sense of place. These observations should be considered at the more detailed stage.
- 6.36 To the south of the existing boundary, there is a clear change to more regular field patterning in the vicinity of Balaam's Heath and Beambridge.

However, the landscape around Broncroft retains an attractive mix of features, similar to the included land to the north and should be reviewed at the more detailed stage.

- 6.37 To the south of Broncroft, the dale starts to widen and flatten and there are fewer historic hamlets and features of interest. Visual links to the ridgelines weaken with distance and modern, linear development along the route of the B4368 detracts from the traditional character of the dale. This land does not appear to meet the natural beauty criterion and its exclusion is appropriate.
- 6.38 An area of land in the lower Corve Dale on the eastern valley slopes was identified as being worthy of further scrutiny. As in the upper dale, Stanton Lacy and Culmington are attractive, historic villages with few modern buildings. The surrounding landscape comprises medium sized fields which slope down towards the River Corve, where it meanders through a pastoral floodplain. Here, the valley sides rise steeply to the east, creating a more dramatic landscape with a sense of enclosure.
- 6.39 In summary, the Corve Dale is a complex valley, with variety in landscape quality from north to south and east to west. Overall, the Dale lacks the rich mix of features that makes a landscape outstanding as well as any key features which can add drama and a sense of place.

Craven Arms (see Plan 11(2768/11))

- 6.40 Craven Arms is a largely modern development which has more recently dispersed beyond the railway to the west. It contains a significant industrial and retail component which has an influence on the wider landscape, hence the exclusion of the town and surrounding area from the AONB. It is recommended that the boundary to the east of the town is reviewed with the possibility of the River Onny forming the eastern boundary in this area. The northern boundary also requires further study with linear development along the A49 forming minor detractors in an area that lacks visual links to the hills to the east and west.

South of Clun Forest (see Plan 12 (2768/12))

- 6.41 The landscape to the south of the Clun Forest Hills is a high quality one, including the narrow and distinctive Teme Valley, steep wooded hills and scattered dwellings. There is a distinct sense of wilderness, the upper slopes containing moorland species and the topography creating a sense of isolation and tranquillity. This area meets the natural beauty criterion and could be included within the AONB. The reason for exclusion is administrative, the valley and hills being within Wales and Herefordshire. While there is some administrative convenience for such an alignment, this gives rise to a number of inconsistencies, the most significant being the abrupt termination of an AONB designation within the middle of a high

quality landscape. A further key inconsistency is the alignment of the boundary along the country/county border, which does not follow clearly definable features on the ground.

- 6.42 It is recommended that this whole area is reviewed as part of the next stage in the boundary review process. If further consideration of these issues results in a decision to retain the exclusion of the Welsh and Herefordshire Hills, it is recommended that the boundary is realigned to follow distinct features on the ground and to avoid splitting the settlements of Bucknell and Knighton.

Land West and North of Clun Forest (see Plans 13 (2768/13) and 14 (2768/14))

- 6.43 The densely wooded hills of the Clun Forest are a high quality landscape that meets the natural beauty criterion. There is no difference in the character or quality of the landscape inside or outside of the existing boundary, the hills extend west into Wales and include Beacon Hill which rises to a higher level than the Clun Forest Hills. To the north, the lower slopes of the Clun Forest Hills should also be considered for inclusion, there again being no difference in character or quality on either side of the boundary. Here, this intimate and rolling landscape affords wide views across the valley to the Shropshire Hills in the north east.
- 6.44 As with the area to the south of Clun Forest, the reason for the boundary alignment in this area is administrative. The possibility of extending the boundary west to include the Welsh Hills should be considered. Whilst it is recognised that this may pose administrative problems, the existing Wye Valley AONB forms a cross border AONB by following the River Wye and its adjacent surrounds. This AONB includes Monmouthshire on the Welsh side, and parts of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire in England. The AONB is run by a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) comprising of private and public representatives from both sides of the border. The success of this approach should be investigated with the possibility of a similar arrangement being adopted between Shropshire, Herefordshire and Wales.

Bishop's Castle (see Plan 15 (2768/15))

- 6.45 Bishop's Castle is a relatively large settlement with an attractive historic core. Modern development has expanded the town to the east, reducing the quality of the town as a whole. While the lower slopes of the Clun Hills create a high quality landscape to the south and west, the landscape immediately to the east is influenced by the urban fringe and lacks features of interest. While the town and the land to the east retains a strong sense of place as a result of the visual links to the surrounding hills (Long Mynd, Heath Mynd and Corndon Hill), this is not sufficient to meet the natural beauty criterion.

- 6.46 The undulating and wooded landscape to the west of the Long Mynd is of high quality, comprising a largely undulating landscape, interspersed with river valleys and comprising an intricate network of fields and villages. There is no doubt that the lower slopes of the Mynd to Hardwick and Whitcot in the west do meet the natural beauty criterion on account of the wooded moorland slopes, long ranging views and intimate landscape of small field parcels, wooded valleys and historic hamlets. Beyond the river, the topography becomes flatter and there are fewer features of interest. WCPM recommend that the boundary should be drawn somewhere in this transitional landscape, taking account of the visual presence of the Long Mynd.

Corndon Hill and Land West of Stapeley Hill (See Plan 16 (2768/16))

- 6.47 Corndon Hill is a distinctive, high quality landform that clearly meets the natural beauty criterion. It is currently excluded for administrative reasons, being within the Welsh boundary. There is no doubt that this prominent hill is related to the core of the Shropshire hills and its exclusion is highly inconsistent in relation to the application of the statutory criterion. WCPM recommend that the boundary is extended to include the hill and its surroundings to complete the protection of the whole of the Stiperstones range within England and Wales.
- 6.48 It is also recommended that the lower slopes of Corndon Hill and Stapeley Hill including the Camlad valley is included as this is an attractive, cohesive landscape with undulating topography and small field parcels interspersed with wooded valleys and copses. Of particular note in the area is the dramatic Marrington Dingle which forms a memorable feature of high quality. Beyond the River Camlad, the land becomes increasingly flat and more remote from the core hills. The boundary should be drawn within this transition if administrative difficulties can be overcome. Church Stoke lies on the edge of this area. It is a relatively large settlement with modern housing and development and should be excluded from the AONB.

Summary

- 6.49 There are a number of areas where the boundary could be extended to include land within the Shropshire Hills AONB that meet the AONB natural beauty criterion.
- 6.50 Much of the land within the Welsh border could be included within the Shropshire Hills AONB on landscape quality grounds.
- 6.51 Some small areas no longer meet the AONB natural beauty criterion and, at the field level should be removed from the AONB.

6.52 The existing boundary does not always follow the Countryside Agency's approach to boundary setting. Large sections do not follow a clearly defined physical boundary and a number of settlements are split by the boundary.

Section 7 Conclusions

- 7.1 This report provides a detailed review of the existing Shropshire Hills AONB, summarising the landscape character of the area and assessing the AONB and its immediate surroundings against the statutory criterion for designation.
- 7.2 It is clear from a review of the designation history that a number of options were considered before the designation was finally made in 1959. Some of these options touched on the issues identified as part of this review. Hobhouse's original Conservation Area for example included Corndon Hill. In addition he identified a second cross border Conservation Area which grouped the Clun Forest Hills with the Radnor Forest Hills, addressing the character links between these two areas. Comments on the designation by the CPRE in 1959 have also been considered as part of this review, including the omission of the lower Corve Dale and the lower valleys of the Onny.
- 7.3 The thirteen boundary sections identified for further review were assessed against the natural beauty criterion. This included desk top analysis of statutory designations, cultural associations and tranquillity as well as field assessment of the landscape character and condition.
- 7.4 WCPM's recommendations following this assessment are illustrated on Plans 1- 16 where areas requiring further scrutiny have been identified. These areas should be taken forward to the next stage in the boundary review process where a draft revised boundary will be identified. Further assessment at a field scale is required in these areas to ensure any revisions to the boundary are accurate and consistent in approach.
- 7.5 In addition to the specific areas identified, WCPM identified certain key issues which should be addressed as part of the review. Some of these issues relate to specific areas such as the welsh boundary alignment to the south, west and north of Clun Forest. Others are more general and apply to the whole boundary, such as split settlements and the boundary not following clearly definable features on the ground. It is therefore recommended that these issues are reviewed in relation to the entire length of the existing boundary, ensuring consistency across the whole AONB.

Appendix 1 Area Assessment Table

Area	Landscape Quality	Scenic Quality	Rarity	Representativeness	Conservation Interests	Wildness	Associations	Tranquillity
The Wrekin	Cohesive landscape of flat plains, undulating floodplain and isolated whale back hill.	High quality scenery of mature wooded slopes and bracken/rocky summit.	Rare example of isolated volcanic outcrop within Shropshire.	Wrekin is contrast to surrounding flat/undulating landscape. Classic example of volcanic outcrop.	Designated AONB, SSSI, Scheduled Monument (SM). Part Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) and Local Nature Reserve (LNR).	Windswept summit leads to feelings of isolation and detachment from surrounding lower landscape.	Local myths and legends. Ancient hill fort.	Summit provides panoramic views over surrounding landscape. Detachment from surrounding urban area.
East of the Wrekin	High quality undulating floodplain of Severn Valley forming apron to Wrekin.	High scenic quality of pastoral floodplain and woodland blocks. Presence of power station and urban influences further south.	Rare lowland meandering floodplain.	Idyllic riverside setting archetypal of lowland river character.	Designated AONB and small area of SSSI following tributary and at Buildwas Abbey.	Intimate and tranquil although becoming more developed further south.	Ironbridge, original power station building, Abbey at Buildwas.	Relatively tranquil despite power station.
Little Wenlock	Undulating topography to the east of the Wrekin	Relatively poor scenic quality due to large arable fields and encroachment of urban fringe of Telford.	Common landscape character.	Representative of agricultural intensification and urban encroachment.	SSSI designation of Lydebrook Dingle.	Managed landscape.	Listed in Domesday Book.	Relatively tranquil.
West of the Wrekin	Flat arable plain with large arable fields.	Featureless arable fields. Some industry present.	Common landscape character.	Representative of agricultural intensification.	SM at Wroxeter.	Managed landscape.	Wroxeter Roman City.	Relatively un-tranquil.

Area	Landscape Quality	Scenic Quality	Rarity	Representativeness	Conservation Interests	Wildness	Associations	Tranquillity
North of the Wrekin	Flat plain containing urban sprawl.	Urban settlement of Telford.	Common landscape character.	Representative of urban development.	NVZ to the north.	Managed landscape.	Birthplace of industrial revolution.	Un-tranquil.
Severn Floodplain	Tranquil landscape of floodplain and woodland.	High quality floodplain, pasture and woodland blocks. Presence of Power station	Rare lowland meandering river floodplain.	Idyllic riverside setting archetypal of lowland river character.	Designated AONB and small area of SSSI following tributary. Abbey at Buildwas designated SM	Intimate and tranquil.	Abbey at Buildwas.	Far removed from urban edge of Telford and development on river further south. Presence of power station noticeable.
Wenlock Edge	High quality ridge running south west across Shropshire. Complementary landscape of ridge and valley forming coherent landscape.	Elevated densely wooded belt. High quality.	Rare example of extensive wooded ridge feature.	Classic example of escarpment ridge. None of this scale elsewhere in Shropshire.	Designated AONB and quarried areas SSSI.	Relatively wild due to woodland although presence of arable farmland to the east.	Geologically important.	Relatively tranquil although influence of B4371.

Area	Landscape Quality	Scenic Quality	Rarity	Representativeness	Conservation Interests	Wildness	Associations	Tranquillity
West of Wenlock Edge	Intervening valley between Wenlock and Kenley escarpments.	Wooded valley with medium sized fields.	Relatively common landscape feature.	Representative of valley and dale landforms within Shropshire.	None found.	Relatively managed landscape although some areas of un-kept scrubland.	None found.	Relatively tranquil.
East of Wenlock Edge	Undulating topography of dip slope of Wenlock Edge giving way to flat arable farmland.	Complex topography containing arable fields and some woodland blocks. Presence of quarrying noticeable.	Relatively rare landscape due to complexity of topography.	Representative of usual dip slope characteristics.	None found.	Managed landscape.	Bourton Manor.	Relatively tranquil.
Much Wenlock	Nestled at the foot of Wenlock Edge. Settlement	Historic core. Although town has experienced modern development of fringes.	Common landscape character.	Market town that has seen peripheral development at fringes.	NVZ. Wenlock Priory SM.	Managed landscape.	Birthplace of William Penny Brooks – founder father of the modern Olympic games.	Relatively un-tranquil.
Clee Hill	High quality expanse of upland moorland with radiating ridges from core. Limited impact of quarrying.	Rugged treeless moorland covered with heather and bracken.	Upland moorland is a rare habitat within the UK.	Characteristic example of heather and bracken upland moorland.	AONB, NVZ quarries designated SSSI. Several SM designations upon hill. Registered moorland.	Windswept, rugged and relatively wild.	Culturally significant quarries. Ancient hillforts.	Tranquil, remote and relatively wild.

Area	Landscape Quality	Scenic Quality	Rarity	Representativeness	Conservation Interests	Wildness	Associations	Tranquillity
South of Cleve Hill	Radiating ridges forming transition from Cleve Hill to lower plains.	Complex topography with attractive wooded valleys and ridges.	Relatively rare landscape within Shropshire.	Characteristic of transition of upland to lowland.	SM at Nicklass Moat. River Teme SSSI further south.	Relatively wild decreasing with distance from Cleve Hill.	Whitton Park Estate.	Relatively tranquil.
East of Cleve Hill	Sloping and undulating land forming transition from upland to lowland.	Complex topography of undulating land with sunken lanes and developed hedgerows.	Fairly common landscape.	Characteristic of transition of upland to lowland.	SM of Woodhouse Moated Friary at Hopton Wafers. SSSI at Catherton Common	Managed landscape.	Historic church.	Relatively tranquil.
North of Ludlow	Coherency of landscape decreases closer to Ludlow as detractors such as urban edge and agricultural fields becomes apparent.	Attractive wooded escarpment slopes to large agricultural fields and urban fringe.	Common landscape within Shropshire.	Typical scarp slope leading to urban development upon plain.	AONB follows escarpment ridge. ESA and SSSI all within AONB.	Managed landscape.	None found.	Woodland creates secluded landscape. Relatively tranquil.
Town of Ludlow	Sits upon terrace of River Teme. Settlement has expanded onto surrounding floodplain.	Historic core. Modern fringe development.	Common landscape character.	Urban area expansion.	River Teme SSSI. SM of Augustinian Friary, Ludlow Castle and town walls. Whitcliffe Common.	Managed landscape.	Quoted as the most perfect town in England by Sir John Betjeman.	Un-tranquil.

Area	Landscape Quality	Scenic Quality	Rarity	Representativeness	Conservation Interests	Wildness	Associations	Tranquillity
Upper Corve Dale	Landscape has become fragmented due to spread of large arable fields.	Proliferation of large arable fields and hedgerow removal has degraded scenic quality.	Common landscape character.	Representative of agricultural intensification.	SM motte and bailey at Brockton (within boundary).	Managed land.	None found.	Relatively tranquil.
Lower Corve Dale	Cohesive landscape of small, irregular pastoral fields within encompassing valley escarpments.	High quality – irregular field patterns, developed hedgerows and undulating topography. Quality decreases further south.	Relatively rare wide valley floodplain within Shropshire.	Classic example of wide lowland river valley. Visual links to AONB escarpment remain.	SM designations of Corfham Castle, motte and baily at Corfton and motte and bailey at Culmington Farm.	Relative un-wild archaic landscape.	Ancient forts and castles.	Tranquil and sedate landscape.
Craven Arms Surrounds	Landscape has been modified by man for the intensification of agricultural production.	Flat featureless arable farmland.	Common landscape character.	Landscape representative of lowland arable.	SM of Bowl Barrow at Belair.	Managed landscape.	Former important frontier trading post.	Relatively un-tranquil human managed environment.
Craven Arms	Town sits upon flat plain at foot of Wenlock Edge.	Flat featureless arable farmland.	Common landscape character.	Representative of urban area.	SM of Bowl Barrow west of Ambleside.	Managed landscape.	Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre.	Un-tranquil.

Area	Landscape Quality	Scenic Quality	Rarity	Representativeness	Conservation Interests	Wildness	Associations	Tranquillity
North of Craven Arms	Landscape fragmented due to A49 and proliferation of large arable fields.	Flat arable land intersected by A49.	Common landscape character.	Representative of agricultural intensification.	Within AONB.	Managed landscape.	None found.	Local impact of A49 apparent. Un tranquil.
South of Clun Forest	Cohesive flow of hills from Clun Uplands into Wales and Hereford Hills.	High scenic quality of rolling hills and incised valleys. Some development at Bucknell.	Rare unspoilt upland area.	Representative of upland hill land of Welsh border.	River Teme and Brampton Bryan Park SSSI. SM at Coxall Knoll.	Wild and remote in character.	Site of Owain Glyndwr's famous victories against English.	Limited settlement results in isolated and tranquil landscape.
Knighton	Nestled within Teme valley between Clun Uplands and	Attractive timber building and steep narrow roads. Some modern development at fringes.	Relatively rare and unspoilt character.	Small market town.	Majority of town within Wales. No data available.	Isolated and remote.	Town split by English/Welsh border. AONB splits town.	Relatively tranquil.
Land North and West of Clun Forest	Flow of landscape from uplands to wide valley lowland.	Attractive rolling uplands, wooded escarpment and river channel.	Relatively rare landscape character with little development.	Classic example of escarpment and intimate valley.	Within Wales. No data available.	Wild uplands give way to sedate ridges and river valley.	Clun Forest Royal Hunting Forest. Ancient forts.	Tranquil wooded river valley.

Area	Landscape Quality	Scenic Quality	Rarity	Representativeness	Conservation Interests	Wildness	Associations	Tranquillity
Bishop's Castle and Surrounds	Undulating topography forming transition from uplands to lowlands.	Undulating topography. Some industrial development. Flatter arable fields to east.	Relatively common landscape.	Representative of transition from uplands to wide valley lowlands.	Within NVZ. SM motte and bailey at Bishop's Castle, More, Hardwick and Lyndham. Hillfort at Eyton. Tower at Lower Lea. Bowl Barrow at Eaton Farm.	Managed landscape.	Historic church. Castle remnants. Bishop's Castle Railway.	Tranquillity increases with distance from Bishop's Castle.
Camlad Valley	Undulating ridges flowing down from Stiperstone range containing wooded Camlad Valley.	Undulating ridges with some medium sized arable farmland. Wooded Camlad River Valley. Disused quarries present although not intrusive.	Relatively common landscape.	Representative of transition from upland ridge to lowland plain.	Forms border of ESA. SM of Caerbrae and Calcot Camp. SSSI at Spy Wood and Aldress Dingle.	Relatively managed landscape with pockets of unmanaged. Some disused quarrying present.	Marrington Hall. Disused quarries.	Tranquil wooded valley. Although tranquillity decreases with proximity to A490.
Corndon Hill	Distinctive hill at southern end of Stiperstone range.	High quality hill of bracken and rough pasture. Distinguishing profile of rocky outcrops.	Iconic hill that dominates surrounding landscape.	Characteristic of wider Stiperstones range further north.	Within Wales. No data available.	Wild and rugged appearance. Little settlement.	Ancient cairns and hillforts. Mined and quarried throughout history.	Tranquil and detached from the surrounding lowland development.
Church Stoke	Urban settlement upon lowland plain.	Scenic quality degraded by urban development.	Common landscape.	Representative of urban development.	Within Wales, No data available.	Managed appearance.	None found.	Limited tranquillity.

Area	Landscape Quality	Scenic Quality	Rarity	Representativeness	Conservation Interests	Wildness	Associations	Tranquillity
North Stretton	Flat arable plain leading to undulating topography within AONB.	Flat, large arable fields.	Common landscape character.	Representative of agricultural intensification.	None found.	Managed appearance.	Some Roman and Victorian influences.	Managed landscape, Limited tranquillity.
Acton Burnell and Surrounds	Pockets of high quality parkland surrounded by large -arable fields.	Contrast in quality between parkland and large arable fields.	Presence of historical buildings within wider common landscape.	Representative of agricultural intensification and modern development.	SM roman bridge at Radnor, Acton Burnell Castle. Within Conservation area.	Managed appearance.	Historic links to Robert Burnell and Edward I.	Relatively tranquil.
Church Preen and Surrounds	Valley lowland between Wenlock Edge and Kenley Ridge.	Wooded pastoral lowland with some scrubland.	Relatively common landscape.	Typical lowland valley character relatively unspoilt.	None found.	Managed appearance.	13 th Century Church.	Relatively tranquil.

Appendix 2 Statutory Rural Designations (Maps 1-22)

Appendix 3 Tranquillity Mapping

Plans

Boundary Review Sections
(2768/17 02/06 FM/SM)

Shropshire Hills AONB Boundary Review
(2768/18 03/06 FM/SM)

- | | |
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| Plan 1 | The Wrekin
(2768/01 02/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 2 | Severn Valley
(2768/02a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 3 | Wenlock Edge
(2768/03a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 4 | Church Preen and Surrounds
(2768/04a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 5 | North of All Stretton
(2768/05a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 6 | East of Clee Hill
(2768/06a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 7 | South of Clee Hill
(2768/07a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 8 | North of Ludlow
(2768/08a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 9 | Lower Corve Dale
(2768/09a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 10 | Corve Dale
(2768/10a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 11 | Craven Arms
(2768/11a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 12 | South of Clun Forest
(2768/12a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 13 | West of Clun Forest
(2768/13a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 14 | North of Clun Forest
(2768/14a 03/06 FM/SM) |
| Plan 15 | Bishop's Castle |

(2768/15a 03/06 FM/SM)

Plan 16

Corndon Hill and Land West of Stapeley Hill
(2768/16a 03/06 FM/SM)