

## Position Statement on the AONB boundary

Issues concerning boundaries of designated areas can sometimes be problematic. This statement is intended to clarify the AONB Partnership's approach to the boundary in carrying out its work.

### Background

The Shropshire Hills AONB was designated in 1958, according to criteria for natural beauty set out in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, and its boundary has remained unchanged. The distinction between the AONB and surrounding countryside has been made through the policies of planning authorities, though some have sought also to apply high standards of protection to areas around the AONB. During the 1980s and 1990s the AONB was not the defining aspect of practical management initiatives, and the South Shropshire Countryside Project and later Shropshire Hills Countryside Unit worked to a larger area than the AONB, based on parish boundaries. This area was also used as the basis of the Shropshire Hills Advisory Plan in 1992. The AONB Joint Advisory Committee was formed in 1993, and supported both working in a wider area and the aspiration to formally review and enlarge the AONB boundary.

With the passing of the Countryside & Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 and subsequent guidance from the Countryside Agency, there was a national move to concentrate work on the designated area of AONBs. (One of the defined core functions of AONB teams is "*Promoting the AONB vision and management plan to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside.*") This has been reflected in the Shropshire Hills by production of the AONB Management Plan in 2004. The Blue Remembered Hills project was developed before this change of focus was fully implemented, and ran until the end of 2007 within the wider area of the former Advisory Plan.

The AONB Partnership in 2006 commissioned a study by Waterman CPM consultants to provide recommendations for a boundary review of the Shropshire Hills AONB, and assess supporting evidence. The study largely endorsed the current boundary, but identified a number of small areas which could justify inclusion, and highlighted that significant adjoining areas in Wales were of AONB quality. A consultation with relevant authorities over 2007 revealed no support for a legal boundary review of the Shropshire Hills AONB. In February 2008, the AONB Partnership's previously stated aspiration towards a boundary review was formally dropped, and replaced by the position outlined below.

## **Position with regard to review of the AONB boundary**

There are areas of considerable landscape value beyond the designated AONB itself. For some small areas, evidence may indeed be strong enough to support their inclusion against current criteria. **The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership does not however believe that the benefits of formally amending the boundary are justified against the considerable costs and resources this would entail.**

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership would support the designation of adjacent land in Wales as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is the Partnership's view that if this were to happen, the Shropshire Hills AONB should remain separate in terms of identity and administration from a Welsh AONB, but that cross-border collaboration should be given a high priority.

## **Position with regard to work of the AONB Partnership in relation to the boundary**

The Partnership exists to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Shropshire Hills. **It will work to this end, and encourage its partners and others also to work, in ways which will strengthen the integrity and identity of the Shropshire Hills as an area of exceptional landscape value.** The AONB designation provides the core and legal backing for this approach, and though old, the boundary has been largely endorsed by modern assessment, and still encompasses the key features of importance.

**The Partnership will focus its work strongly on the designated AONB area, but will work in a flexible and pragmatic way in relation to the AONB boundary, to secure the maximum benefit for the Shropshire Hills.** In particular the Partnership will:

- have regard to, and make efforts to conserve, important features lying just outside the boundary and strongly linked to the Shropshire Hills, especially features crossing the boundary (for example rivers, geological features, Offa's Dyke).
- consider the context of the AONB in relation to:
  - economic and cultural links of nearby communities (including market towns lying just beyond the boundary) with the natural beauty of the AONB,
  - facilities and services for visitors and tourism which have an influence on patterns of visitor use within the AONB,
  - supply chains for products originating within the AONB, where these relate to management of the landscape (e.g. farm produce, wood products).
- consider planning applications for significant developments outside the AONB which may have an impact on its special qualities,
- collaborate, where results for the AONB will be achieved more effectively or more efficiently by working with others in relation to a larger or different area e.g. county-wide initiatives (though benefit to the AONB will remain the guiding rationale for the Partnership's involvement).
- avoid being drawn into issues and work outside the AONB boundary where there is no significant benefit to the AONB. This will include socio-economic issues in towns and settlements outside the boundary where there is little connection with the landscape.
- not support projects or initiatives which may undermine the integrity of the Shropshire Hills area, or the Partnership's work focused on the AONB.