

# Shropshire Hills Uplands Forum

7.00pm – 9.30pm Monday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017  
Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms

## Discussion Workshop Summary Report



*in collaboration with:*

**THE UPLANDS ALLIANCE**  
A Network For the Future of England's Uplands



This open-invitation evening event was attended by 82 people, including farmers, landowners, public agencies, community representatives, environmental NGOs, recreation and business interests from around the Shropshire Hills. The purpose was to gather a range of stakeholders to share views and work together to develop ideas on future policy and funding for upland land management. The focus was on the public benefits the Shropshire Hills uplands provide society, and how these could be supported and enhanced in the future.

Four speakers gave perspectives from their organisations on the opportunities for potential new UK land management policies: Julia Aglionby (Uplands Alliance and Foundation for Common Land), Caroline Bedell (CLA), Andrew Hearle (National Trust) and Robin Milton (NFU). After some questions, the rest of the evening was based on small group discussions, looking at 'Public benefits and public funding', and 'Moving forward, what we need to do'.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is grateful for support with the event from the Uplands Alliance, NFU, CLA, National Trust, Natural England, and the Foundation for Common Land.

The **public benefits** put to attendees which the uplands provide were agreed:

Food production, Flood management, Tranquillity and wellbeing, Carbon storage, Space, exercise & relaxation, Biodiversity and ecosystems, Clean air and water, Landscape, Wood products, minerals, Historic and cultural value.

Additional benefits added by discussion groups included: Tourism, Livestock in the landscape, and breeding livestock, Education & skills development, Source of income, Energy, Soil stability and health.

The following is a summary of key points raised in the discussion groups against four questions. There was a diversity of views and not necessarily consensus on every point, but the issues raised most often are towards the top of the bullet lists.

### **Which public benefits from the uplands should government funding support?**

- Food production from farming is the basis for land management and keeps people in the uplands, but shouldn't be the only consideration i.e. not at any cost.
- Flood management – the way land is managed can make a difference to downstream water flow, but land managers are not paid for it, so there is little incentive. Government funding should support effective natural flood management measures.
- Biodiversity and ecosystems are a base from which other things follow. Climate change adaptation is important to consider.
- Some considered the landscape benefits for tranquillity, exercise, relaxation, etc – should be paid directly by visitors through accommodation cafes etc, while others recognised not all farmers and landowners can charge for the public benefits they provide. Infrastructure for visitors - car parking, footpaths, etc needs public funding.
- Clean water – this will be helped by managing land better for biodiversity, e.g. reducing sediment. Reducing pollutants such as pesticides will come from regulation and also action by water companies, but government schemes may also help.
- Education – programmes for schools and wider public awareness can help to underpin other benefits.

### **What principles should guide public funding for the uplands?**

- A locally targeted and focussed scheme within a basic consistent national framework. Use local structures for administration e.g. AONB?
- Integrated schemes – don't damage one thing to benefit another. More environmentally based, but also encourage employment opportunities and the local economy.
- Fair reward – being proportionate and realistic to actual costs and activity. .
- Easy to follow, simple and cheap to implement. Longer term funding.
- More public benefits = more money paying for outcomes, but these are difficult to measure and hard to verify. Need a variety of ways of monitoring.
- Landscape may be too large a scale – divided opinion within the group (some farmers thought it too large, other members thought it necessary).

### **How should public funding for the uplands work, to follow these principles?**

- Local continuity and planning – a contact advisor.
- Organisations involved need to be well linked up. Simplicity, less driven by technology.
- More to be done for young farmers – skills are being lost.
- Farm business tenancies have changed – grant must go to primary producer.
- Encourage certain enterprises that bring public benefits e.g. suckler cows
- Some of the best events have been farmer to farmer knowledge exchange, best practice – but internet is often not available, and real contact is invaluable.
- Train farmers to monitor outputs – use local knowledge and keep simple - cannot monitor individual species but can monitor habitat and guide local delivery.
- In some cases, farmers can work as group to collaborate e.g. commons.

### **What we need to do for the Shropshire Hills - 'Looking forward, we need to ...'**

- Build common ground between conservation bodies, farmers and wider community – to understand the needs of all users and managers of the land, to work together for common goals, and agree on a clear vision for Shropshire Hills.
- Get simple messages out to engage the wider public as to the importance of the uplands, the central role of farming (small/medium scale family farms) and the environmental, health and economic benefits they can deliver.
- Encourage new land management support schemes to have locally relevant delivery within a national framework – targeted schemes with local priorities for public benefits. Develop properly convened partnerships to involve farmers and landowners in scheme design. Link up business, research and government support.
- Identify what was good and worked well from the 25-year ESA schemes, from HLS and what is working well now, and incorporate these into a new scheme alongside new ideas.
- Consider and address resilience to climate change including flooding. Incorporate learning from around the world, more international perspectives.
- Ensure we join up between livestock production, land management, rural economy and communities. Support young people and new entrants into farming by addressing affordable housing, viable business opportunities and planning issues.