

Stretton Valley, Wenlock Edge and Dales – extract from draft Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24

This area can justifiably claim to be the heart of the Shropshire Hills, with the Stretton valley containing a major transport corridor and the AONB's main town, Church Stretton. Key themes for future effort are ensuring development is in keeping with the landscape, developing tourism sustainably, and managing the increase in outdoor activities.

This is the most settled part of the AONB and includes the largest lowland area, with more intensive and arable farming. The A49 corridor makes this the most accessible but also the least tranquil part of the AONB. Church Stretton, the main town within the AONB, has a superb setting among the hills, with the Long Mynd, Caer Caradoc and the Lawley providing some of the most iconic images of the Shropshire Hills. The historic character of the town is enhanced by considerable tree cover.

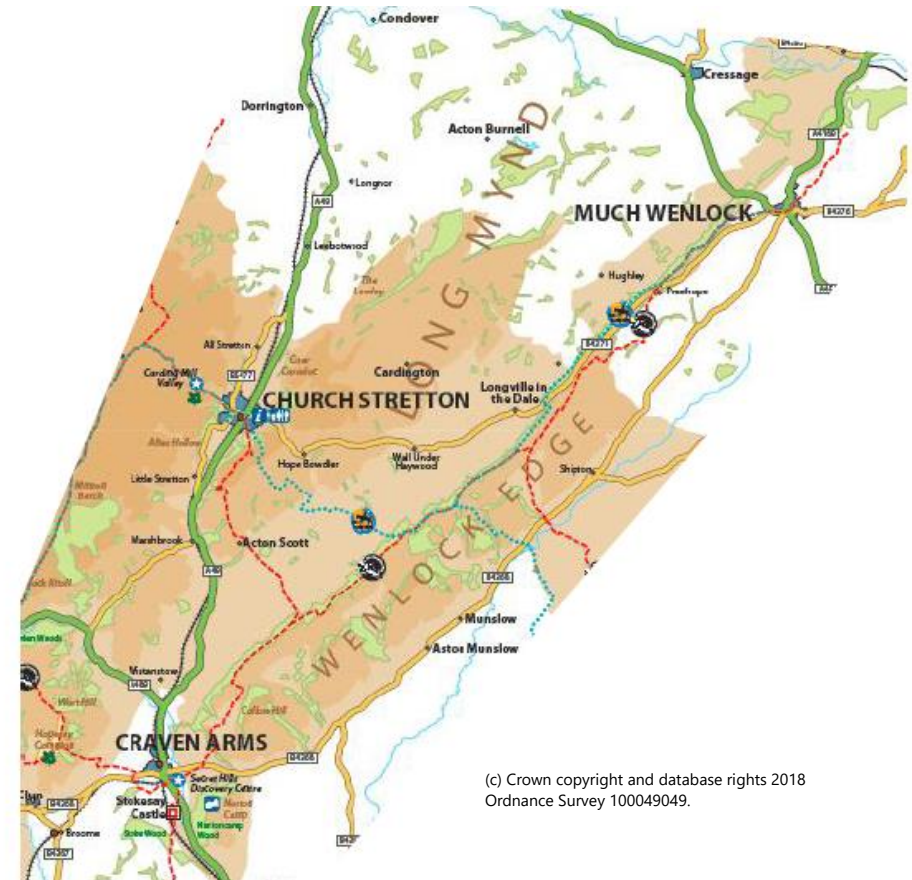
Tourism is more strongly developed in this part of the AONB than elsewhere. Carding Mill Valley is the major visitor honeypot site in the AONB, predominantly used by day visitors. It is carefully managed by the National Trust, who also own substantial parts of Wenlock Edge. This famous wooded limestone escarpment is a major landmark, running over 20 miles from near Much Wenlock to Craven Arms and separates Ape Dale from the Corve Dale. There are significant former quarry sites on the back of Wenlock Edge, along with areas of species-rich calcareous grassland. The Corve Dale lies mostly outside the AONB but is of conservation value through its many heritage features, the River Corve itself, veteran trees including black poplar, and in views between Wenlock Edge and the Cleve Hills.

Key Issues

Development pressures are the highest here of any part of the AONB. Church Stretton has taken its share of new housing and employment development over the years, and the allocation of future sites continues to be contentious. The town links itself strongly with the Shropshire Hills and the AONB, and is seeking to make the most of its location and potential for outdoor activities in the development of tourism in a sustainable way.

Farming is more diverse in this area due to lower-lying and better quality land, and so has more options for the future than the uplands. More intensive methods and large agricultural buildings therefore have particular potential to cause harm to the landscape quality of the area.

Ash dieback will be a particular issue in this part of the AONB where ash is more common on the lime-rich soils, especially around Wenlock Edge.



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Growth in road traffic on the A49 is a concern, and is affected by development well outside the area, including in Shrewsbury and Hereford, and in north and south Wales. This corridor does however offer opportunities for sustainable tourism linked to the railway line and good bus services, and for capturing passing trade through farm shops and other facilities.

Some former quarry sites on Wenlock Edge have been used for industrial activities, which may have limited the areas potential of this part of Wenlock Edge to develop into a really significant visitor destination and contributor to the sustainable tourism economy. There remains a need to maximise opportunities for conservation and quiet enjoyment where possible.



Priorities

- The need to retain character and limit the negative impacts of change and development is probably more acute here than anywhere else in the AONB. Church Stretton is an important service centre but is also the only one of Shropshire's Core Strategy market towns within a nationally protected landscape. The physical capacity for further development may be more limited, and it is important that the sensitivities of Church Stretton's location within the AONB are fully considered in decisions.
- A sustainable tourism approach is vital in this part of the AONB and also made more possible by the good transport links, attractiveness for walking and landscape interest in the area. This part of the AONB is a key link for visitors from Shrewsbury, Telford and more populated areas to the north and east. The development of a better located Visitor Information Centre in Church Stretton would be a real benefit.
- The accessibility of the town enables it to provide services for the benefit of other parts of the AONB. Developing further the links between Church Stretton and the AONB should allow the town to play a greater role in raising people's awareness of the AONB and its value, and to develop increasingly as the natural centre or hub of the AONB.

Follow the link to download the full draft Plan at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/a-special-place/management-plan/>