

Sustainability Appraisal of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Draft Management Plan 2014 – 2019

Non-technical Summary

December 2013

The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a national designation covering a quarter of Shropshire. The Management Plan is a statutory document outlining priorities for the future of the area. Alongside the review of the Management Plan, a process of Sustainability Appraisal examines the interactions between policies in the draft Plan and a broad range of environmental, economic and social issues. The purpose of this is to look at any potential negative effects arising from the Plan on these wider issues, and see how alternative approaches can reduce any conflicts.

The draft AONB Management Plan for 2014-19 has four strategic themes:

Conserving and enhancing our outstanding landscape and nature

Wildlife, heritage, tranquillity, appropriate development

Helping our local communities thrive in a more sustainable way

Farming and land management, prosperity and wellbeing, low carbon

Promoting personal enjoyment, understanding and participation

For local people and visitors, sense of place and belonging, doing and taking part

Maintaining and enriching the natural services on which we all depend

Ecosystem services (air, water, food, climate, etc) and wider benefits to society

and six Delivery Priorities:

Joining up the conservation effort

Valuing the AONB in planning and decisions

Encouraging a sustainable land management economy

Supporting enjoyment and a visitor economy in harmony with the AONB

Raising awareness and participation, especially among young people

Local working with communities

The full draft Management Plan and Sustainability Appraisal report are available at www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk. This brief non-technical summary outlines some of the principal issues and possible alternatives emerging from the Sustainability Appraisal.

The Appraisal process shows that the approaches of the Management Plan are generally strong for sustainability, and there are many more positive interactions between environmental, economic and social aspects than negative ones. The Plan provides an important means to navigate some of the key issues for the area.

EFFECTS ON OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES, AND ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- Current policies protecting the landscape prevent larger scale **wind energy development** which could be effective in lowering carbon emissions.
Allowing large scale wind energy development would reduce this conflict, but at the expense of the nationally protected landscape. The Management Plan is strong on alternative approaches to lowering carbon emissions, including concentrating wind energy development outside protected landscapes, vigorously pursuing energy conservation to reduce demand, encouraging renewable technologies which are more compatible (especially woodfuel), and optimising carbon storage in soils and trees.
- **All renewable energy** technologies need to be carefully applied to avoid damage to biodiversity, heritage, landscape and resources.
Good information and guidance will be key to achieving this.
- In the longer term, **climate change** will intensify conflicts between basic human needs (e.g. food, energy) and maintaining nature and landscape.
Demonstration is necessary to show that food and energy production is compatible in the area with maintaining landscape and nature.

EFFECTS ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES, AND ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- AONB designation **prevents some forms of development**, potentially limiting economic progress. However the high quality of the AONB's **environment is also an economic asset** which can be sensitively used, but may be damaged by inappropriate development.
Alternatives lie largely in the balance of how protective policies and decisions are. Optimising and publicising the positive economic effects of the high quality environment will be very helpful in influencing attitudes.
- As a largely very rural area, **people are very dependent on transport by private car**. Policies aiming to limit the impact of transport and traffic on the area need to avoid negative social and economic consequences.
The influence of the Plan on this issue is relatively small, though efforts to link recreation opportunities to public transport are likely to have benefits to those most in need. The promotion of local products and sustainable tourism is also likely to support jobs while minimising transport. There is evidence that strengthening community in rural areas can help to reduce dependence on mobility to meet people's needs.
- High standards of protection of the AONB may exacerbate problems of **affordability of housing**, especially by making the area more attractive to wealthier incomers.
The measures to reduce this conflict lie largely beyond the scope of the Management Plan, and lie in the Council's policies for affordable housing and contributions. The Management Plan makes clear that affordable housing should be allowed in the AONB where other forms of development would not be, but that high standards of design need to be maintained.
- The **higher standards, e.g. of design**, sought in the AONB may add to costs. An emphasis on quality in tourism provision risks excluding those on lower incomes.
This may be somewhat overcome by good guidance and early consideration. Some design aspects do not affect cost, and where higher costs are incurred there are likely to be some benefits to the local economy (e.g. through using local materials). Provision for low cost accommodation which meets good environmental standards e.g. campsites, hostels, should be supported.