

Wrekin Forest Partnership

Notes of meeting, Tuesday 23rd April 2015, Little Wenlock Village Hall

Present:

Michael Barker, Telford & Wrekin Council, Assistant Director: Planning Specialist
Jayne Davidson, Little Wenlock Parish Council
David de Courcy, Shropshire Geological Society
Brian Herring, Wellington LA21
Phil Holden, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Manager (Chair)
Pete Lambert, Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Dorothy Roberts, Wellington Town Council
Jim Roberts, landowner, Upper Huntington Farm
Dag Saunders, Walkabout Wellington
Robert Saunders, Wellington LA21
Cllr Jacqui Seymour, Telford & Wrekin Council
Michael Vout, Telford & Wrekin Council, Team Leader Environment and Planning Policy

1. Apologies

George Chancellor, individual member and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Chair
Bob Coalbran, Wellington Walkers Are Welcome
Juliet Esp, Little Wenlock Parish Council
Andrew Jenkinson, Shropshire Geological Society
Harry Vane, landowner, Raby Estate

2. Notes of meeting 24 February 2015

These were accepted. Actions – Some members had submitted comments to Pete on the draft of the Plan.

3. Developing the new Wrekin Forest Plan

Pete reminded members of the process so far for developing the Plan, for which the Wildlife Trust had secured some funding from the Jean Jackson Charitable Trust. A public consultation on issues facing the area had been held before Christmas, and comments were now being received on the draft Plan from members of the Partnership.

The ambitions to create a hard boundary around the area for protective purposes looked now to be unfeasible within the planning system. The 'core' area as described in the draft Plan had various forms of existing protection, while the wider area with a mix of farmland, housing, brownfield and industrial land mostly did not. Telford & Wrekin Council's intentions for the 'Shaping Places' Local Plan were more towards the development of policies that looked at the setting of the AONB, for which there were examples from other areas.

Pete had recently done a presentation at Wrockwardine Parish Council, at which these issues had been discussed. He also said that it was clear that visitor facilities can be very sensitive in the core area, and there were differences of opinion on how to move forward on these.

Michael Barker said that strong evidence would be needed to back up any planning policy, but he hoped the concept of a buffer area could be worked in to Shaping Places somehow, and possibly developed further in the future.

Jayne expressed concern that highlighting areas as special without protecting them could further add to development pressure. Michael Barker said that the Shaping Places plan coming out in June will allocate sites, and outside these, development would be strongly resisted.

Michael Vout said that policies from elsewhere on the setting of AONB looked promising, but reiterated that strong evidence would be needed to back up any policy, especially those that seek to be more prescriptive. He said that the Council were intending to carry out a Landscape Sensitivity study, which would look at the area and levels and types of sensitivity, as well as views and the effect on the core area. It was hoped that this would then be built into the approach of the Shaping Places plan.

Jacqui mentioned the five year land supply for housing which the Council had now established, which should make sites less vulnerable. Neighbourhood Plans were mentioned as a process, with examples from elsewhere in the Borough. However, it was clarified that a Neighbourhood Plan cannot opt to give a community less new development than the Local Development Framework sets out (though it can opt for more). The possibility was mentioned of a number of parishes working together on a Neighbourhood Plan, though this was not felt to be easy.

Jim Roberts mentioned his discussions with Harworth Estates and said that restoration on the Huntington Lane opencast site had more or less stopped, though there was still work to do. Possibilities of new woodland planting and creation of education facilities were mentioned, along with some interest from developers of solar farms. Pete mentioned that the Wildlife Trust were engaging in discussions with various parties about the future of this area. Michael Barker stressed that no proposals yet had planning permission, and the site allocations which would be set out in June would be highly relevant.

Phil asked how the new Wrekin Forest Plan can best seek to influence the Shaping Places plan? It was clarified that it cannot drive policy, but it would nevertheless be a valuable supporting document.

Pete suggested that the Partnership should look at reviewing and updating its governance in relation to taking the Plan forward. Dag commented that as a newcomer, the issues were very complicated, but he said there was a lot of love for the Wrekin area among the public.

Robert raised whether election promises around housing delivery would affect the area through higher target for housing numbers? Michael Barker said that housing delivery in the Borough is very strong, and the issue is viability. Inevitably, a change in government policy could have an effect, but this would have to be worked through.

Discussion returned to the draft Wrekin Forest Plan, and it was agreed that Telford & Wrekin Council's input to the planning section would be very beneficial – **ACTION Michael Vout and Michael Barker.**

The brief for the Landscape Sensitivity study would be circulated - **ACTION Michael Vout.**

A further period for members of the Partnership to comment on the draft Plan was agreed, until Friday 15 May – **ACTION All.**

The Shaping Places plan was due to go to Telford & Wrekin Council Cabinet on 5 June.

There was discussion again on the possibility of forming a charitable trust to raise funds to help with basic practical management of The Wrekin, visitor pressures, etc. Dorothy said that one way could be to call a public meeting and see if people came forward to get involved in establishing something. Phil agreed to set down briefly on paper some of the ideas he had mentioned - **ACTION Phil Holden.**

4. Date of next meeting

Thursday 11th June 2015, 7-9pm, Little Wenlock Village Hall