

# Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24 - POLICIES

## **POLICY LM1 - Land Management Supporting Landscape and Natural Beauty**

### i) Habitats and Networks

Existing areas of high quality habitat should be retained, and networks developed of higher quality habitat through targeted improvements by agreement on privately owned land, by all available mechanisms.

### ii) Climate Change Adaptation

Pro-active adaptation to climate change, focusing on natural processes and wildlife, is essential to retaining the natural beauty of the AONB and must be given a high priority.

### iii) Regulating Organisations

Organisations which regulate designated sites and features, environmental quality and amenity should make full use of available measures to ensure the highest standards appropriate to a nationally protected landscape are achieved in the AONB. A supportive and awareness-raising approach should be used wherever possible, but mechanisms for legal enforcement should be employed where necessary. Known blackspots and problems should be targeted, while consideration should be given to the secondary AONB purposes of having regard for the needs of rural industries and local communities, and promoting sustainable development.

### iv) New Environmental Land Management Schemes

The Shropshire Hills should be a priority area for new environmental land management funding, and farmers should be actively encouraged to utilise the options that best contribute to the AONB Management Plan's aims.

### v) Rivers, catchments and water

Management of water resources should be given a high priority, including water quality and quantity, habitats and species. Integrated catchment management approaches are supported.

### vi) Woodlands and trees

Broadleaved woodland comprising native species should be expanded, with restoration prioritised on Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and Plantation on Wood Pasture (PWP).

Where felling is taking place, opportunities should be sought to improve design and landscape sensitivity of plantations. Reversion to open habitat should be targeted to locations where landscape benefits and the potential for high value habitats such as heathland are greatest. Any new or replacement planting should follow the highest standards of design guidelines in relation to landscape and amenity, nature and heritage conservation and resource protection.

Planting of new trees outside woodlands should be a high priority, to combat the effects of tree diseases.

Disincentives to tree planting within agricultural funding regimes should be removed wherever possible.

#### vii) Heritage

The conservation and enhancement of the area's historic environment and heritage assets is a high priority and all activities should seek to enhance or better reveal their significance as well as promote their wider understanding and enjoyment.

#### viii) Land Management

Farmers and land managers are the main stewards of the landscape, and their actions which help maintain natural beauty and the special qualities of the AONB should be supported. Solutions which enable environmentally, economically and socially sustainable farm businesses should be supported.

### **POLICY P1 - Protection of the AONB**

i) In line with national and local authority planning policies, the AONB has the highest standards of protection for landscape and natural beauty, and the purposes of designation should be given great weight in planning decisions, also taking into account the statutory AONB Management Plan.

ii) Full consideration should be given to the purposes of designation in all decisions affecting the AONB and should reflect sustainability and the full range of special qualities defined in the Management Plan as well as landscape character, views and visual amenity. Exceptionally where a significant adverse impact associated with development cannot be avoided, appropriate mitigation or compensation measures including habitat creation or community benefits, should be sought.

iii) Tranquillity should be taken fully into account in both strategic and specific decisions. Proposals having a significant impact on tranquillity in the AONB should be prevented where possible. Expansion of airports or alterations to flight path corridors which increase the volume or impacts of air traffic over the AONB should not be allowed.

iv) Small scale quarrying to supply local materials for repairing traditional buildings and structures is supported, subject to careful consideration of environmental factors, including the conservation value of former quarries where these may be reopened.

v) In line with Shropshire Council policy MD8 on infrastructure, opportunities created by technological advances should be sought to remove or reduce the prominence of hilltop telecommunications structures, while still improving services. New overhead cables should be avoided where possible, with emphasis given to undergrounding or off-grid options.

vi) Even with small structures not requiring planning permission, care should be taken to avoid loss of wildness. On many hills and in more secluded valleys, especially where there are few man-made objects, this will mean a preference for no structures at all. In cases where structures are essential, their location and design may need to be modified to reduce the impact on wildness.

vii) Water environment. Development should avoid adverse effects on rivers or streams such as channel alteration or siltation during construction phase, and any ongoing impacts such as increased nutrient run-off or silting due to increased traffic on minor roads. Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) should be used to aid water quality and slow the speed of water run-off to lessen flooding. Other wetland features such as ponds, marshes and flushes should not be harmed by development.

viii) Setting of the AONB

Development in the area around the AONB should be assessed for its impacts on the AONB itself, and also take account of the landscape quality of the setting of the AONB. Measures to consider and mitigate such impacts should include where required Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments; care over orientation, site layout, height and scale of structures and buildings; consideration of the landscape, land uses and heritage assets around and beyond the development site; careful use of colours, materials and non-reflective surfaces; restraint and care in the and use of lighting.

[This policy links with current Shropshire Council Core Strategy policies CS5 Countryside and Green Belt, CS17 Environmental Networks].

#### **POLICY P2 - Landscape**

i) Priority should be given to protecting key features of the landscape. Where possible, existing features such as hedges, watercourses, trees and ponds should be incorporated into site design. Landscaping measures and creation of new features can enhance a development, but these must be appropriate to the location. Changes should only be pursued that are appropriate to each landscape type and the features and characteristics that define local distinctiveness.

[This policy links with current Shropshire Council SAMDev Policy MD12 Natural Environment].

#### **POLICY P3 - Heritage and development**

i) Existing traditional buildings of heritage interest should be repaired and re-used in preference to being replaced by new building, and conservation advice should be sought.

ii) All proposals relating to the re-use and redevelopment of traditional rural buildings should be informed by an assessment of the farmstead as a whole, including its landscape setting, character, significance and sensitivity to and potential for change. Traditional rural buildings of heritage interest should be retained in appropriate agricultural use, where possible. All proposals for new uses (employment, live-work, residential) will need to be carefully assessed in order to achieve the conservation and enhancement of the heritage asset and secure its sustainable use. Where it can be demonstrated that new buildings will sustain and enhance the significance of a farmstead, an element of new build might offer the most appropriate option.

iii) New development should take full account of the setting of heritage assets.

[This policy links with current Shropshire Council SAMDev Policy MD13 Historic Environment].

## **POLICY P4 - Housing and Design of Development**

i) Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important to clarify expectations and reconcile local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those who will be affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community.

ii) To create truly sustainable places for people to live, great care should be taken to ensure design is of the highest quality whilst at the same time seeking to enhance local distinctiveness. The design of all housing (market priced and affordable) should demonstrate sensitivity to the immediate surroundings and the special qualities of the AONB.

iii) Where affordable housing is allowed when other forms of development would not be, in order to meet social need, the standards of design and sensitivity to the AONB should not be compromised. Affordable housing within the AONB is expected to be of a higher design quality than outside the AONB. These cases need to include a rigorous assessment of identified local housing need and consideration of the capacity of the landscape to accommodate development without undermining the purposes of designation. Development should not contribute to the loss of irreplaceable habitats or established ancient trees. All development should be designed so as to protect, restore, conserve and enhance the natural, built and historic environment. All development should be appropriate in scale and density to the surrounding properties. Local character and context should be respected. All development should integrate well into the historic pattern and character of the surrounding built environment and landscape. Appropriate landscaping should be used to ensure new developments are softened and sit well within the landscape. Attention should be paid to how new development is viewed at close quarters within the street scene and how it is seen from the surrounding area.

iv) Building style should reflect local tradition, and local materials should be used wherever possible. Designs should be of a high standard in keeping with the nationally designated landscape. In line with Core Strategy policy CS6, particular regard should be paid to village and town design statements and Conservation Area Appraisals and Design Guides. Innovative sustainable schemes are to be encouraged where they take account of the surrounding vernacular and the use of local materials as well as conserving the integrity of the surrounding landscape.

v) Roofing materials should be in keeping with those used in nearby buildings, with no bright coloured tiles or reflective surfaces. The use of photovoltaic tiles matching existing and surrounding roof colours should be encouraged in preference to solar panels. External lighting on new developments should be kept to a minimum and use down-lighting to reduce light pollution. Lighting should not highlight structures that would have an adverse visual impact on the surrounding landscape.

[This policy links with current Shropshire Council Core Strategy policy CS6 Sustainable Design & Development Principles, and SAMDev Policy MD2 Sustainable Design].

## **POLICY P5 - Agricultural development**

- i) Farm enterprises need to be in harmony with the environment and sympathetic to the purposes of AONB designation. Farm developments should not degrade landscape quality, which provides an important economic asset for the future. The impact of business-related traffic to and from the property will be an important consideration, including cumulative effects.
- ii) Design of new agricultural buildings and structures including location, structure and materials should be of a high standard appropriate to the AONB, taking account of the published AONB Agricultural Buildings Design Guidance including on location, structure and materials. Account should be taken of potential impacts on tourism and areas of public access.
- iii) Housing related to agricultural development should be appropriate to the needs of agricultural workers and not a short-cut to open market housing.
- iv) Efforts should be made to improve existing buildings where these are of a poor standard, and to remove redundant agricultural buildings which are not suitable for re-use and not of heritage value.
- v) Large and multiple agricultural buildings for intensive livestock rearing such as poultry must meet the stringent tests for major development in national policy, and only be permitted in these exceptional circumstances.
- vi) Criteria indicating that applications for intensive livestock buildings should be refused include where:
- the scale of buildings would exceed the farmstead's existing built footprint
  - proximity to existing sheds would create significant cumulative impacts
  - location is proposed in open field locations away from other farm buildings
  - significant earth-moving or bunding is proposed
  - the topography means that the development will be easily visible
  - harm to landscape character cannot be satisfactorily mitigated
  - proximity to residential properties or other businesses (within 400m has potential to generate harmful impacts on amenity, as recognised in the restriction in this zone for agricultural permitted development)
  - units would be accessed by narrow roads and/or heavy traffic movements would alter the character of rural lanes or damage hedges or verges.

[This policy links with current Shropshire Council SAMDev Policy MD7b General management of development in the countryside].

## **POLICY P6 - Highways & Road Management**

- i) Road improvement schemes within and outside the AONB should not increase noise pollution or emissions from traffic. Approaches like speed management schemes may, for example, be more appropriate than road widening. Potential impacts within the AONB of proposed road improvement schemes beyond the boundary should be considered. Road management and improvement schemes in the AONB should minimise landscape impact and avoid urbanisation of rural roads – for instance through sensitive and appropriate design and

use of materials, and avoiding unnecessary signage clutter, road markings and coloured road surfaces. In conservation areas, special care should be taken to use the correct colour and width of lines when marking out roads. Wildflower-rich verges should be managed appropriately.

ii) The potential impact on freshwater habitats should be borne in mind and rural SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) should be used where possible.

iii) The provision of any new public car parking should be in scale with the setting and capacity of roads used to reach the location. Larger car parks should generally be situated nearer to settlements or larger roads. Where informal roadside parking is improved to alleviate traffic problems on smaller roads, care should be taken to avoid adding to traffic levels. Design should be appropriate to a rural setting for example stone surfacing, timber for edging and signs.

iv) Strategies for transport affecting the AONB should not be solely informed by a 'predict and provide' model of increasing capacity to deal with increased traffic flow. The need for road upgrades and improvements which could have detrimental effects on the AONB may be avoided by use of other measures.

#### **POLICY P7 - Renewable Energy**

i) Major developments of wind and solar energy, and woodfuel or biomass processing should be refused within the AONB, unless it can be demonstrated the proposals are in the public interest and the tests of exceptional circumstances in AONBs as set out in NPPF para 172 can be fully satisfied.

ii) For ground-mounted solar installations in the AONB:

- these should not be overlooked from publicly accessible vantage points
- development should not necessitate the removal of landscape features such as trees and hedgerows.
- Ancillary equipment such as security fencing, security lighting, storage cabins and grid infrastructure, should be screened by planting of trees.
- Brownfield sites are preferable to greenfield sites, but taking into account their biodiversity value.

iii) Small scale domestic renewable installations are encouraged. Where solar panels are used, consideration should be given to visual impacts. Non-reflective or anti-glare options should be used. Solar panels should not be used on Listed Buildings or heritage assets nor on buildings on a site designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Greater sensitivity will be required in Conservation Areas and the cumulative effect of solar panels in a Conservation Area should be avoided. In a Conservation Area, solar panels should face away from the road or lane. They should be flush fitting to the roof and be the same colour as the tiles. The design and installation of such installations should take account of visual amenity.

iv) Community low carbon initiatives in keeping with the AONB's purposes should be supported and renewable energy proposals assessed on a range of sustainability criteria.

v) Existing resources in the area, such as woodfuel and agricultural by-products, may contribute usefully to biomass energy as well as sustainable land management, but processing facilities should be of a scale and location appropriate to the AONB. Any establishment of energy crops should avoid harm to biodiversity, water quality and availability, and where larger and longer-lived than normal agricultural crops, should take account of visual amenity (for example, following forestry design guidelines regarding scale and shape of compartments including in relation to landform, structural diversity and edge treatments).

vi) There should be no development of wind turbines (other than in accordance with permitted development rights) within the 'High Open Moorland' and High Volcanic Hills and Slopes' Landscape Types in the AONB.

vii) Proposals for wind turbines and associated infrastructure within the AONB should take account of factors including landscape character, visual amenity and recreation, biodiversity, heritage assets and their setting, and the following guidelines:

- Within 100m of buildings (excluding Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas), one or two wind turbines of up to 12m to blade tip are likely to be acceptable within the AONB.
- Turbines of over 25m to blade tip, or groups of more than two turbines, are not likely to be acceptable within the AONB.
- Wind turbine proposals should be linked to local energy needs and energy conservation measures. Community benefits should relate to energy in preference to amenity or other measures.

viii) Decisions on proposals for wind turbines and associated infrastructure outside the AONB should take account of the potential impacts within the AONB, especially the extent of visibility and significance of viewpoints affected, and potential cumulative effects with existing structures.

ix) Land within 5km of the AONB boundary is unsuitable for large scale windfarm development, and should be excluded from any Search Areas. (As used by TAN 8, the definition of 'large' is developments of 25MW and over).

#### **POLICY P8 - Tourism and recreation development**

i) The siting, design and specification of new developments for tourism and recreation should be to high standards of environmental sensitivity and sustainability. The following guidelines should be followed:

- Single developments of more than around 10 accommodation units are less likely to be supported in small settlements and open countryside.
- Large parks of static caravans, cabins or chalets are likely to be intrusive. Smaller sites with good landscaping are preferable, as are facilities for touring caravans and camping which generally have a low impact by virtue of fewer permanent structures.
- Built facilities for recreation should only be allowed where their location and the activities they support are compatible with the special qualities of the AONB.

ii) Smaller, low-key tourism developments designed in sympathy with local character will blend better into the area and spread economic benefits more widely than larger facilities.

iii) Temporary structures taking an overtly environmental approach (e.g. glamping, yurts) can provide high quality experiences within the rural landscape and be relatively low impact. Their siting should however avoid harm to landscape features such as wildlife or archaeological sites, and related development such as toilet blocks and car parking should be sensitively designed and landscaped. More permanent structures such as cabins are built development and should in general be sited close to other existing buildings. Static caravans rarely blend in well in any location and are discouraged.

iv) Tourism businesses will be supported to take a sustainable approach and encourage their visitors to do likewise.

v) Recreation activities which are inherently noisy or intrusive should be discouraged, and where possible prevented. Planning mechanisms should be used where possible to control organised motorsports events, which are disproportionately intrusive to other visitors and residents and the environment.

vi) Events such as concerts, festivals, and challenge walks in the AONB should be planned (in location, timing and scale) to minimise environmental impact, and regular events should not be allowed or encouraged to grow to a scale where problems arise. Event organisers should seek advice at the planning stages to enable this.

vii) The quality and suitability of public rights of way as a means of experiencing a high quality rural environment should as far as possible be protected, e.g. against significantly increased vehicle use, inappropriate resurfacing or building directly adjacent.

[This policy links with current Shropshire Council policies CS16 Tourism, Culture & Leisure and MD11 Tourism facilities and visitor accommodation].

#### **POLICY EC1 - People enjoying and caring about the landscape**

i) Tourism activities which draw on the special qualities of the area without harming them should be especially encouraged. This may include the development of access infrastructure (such as off-road cycle routes and rights of way); the use of public transport, historic and natural sites; interpretation to help aid understanding; enterprises based on the special qualities of the AONB (like wildlife watching, landscape painting, walking festivals); and cultural events.

ii) Recreational Activities Environmentally sound leisure and recreation activities in keeping with the AONB should be encouraged and promoted - including low resource-use activities, those with minimum damage to the landscape, and following 'quiet enjoyment' principles.

iii) Recreational off-road use of motor vehicles should not be encouraged or promoted within the AONB. Voluntary measures and pro-active work with users are recommended to minimise the impact of legal off-road use of motor vehicles on the landscape and on people's quiet enjoyment of the countryside. Where the impact on the AONB is significant however, measures including traffic regulation orders restricting legal use should be employed. Illegal motorised activities should as far as possible be prevented, and pro-active support given to the police to do so.

iv) Infrastructure associated with countryside access should be sensitively designed and appropriate materials should be used, including stone for surfacing of a type appropriate to the location, wooden signposts and gates on rights of way, and cycle route signage of a rural character.

v) Tourism promotion Countryside attractions and walks should be linked where possible to settlements where services and public transport facilities exist and can be promoted, helping to maximise economic benefits, especially from day visitors. Promotion of the area for tourism should aim to minimise car travel. Towns and locations best served by public transport should receive the main promotion as 'gateways' to the Shropshire Hills, in preference to locations where access is only possible by car.

vi) Opportunities should be should be taken to strengthen the integrity and identity of the Shropshire Hills for its exceptional landscape value. Consistent use of the 'Shropshire Hills' identity should be given greater prominence in tourism and other forms of promotion, along with the special qualities of the AONB and opportunities for visitors to adopt a sustainable approach.

vii) Opportunities and promotion aimed at both visitors and the local community should encourage people to experience the AONB's countryside more fully in more sustainable and less potentially damaging or disruptive ways.

#### **Policy B1 - The AONB boundary**

At the current time, the benefits of formally amending the AONB boundary would not be justified against the considerable costs and resources this would entail. The AONB Partnership and local authorities will work, and encourage partners and others to work, in ways which strengthen the integrity and identity of the Shropshire Hills AONB as an area of exceptional landscape value. 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 boundary to secure the maximum benefit for the Shropshire Hills. If the process for amending boundaries is made easier, this policy will be reviewed.

#### **Policy WF1 - The Wrekin Forest**

The management of the wider Wrekin Forest area is crucial to the integrity of the Wrekin itself within the AONB and should continue to be recognised and integrated within planning policy. The landscape quality of the wider Wrekin Forest area should be protected as far as possible, and the management of the Wrekin itself integrated with this surrounding area. The Wrekin Forest Partnership provides a vital local forum for this important area and should be supported and its links to the AONB Partnership maintained. The Wrekin Forest Partnership needs to develop as a long-term structure linked to permanent funding for a dedicated staff resource to take and co-ordinate action on the ground.