

Workshop on new and current issues for the AONB Management Plan Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership meeting 20 Nov 2012

Planning Group, facilitated by George Chancellor and recorded by Glynn Barratt

Nationally there is **increasing pressure in favour of development** from central and local government, the emphasis being very firmly on development driving forward the economy. Recent messages from government, though confused, were targeting the **planning process as a major hindrance to economic growth**. There is pursuit of **short term gain at the cost of long term environmental and economic sustainability within the AONB**. The Management Plan should firmly argue this point for long term environmental, economic and social sustainability within the landscape and communities of the AONB.

In this respect it was felt that there was a **need for engagement with local communities and parish and area plans to help provide guidance on the status and needs of the AONB**. One possible route for such engagement could be via the Community Council. This would facilitate a consultation process through local engagement.

The Shropshire Local Development Framework including Core Strategy & SAMDev, and also the National Planning Policy Framework were all regarded as significant causes of concern. There remained a **need to firmly establish the significance and special status of the AONB within planning in general**. It was also felt that this significance should extend beyond the AONB boundary where developments had the potential to impact upon the **landscape setting of the AONB**.

The situation with regard to wind turbines within and beyond the AONB boundary was discussed. Concern was expressed in regard to the **growing pressure for ever larger turbines and the tendency for medium size turbines to accumulate** in an area so that by their number they would have a negative influence upon the character of a location. Recent arguments by agents promoting a proposed site by quoting existing turbines within an area as a precedent for planning consent was of particular concern. It was felt that planning should have regard to establishing **guidance on a density limit**.

A **proposal for an AONB Planning Design Guidance document** was discussed, which was perceived as in general a good idea. Development Management should be involved at an early stage to ensure that Shropshire Council were on side with the proposal and that there was no perceived slighting of the planning process or of planners.

The AONB Partnership is usually an objector in the planning process and where cases were decided by committee the **opportunity to influence the decision is virtually nil**. Similarly the appeal process is totally biased in favour of the applicant rather than the objector. In the current political and economic climate it was felt that this was particularly true.

The fact that recommendations and decisions were made on the whole by planning officers was an issue, given that their individual knowledge of and regard for the status of the AONB was quite variable. The potential for offering further **training to both planning officers and councillors** was discussed in relation to this. Cllrs Cecilia Motley and Heather Kidd both agreed that there was a need to ensure that the status and needs of the AONB were included in relevant councillor training seminars.

The subject of affordable housing was considered and it was generally felt that this term had unfortunate connotations within communities, but that such housing stock was vital to the future of communities within the AONB. A more acceptable description favoured by the group being, **'housing appropriate to local needs'**.

Group working on 'Conservation & Land Management', plus 'Visitors, Tourism & Promotion', facilitated and recorded by Phil Holden

The AONB forms most of the **headwaters of the Teme catchment**. Need to link with the Catchment Pilot project & Plan for the Teme, Restoration Strategy for River Teme SSSI and also wider River Severn Basin Management Plan.

Need to stop **silt getting into rivers** – bad for wildlife and also loss of agricultural soil. **Land management in the whole catchment** - changes in land management could improve situation re flooding and water regulation. Cound Brook in north of the AONB now has Catchment Sensitive Farming grants available. Catchment pilots intended to be rolled out.

Take into account the **wider context** of the Management Plan - how to connect with the **areas around the AONB** (this approach fits with the landscape scale approach favoured by the Natural Environment White Paper). Need to **look further out and engage people across boundaries**. The Partnership is valuable for this as it helps draw in a variety of people.

Wildlife is still disappearing. This is linked to pressures on farming. The **end of the Clun ESA** (Environmentally Sensitive Area) in particular is a big change, and only some farmers are transferring to Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). Many will lose income and do less conservation work, with also pressure to intensify. CAP reform likely to lead to less resources in future for agri-environment schemes.

Woodlands project – advice etc. There is **scope for more work on general woodland advice** if funding was there. **Tree diseases** are becoming a bigger issue - ash, alder, willow and horse chestnut. Will have ecological and visual effects.

In **tourism** there has previously been a lack of co-ordination of effort but this is improving. The Walking with Offa Project has developed good partnership working and been of benefit to small businesses. Ludlow are keen to join the Walkers Are Welcome towns network. Cycling and horse riding, although attracting lower numbers than walking, are important too. Management of visitor numbers and access should link to **protecting peace and tranquillity**. The right types of tourism should be encouraged, to not spoil the special qualities of the area.

The **AONB Partnership has an important influencing role, providing funding and co-ordination**. Financial sustainability is a key issue – may need to look more at trading.

Charitable status for Friends group, and be more expansive in aspirations for membership. Should there be a national AONB network which members of the public can join? (would give broader benefits of membership). Tap into the potential of our area – e.g. apparently in postcode SY6 one in three households are National Trust members.

The **Strettons Community Wildlife Group** may help to plug one of the identified gaps in area-based working.