

Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24

Draft, 15th October 2018

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Vision

The Vision for the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24 remains the same as in the previous Plan:

The natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills landscape is conserved, enhanced and helped to adapt - by sympathetic land management, by co-ordinated action and by sustainable communities; and is valued for its richness of geology, wildlife and heritage, and its contribution to prosperity and wellbeing.

xxx

James Williamson, AONB Partnership Chair

xxxx

Local authority member representatives on the AONB Partnership

Forewords

I am fortunate that England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are part of my Ministerial responsibilities. Whether it be rolling hills, sweeping coastline or a tranquil village, spending time in an AONB can stir the heart and lift the spirit. This is a pivotal moment for all AONBs. The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy. Leaving the EU brings with it an opportunity to develop a better system for supporting our farmers and land managers, who play such a vital role as stewards of the landscape. And the Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty led by Julian Glover - the first of its kind for generations - will make recommendations to make sure our designated landscapes can flourish in the years ahead.

In my visits to AONBs around the country, I have been struck by the passion of many people - farmers, volunteers, and hard-working staff - for the beautiful places they live and work. In this spirit I am delighted to welcome publication of this Statutory Management Plan for the Shropshire Hills AONB. It is significant that this plan will be delivered in partnership by those who value the Shropshire Hills. I would like to thank all those involved in preparation of this document, and wish you the best of success in bringing it to fruition.

Lord Gardiner, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Executive Summary

Special places matter to us. They give us a sense of belonging and peace.

The Shropshire Hills have evolved through the interaction of people and nature over a long time to produce a character and quality which we value.

The landscape contributes greatly to the economy and to our health and culture. Food production needs soils and water, while our hills and woods help to manage flood risk. Nature and beautiful landscapes are good for our mental wellbeing and quality of life, provide a sense of identity, and attract business investment.

‘Natural beauty’ does not exclude people. Nature provides the bones and processes of our landscape, which is shaped by farmers and land managers, and enjoyed by many.

Safeguarding the positive interaction between people and nature is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its value.

The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was designated in 1958 recognising the national value of the landscape. The AONB covers a quarter of Shropshire, including the Long Mynd, Stiperstones, The Wrekin and Wenlock Edge, as well as the Clee Hills and Clun Forest. The landscape is rich in wildlife and heritage, along with scenic quality and views, tranquillity, culture and opportunities for enjoyment.

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

AONBs have protection in planning policy, and the statutory Management Plan for the AONB is reviewed every five years. This Plan is about the future of this special place, and is based on local partnership and consensus. It seeks to apply local solutions to local challenges that also respect the national and international importance of the AONB. The plan is for guiding and inspiring action to meet the AONB purposes.

This Management Plan is prepared by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership on behalf of Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

The character and quality of the Shropshire Hills landscape are of high importance but under increasing pressure. The condition of a number of the special qualities of the AONB is declining. Conservation activity through many schemes and projects is not enough to prevent some declines in wildlife. Not enough progress is being made with some water quality and catchment management targets. Farming, especially in the uplands, is at an important cross-roads as we head towards new UK policy and funding regimes. Economic forces are increasing development pressure and reducing resources for positive management, leading to more deterioration of valuable features by neglect.

The Plan sets out policies and proposed actions under three main aims:

- Land management supporting natural beauty and landscape
- Planning for a sustainable economy and communities
- People enjoying and caring about the landscape

This Plan will help deliver many of the priorities of Defra’s 25 Environment Plan - clean air and water, thriving plants and wildlife, reduced risk from flooding and drought, using natural resources more sustainably and efficiently, enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

Introduction

Legal framework

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act first established the AONB designation and this statutory purpose. The Act provided AONBs with protection under planning law against inappropriate development and gave local authorities powers to take action in support of the purpose.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 confirmed the purpose and significance of AONBs, adding:

- a statutory duty to prepare a Management Plan *'which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'*, and to review adopted and published Plans at intervals of not more than five years. Where an AONB involves more than one local authority they are required to do this 'acting jointly'.
- Section 85 places a statutory duty on all 'relevant authorities' to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of AONBs when coming to any decisions or carrying out activities relating to or affecting land within these areas. This includes all public bodies and statutory undertakers (e.g. certain utility companies).

Countryside Agency guidance of 2001 defined secondary purposes for AONBs:

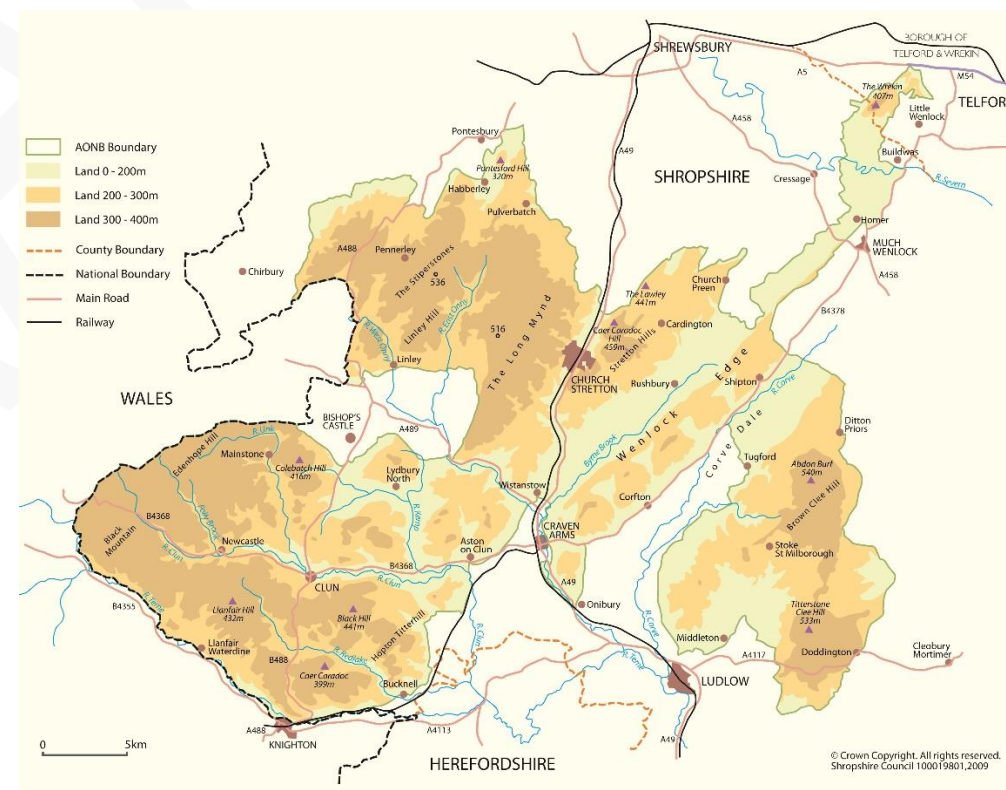
In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves, conserve and enhance the environment.

Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

The Shropshire Hills AONB and its management

The Shropshire Hills are beautiful rolling upland landscape lying along the Welsh border but only an hour from Birmingham. Best known for the Long Mynd, Stiperstones, The Wrekin and Wenlock Edge, the AONB also includes the Cleve Hills and Clun Forest. With a diverse geology giving rise to craggy ridges, moorland plateaux and wooded scarps, the landscape of hills, farmland, woods, rivers and villages is rich in wildlife and heritage, along with scenic quality and views, tranquillity, culture and opportunities for enjoyment. The Shropshire Hills AONB was designated in 1958 and covers 804km² (23% of Shropshire).

The 46 AONBs in the UK are living, working landscapes that contribute some £16bn every year to the national economy. Over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of an AONB, and around 150 million people visit English AONBs every year, spending in excess of £2bn. Together with National Parks, AONBs represent our most outstanding landscapes, to be managed in the interest of everyone and protected for future generations.



The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is formed by Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to fulfil their legal duties for the AONB. A partnership group of 41 members from a wide range of interests is supported by a small staff team, funded by Defra, the local authorities and project funders. The AONB Partnership leads the preparation of this Management Plan, but it is a plan for the area not just this organisation, and many organisations and individuals play a part in the Plan's delivery. For more information on the AONB Partnership, see the Implementation section.

What is the Management Plan for?

The AONB Management Plan is a place-based plan derived through local partnership and consensus. It seeks to define the approach to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB through the application of local solutions to local challenges that also respect the national and international importance of the AONB. The plan is for guiding and inspiring action to meet the AONB purposes. It brings together partners to agree directions and targets, promotes collaboration and helps to prioritise resources.

Who is the Plan for?

The AONB Management Plan is a plan for the area and not for any one organisation. It can help guide activities that might affect the AONB by:

- AONB Partnership organisations – these organisations will have a key role in delivering and championing the Management Plan
- Relevant authorities – all bodies who have a duty to have regard to the purpose of the AONB
- Landowners and managers – those who own and manage land in the AONB have a vital role to play; the plan aims to guide, support and attract resources for sensitive management of the AONB
- Local communities and visitors – all of us that live and work in the AONB and enjoy it can play an active role in caring for the AONB

Explanation of some key terms and concepts

Natural beauty goes well beyond scenic or aesthetic value. The natural beauty of an AONB is to do with the relationship between people and place. It encompasses everything - 'natural' and human - that makes an area distinctive. It includes the area's geology and landform, its climate and soils, its wildlife and ecology. It includes the rich history of human settlement and land use over the centuries, its archaeology and buildings, its cultural associations, and the people who live in it, past and present.^{2; 11; 12; 13}

Landscape

The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as 'An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors'. This view sees people at the heart of all landscapes, each of which has its own distinctive character and meaning.



The Convention defines three principles of landscape action as follows:

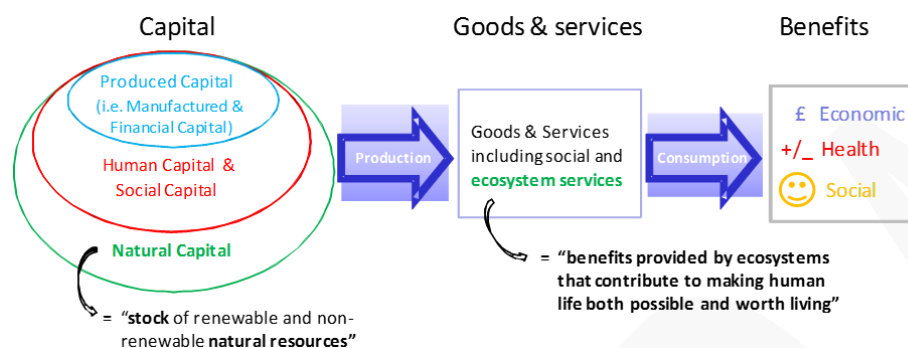
Protect: action to conserve and maintain the significant characteristic features of a landscape, justified by their natural or cultural value;

Manage: action to ensure the sustainable development and ongoing upkeep of a landscape, guiding changes arising from social, economic or environmental necessity;

Plan: strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscape.

Natural capital and ecosystem services

Natural capital is the stock of natural assets that provide free goods and services, often called ecosystem services, that benefit wider society as a whole. Natural capital stock includes renewable and non-renewable natural resources e.g. geology, minerals, soils, water, air, plants, animals, habitats, ecosystems. Some ecosystem services are well known e.g. food, fibre and fuel provision and cultural services supporting wellbeing through recreation. Others less obvious include regulation of climate and water quality.



Ecosystem approach

The ecosystem approach recognises that:

- natural systems are complex and dynamic, and their healthy functioning should not be taken for granted.
- people benefit from services provided by the natural environment. These services underpin social and economic wellbeing and have a value – both monetary and non-monetary.
- those that benefit from these services and those who are involved in managing them should play a central role in making decisions about them.

The NAAONB and the AONB Family

The National Association for AONBs is a charity that provides a strong collective voice for the UK's 46 AONBs. It seeks to:

- promote the conservation and enhancement of AONBs,
- advance the education, understanding and appreciation by the public of AONBs, and
- promote the efficiency and effectiveness of those promoting or representing AONBs, other protected areas and those areas for which designation might be pursued.

It does this by taking a collaborative and partnership-based approach to working with its members and other organisations at a national level to achieve shared goals. For more information see www.landscapesforlife.org.uk.

The AONB Family are involved in the planning and management of around 8,000 square miles of outstanding and cherished landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Membership includes most of the AONB partnerships, as well as some of those Local Authorities with statutory responsibility for AONBs, together with a number of voluntary bodies, businesses, and individuals with an interest in the future of AONBs. The vision of the NAAONB is that the natural beauty of AONBs is valued and secure. The Association's mission is to support and develop a network of ambitious AONB partnerships with a strong collective voice.

The following high level objectives have been adopted as the common national purpose of the national family of AONBs:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future,
- Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty,
- Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the nature and culture of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and encourage people to take action for their conservation,
- Value, sustain, and promote the benefits that the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty provide for society, including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation's health and wellbeing.

Glover Review of designated landscapes

The Glover Review over 2018 and 2019 is the most significant review of designated landscapes in England in many years, and seeks to find ways to help them deliver more. There is a widespread view locally that the status and protection the AONB seems to have in national and local policy is not matched by the reality of many decisions on the ground. This is also seen nationally and is not unique to the Shropshire Hills. Input to the Glover review over 2018 and 2019 will emphasise the need to strengthen the status and regard for AONBs in reality.

The Glover Review will report shortly after the finalising of this Management Plan, and may well result in changes which will affect delivery of the Plan.

One discussion the Review has sparked is whether the Shropshire Hills should become a National Park, and the AONB Partnership is undertaking to look at the potential for and pros and cons of this, to inform a debate.

International context

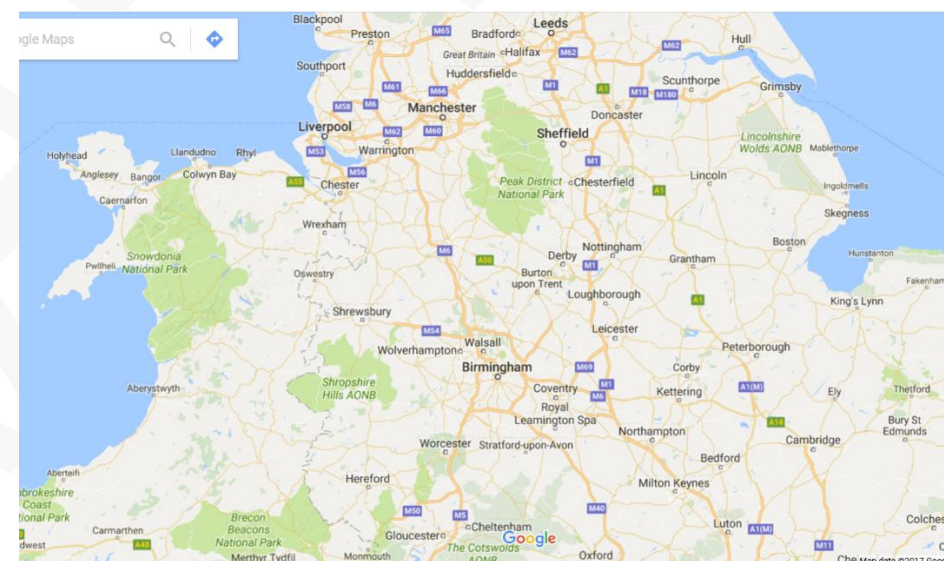
AONBs are recognised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as 'Category V Protected Landscapes',^{21; 22} defined as: *'A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.'*²³ They are recognised therefore as cultural landscapes, in distinction to other categories of natural or near-natural areas. They have also come to be recognised as leaders in area-based sustainable development,^{24; 25; 26} pioneering integrated countryside management based on voluntary partnerships engaging and working with local communities to secure common goals.

A recent study of areas similar to AONBs across 22 countries stated that *"Large scale protected areas... which are based on the principle of integration of people and nature, are becoming increasingly important in the global debate on sustainability."* ref

Geographical context of the AONB

The Shropshire Hills AONB makes up most of the uplands of Shropshire, and its most sparsely populated areas. However, about 19,000 people live within the AONB, and many more live close by. There is a big contrast between the relatively remote areas to the west, and the eastern edges which lie close to Wolverhampton and the West Midlands conurbation. The AONB is the largest in the Midlands area, and some distance from the nearest National Parks. It is therefore important as an accessible, high quality landscape for a wide catchment area including a large population.

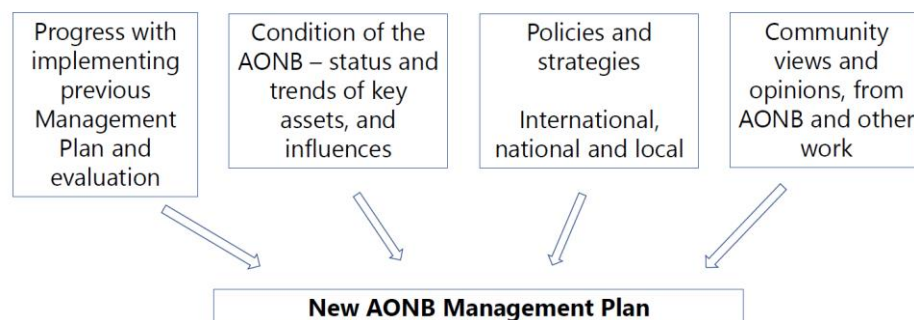
Its position in the country means that the Shropshire Hills combine landscapes and wildlife characteristic of both upland and lowland, and northern and southern Britain, in an unusual blend.



Process for preparing the Management Plan

The review resulting in this new Management Plan has followed national guidance. It has been influenced by policy directions and by community consultations and experience at a local level.

Inputs into the Plan Review



A detailed progress update on actions in the previous 2014-19 Management Plan was published by the AONB Partnership on 1 November 2016. ref

Three workshops have been held with the AONB Partnership:

13th June 2017: Issues and aspirations, in the context of EU Exit

14th November 2017: Brief presentations by ten partner organisations on the issues they felt were most pressing for the new Plan

6th March 2018 focussed on delivery priorities, i.e. what needs to be done.

Management Plan topics have also been discussed at working groups such as the Clun Catchment Partnership, Wrekin Forest Partnership and Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership.

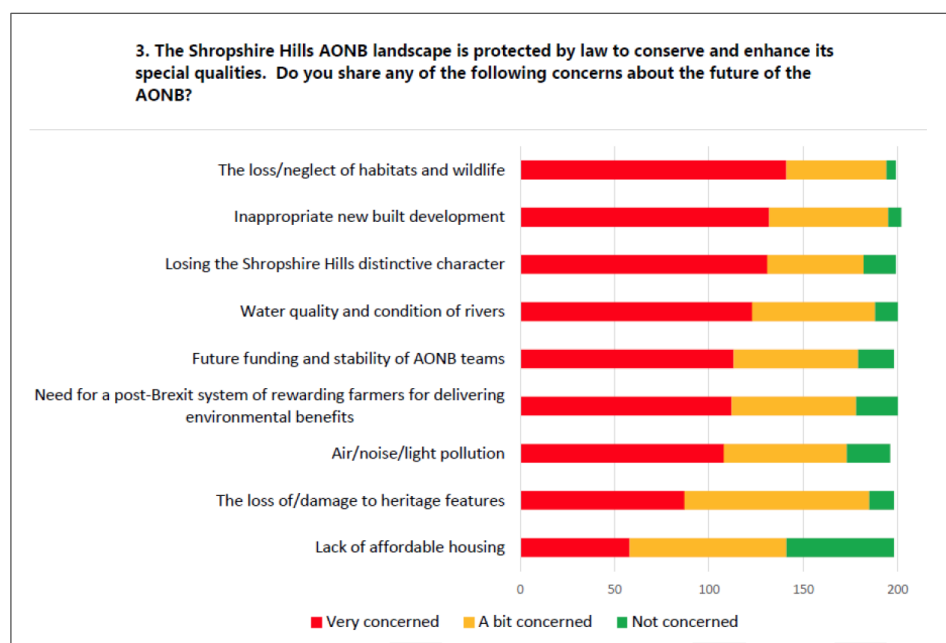
Partnership members felt that:

- Protection of the landscape and biodiversity needs to be better in practice
- The planning system needs to take more account of the AONB
- We must help people to see the AONB as an asset rather than a barrier to economic growth
- Sustainability should influence all areas – land management, tourism, communities

A Shropshire Hills Uplands Forum was held in February 2017, attended by 82 people, including farmers, landowners, public agencies, community representatives, environmental NGOs, recreation and business interests from around the Shropshire Hills. The purpose was to gather a range of stakeholders to share views and work together to develop ideas on future policy and funding for upland land management. The focus was on the public benefits the Shropshire Hills uplands provide society, and how these could be supported and enhanced in the future. Key points from this were to:

- Support a range of public benefits from the uplands
- Encourage new land management support schemes to have locally relevant delivery within a national framework
- Build common ground between conservation bodies, farmers and wider community - understand the needs of all users and managers of the land to work together for common goals
- Gain public support for public benefits the uplands provide, and the need for public funding
- Support the links between livestock production, land management, rural economy and communities and address affordable housing, viable business opportunities and planning issues.

A public on-line survey was carried out during April and May 2018. With over 200 responses, the survey revealed a high degree of support for the primary 'conserve and enhance' AONB purpose. Most valued characteristics of the Shropshire Hills were dramatic views and wide panoramas, opportunities to walk and explore, wildlife and relatively natural areas, peace and quiet and a chance to unwind. Top concerns were the loss/neglect of habitats and wildlife, inappropriate new built development, losing the Shropshire Hills distinctive character, inappropriate new built development, losing the Shropshire Hills distinctive character, water quality and condition of rivers.



Work on 'State of the AONB' has included analysing data for a set of key indicators, which are shown at Appendix 1, and described in the Condition of the AONB section.

During the period of the Plan review, the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy has been prepared and approved by the Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership. This provided very useful material for the new AONB Management Plan on this topic.

Sustainability Appraisal

The process of Sustainability Appraisal of the Management Plan runs in parallel with the plan review and meets the legal requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment. The process is based on Natural England's guidance and the practice of local authorities on sustainability appraisal for Local Development Frameworks.

The Scoping Report was published in February 2018 ref, and includes a review of current policies and strategies affecting the Plan.

The full Sustainability Appraisal report will be published alongside the draft Management Plan.

An expected conclusion of the Sustainability Appraisal is that the high quality of the AONB's environment is a huge economic asset which, if sensitively used and not damaged by inappropriate development, can deliver great long term economic benefits. In the need however to take a long-term view and protect this asset, there is a risk of the designation being perceived as hampering economic progress. This may be overcome by demonstrating the positive economic effects of the environment and of looking after it.

Consultation and approval process

Three topic groups met in October 2018, and the draft Plan is being taken to the AONB Partnership on 23rd October before being shared for public consultation. During the consultation period it is planned to hold meetings of the various area groups supported by the AONB Partnership, and to encourage wider engagement with farmers through a follow-up to the Uplands Forum, as well as other public consultation events.

Changes arising from the public consultation will be considered by the AONB Partnership. The Plan will then be submitted for 'formal observations' by Natural England, before formal approval by the two Councils in the spring of 2019.

Statement of Significance and Special Qualities

Different people have their own opinions on what is special about the Shropshire Hills, and no definition is absolute. The purpose of this brief outline is to help determine how best to manage these qualities within the remit of the AONB. This requires describing aspects which are subjective, hard to define and often difficult adequately to put into words. Such qualities are nevertheless greatly valued by people and may be threatened, making it important to consider them in a structured way. The qualities identified relate to each other and overlap, and should not be looked at in isolation.

Diversity and Contrast

With a variety of geology unequalled in any area of comparable size in Britain, the Shropshire Hills have no single dominant feature or landform. The area's landscape character is one of variety and of transition – between the lowland plains of the English Midlands and the uplands of Wales, and between north and south of Britain. This is reflected in both ecology and human activity.

The key components of the Shropshire Hills landscape are the hills, farmed countryside, woodlands, rivers and river valleys.

Hills

The rocky Stiperstones, the dissected plateau of the Long Mynd, the craggy volcanic Stretton Hills and Wrekin, the harsh quarried landscape of the Clee Hills, the wooded scarp of Wenlock Edge, and the rolling enclosed hills of the Clun Forest all have their own distinctive character. The hills define the identity of the area, and are the backbone of our landscape. They contain commons, heath, moorland and rough grasslands, and are home to a variety of upland birds including curlew, red grouse and merlin.

Farmed Countryside

The patchwork of fields, mostly pasture bounded by hedges, results from generations of farming. Hedgerow and field trees, including many veteran trees, give the landscape a maturity. Remnants of valuable grassland and hay meadow habitats survive. There is some small scale arable cultivation – mostly for feed crops – with larger scale cropping in the valleys extending outside the AONB.

Woodlands

The area has higher than the national average cover of ancient and semi-natural woodland. Upland oakwoods are found mostly on steeper slopes and are important for birds, bryophytes and lichens, while mixed ash-elm-oak woods such as on the limestone of Wenlock Edge have a rich ground flora. There are also larger predominantly conifer plantations, many small farm woodlands, scattered valuable areas of wet woodland, parkland, wood pasture, and small, often remnant orchards.

Rivers and River Valleys

The Rivers Clun, Teme and Onny, along with many smaller rivers and streams, are relatively clean and natural in form, and of high quality. Many are lined with alder, and home to important species like the dipper, white-clawed crayfish and otter. The critically endangered freshwater pearl mussel is found in the River Clun just outside the AONB. Valleys vary from the steep-sided batches and dingles of the Long Mynd and Stiperstones, to larger expanses with some flood meadows, and the broad dales such as Corve Dale and Ape Dale which divide up the area. The AONB makes up the majority of the headwaters of the Teme catchment, and a short stretch of the River Severn within the AONB divides the Wrekin from Wenlock Edge. There are few large water bodies but many ponds, marshes and flushes.

Other special qualities are found in different ways across the whole area, including geology, wildlife, heritage, environmental and scenic quality, tranquillity, culture and opportunities for enjoyment.

Geology

The Shropshire Hills have great geological variety, with bedrock dating from the Precambrian almost continuously through to the Permian, and the influence of different rock types and structures on the landscape are clearly visible. There is a widespread mantle of more recent Quaternary deposits and along with landforms on the lower ground, these reflect the complex geological history of the last Ice Age. The AONB is important in the history of geological science – Murchison's study of the Silurian (including the Wenlock limestone) and its fossils being notable. The Ercall quarry has a well-recognised example of the sudden transition from metamorphosed and barren rocks to sediments containing the earliest known hard-shelled fossils in the Cambrian period.

Wildlife

The valuable habitats of the AONB, especially heathland, grassland, woodland and rivers are linked to a long history of relatively sympathetic land management. Due to their transitional position, the Shropshire Hills have an unusual mix of species associated with both upland and lowland, including red grouse and dormice. The area holds some national rarities and is very significant in a regional and county context for upland species such as merlin, snipe, curlew, whinchat, dipper, emperor moth, small pearl-bordered fritillary and grayling butterflies. It is also significant for species of western oakwoods such as pied flycatcher, wood warbler redstart and tree pipit, and something of a stronghold for formerly more common or widespread species like skylark, black poplar and great-crested newt.

Heritage

Many ancient features survive in a landscape which has seen much less change than many parts of the country. Defences such as Offa's Dyke, Iron Age hillforts such as at Caer Caradoc and Bury Ditches, and medieval castles and fortified houses such as Clun and Stokesay tell of centuries of turbulent Marches history. The Shropshire Hills has the greatest concentration of medieval castle earthworks anywhere in Britain. Much of the field and settlement pattern is very ancient with tiny lanes, villages and scattered hamlets and farms. There are also estates, parkland, planted settlements and abandoned medieval villages, along with areas of later, more regular Parliamentary enclosure. Stone and timber-framed buildings in a variety of styles reflect the diversity of local materials available, and there is a rich variety of churches and churchyards. The Clee Hills and Stiperstones in particular have seen periods of thriving industry such as lead mining and stone quarrying, often accompanied by haphazard 'squatter' settlement.

Scenic and environmental quality

Panoramic views extend across and beyond the AONB, which abounds in both wide open spaces and intimate corners. There are contrasts from relatively wild hills and valleys to softer, settled landscapes, as well as between varying seasonal colours of heather, grass, bracken and broadleaved trees. Clean air and water are accompanied by other valuable ecological functions including food and fibre growing, and water run-off control.

Tranquillity

Off the beaten track and remote in the context of this part of England, the Shropshire Hills are a haven of tranquillity – peace and quiet, dark skies and unspoilt views. Relatively low levels of noise and development are coupled with modest visitor numbers to create an unspoilt quality that is greatly valued.

Culture and Opportunities for Enjoyment

The Shropshire Hills span a wide spectrum of cultural settings. These range from the urban fringes of Telford and Ironbridge, through the rural setting of market towns just outside the AONB such as Ludlow, Craven Arms and Much Wenlock, to some of the sparsest areas of population in England along the Welsh border. Church Stretton has a unique location in the heart of the hills and a strong Edwardian character. The Shropshire Hills have been a cultural inspiration for writers such as A E Housman, Mary Webb and Malcolm Saville. Opportunities for enjoyment and wellbeing are open to both locals and visitors with walks and outdoor activities respecting the area's qualities. The AONB has some of the best rights of way networks in Shropshire, most of its open access land, and a wide variety of sites, features and promoted routes.

2. What ONE thing do you most value about the Shropshire Hills?

Wild Valley Access Environment Dramatic Wilderness Hills
Church Stretton Wildlife Freedom
Peace and Quiet Heritage Walking
Unspoiled Beauty Solitude Landscape Fact
Natural Open Views Unspoilt Development Space Rural
Place Tranquillity

(Words used most often are shown larger)

(from public survey, June 2018)

Condition of the AONB and trends

Summary

The character and quality of the Shropshire Hills landscape continue to be of high importance. This character and quality are under increasing pressure, and the condition of a number of the special qualities of the AONB is declining. Improvements resulting from conservation activity, e.g. on Sites of Special Scientific Interest and through agri-environment schemes, are accompanied by some declines in biodiversity and failure to make meaningful progress with certain water quality and catchment management issues. Farming, especially in the uplands, is at an important cross-roads as policy and funding regimes are changing significantly. Economic forces are increasing development pressure and reducing resources for positive management, leading to more deterioration of valuable features by neglect.

Policies and considerable conservation activity continue to maintain quality of the AONB's landscape and its features relatively well in a national context. Targeted gains in some areas are however offset by declines elsewhere, and the potential of the area to deliver significant public benefits through ecosystem services is far from being met.

Patterns in farming are continuing to polarise – with larger holdings increasing in number and smallholdings also increasing, while middle sized family farms are becoming less numerous. Uncertainty over farming policy and funding is affecting farm business decisions and environmental activity. Uptake in the AONB of agri-environment schemes overall remains high, with over 75% of farmed land being in a scheme of some kind. The uptake by land area of woodland grants is only half as high (38% of all woodland). Both agri-environment and woodland grants are showing slight increases in uptake since 2013, after having been declining. Levels of new woodland planting are however at a long-term low.

Condition of key conservation sites (including biological SSSIs and Scheduled Ancient Monuments) has improved, due to targeted work by the agencies (Natural England and Historic England). However, valuable sites of lesser status (e.g. county wildlife sites) appear to be declining in condition.

The health of the water environment is a real concern, with only 15% of river length classified as of 'Good Ecological Status', and no sections of river SSSI in either favourable or recovering condition. This is despite considerable activity and investment, without which the situation would be worse, but indicating the deep-rooted nature of the issues. The Clun Catchment is one of a number of sites nationally included in a high profile current Judicial Review case about condition of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Siltation and raised nutrient levels in streams and rivers are a problem for some important species. These usually arise from diffuse sources, and are associated with loss of valuable soils from both arable land and pasture (e.g. where land is poached or tracks are eroded). Aerial Nitrogen deposition is also harming important wildlife habitats.

Biodiversity shows a mixed picture, with continuing declines in flowering plants and invertebrates, especially outside designated conservation sites. Concerted work on certain priority bird species (e.g. curlew, lapwing) has helped to stabilise declines, but numbers of some species are still critically low. Much conservation work is carried out by organisations and individuals, but other land holdings are being worked harder, with a gradual loss of features and environmental quality. Building more effective and resilient ecological networks across the landscape is proving to be very challenging and progress is slow.

Development pressure on the AONB has increased over the last 5-10 years. Changes in policy have led to a significant increase in building of single houses and small groups. More worryingly, every single known case of proposed 'major development' in the AONB since 2012 (11 cases) has been recommended by planning officers for approval. Not all of these developments have eventually gone ahead, but large poultry units, solar farms and large housing developments have all been contentious. Some developments also drive wider land use changes beyond the planning system. The large number of relatively minor development applications in the AONB have the potential cumulatively to affect its character. Current guidance is not really adequate on how these can be designed to assimilate them best into the landscape.

Recreational use of the countryside is increasing. This is good for public engagement, and for the most part has little negative impact, but greater pressure is being felt on some key sites of conservation sensitivity, and further targeted effort is needed to manage this. The reductions in public sector spending are showing in visitor facilities, from rights of way maintenance to public toilets and visitor information.

Summary of achievements in the period of the last Management Plan 2014-19

- The Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund ran from 2013 to 2018, and:
 - Invested £665,000 in 144 local companies, contractors and organisations
 - Improved management of 55ha of land including 20ha of hay meadows
 - Completed habitat restoration across six key sites
 - Engaged 324 primary age children and 299 from secondary schools
 - Awarded £60,000 awarded in 43 small grants
 - Involved 491 volunteers, contributing over £150,000 worth of effort
 - Completed 206 volunteer practical tasks, survey and fieldwork days
 - Ran 12-month traineeships for four local young people
 - Ran 129 public events involving at least 3,450 people
 - Improved management at eight built heritage sites
 - Delivered 47 traditional rural skills courses to 390 people
 - Trained 24 people in maintenance of traditional buildings
 - Interpreted ten heritage sites, and improved access to 11 sites
 - Developed eight new walking and cycling routes, including an all-ability trail at the Bog.
- Partnership project working in the Clun catchment has included the SITA & Natural England funded Freshwater Pearl Mussel project, the River Clun Recovery project (funded by WREN and others) and the Environment Agency's 'Unmuddying the Waters' project.
- After a successful pilot focused on the Long Mynd, HLF funding has been secured for the 'Our Common Cause' upland commons project, led by the Foundation for Common Land, which is now in the two year development phase.
- The Stepping Stones project focused on improving habitat networks in the Long Mynd & Stiperstones area has received high level support and some funding from the National Trust, for development as a long-term initiative.
- Community Wildlife Groups have continued to develop and new ones have been supported by the Landscape Partnership Scheme.
- Establishment of the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust in 2016, and a successful programme of grants through the AONB Conservation Fund.
- Undergrounding of electricity cables
- The Wrekin Forest Plan was renewed and the Wrekin Forest was defined as a 'Strategic Landscape' in Telford & Wrekin's Local Plan.
- Slow the Flow projects have been implemented in the Corve Dale and elsewhere.
- Development of Shropshire Hills Tourism, the Destination Partnership, Sustainable Tourism Strategy and renewal of the European Charter.
- Improvement of walking and cycling promotion
- Continuation and improvement of the Shropshire Hills Shuttles.
- The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre has made a successful transition to a social enterprise, Grow Cook Learn.
- Bishop's Castle Town Hall is now a community run Visitor Information Centre and multi-purpose community facility.
- Significant delivery of the John Muir Award with schools.
- Young Rangers schemes have operated in the Stiperstones and Cleve Hills areas, and young people took part in the international Young Ranger camp in 2017.
- 10 Walking for Health programmes in and around the AONB are involving 59 volunteers and 219 walkers.

The AONB Partnership has in the last five years:

- Brought in over £4.3 million of funding directly for the area
- Supported over 150 projects and many businesses with grants and advice
- Led valuable project work on river catchments, heritage, woodlands, meadows and uplands, as well as sustainable tourism and access
- Led around 270 events with more than 7,500 attendances.
- Led over 100 sessions with 33 different schools, with over 3,500 attendances and 224 John Muir Awards achieved.

KEY ISSUES

The following have been identified as the key issues for the new 2019-24 Plan:

- **The future of farming - new UK policy and funding for land management and the Shropshire Hills response**
- **How to achieve more, bigger, better and joined up wildlife habitats and resilient ecosystems**
- **Pressure for economic development and growth, and risks of loss of sustainability**
- **Better care for the historic environment, enhancing its potential to benefit society**
- **The need to gain support for public benefits from the landscape**
- **The changing public sector and increasing need to harness volunteer effort and funds**
- **Need to raise awareness of the AONB and of work to look after it**
- **Need for a stronger structure and robust governance for the AONB organisation, and stable delivery for the AONB team**



POLICY FRAMEWORK

This main part of the Management Plan is presented in three sections, written as high level aims for the Plan:

- **Land management supporting natural beauty and landscape**
- **Planning for a sustainable economy and communities**
- **People enjoying and caring about the landscape**

Policies are defined where there is a particular need for clarity of position and to influence others. These are mostly the same as in the previous Management Plan, but have been reorganised and updated, with a few additions. Since the Management Plan is formally approved by the local authorities, these are policies of Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council, not merely those of the AONB Partnership. The Policies are intended to complement and support formal planning policies in existing Plans. Some, however, relate to topics on which the local authorities do not have decision-making powers, and in these cases they are put forward to guide the decisions of others and responses to consultations.

Climate change is an over-riding issue which affects all aspects of the Plan. The effects of climate change are increasingly being felt, with generally milder wetter winters and hotter drier summers but also an increase in variability and extreme weather events. The Management Plan supports activity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through improving energy efficiency, using appropriate forms of renewable energy, reducing car use, making better use of public transport and purchasing locally produced food and services. These are not likely to have any conflicting impact on the AONB landscape. Other measures such as large scale renewable energy generation need to be balanced with landscape protection.

Climate change adaptation is also a key driver of land management. Progress needs to be made to increase resilience to changing conditions. The global context of climate change will put greater pressure on land use e.g. for more food production, but a long-term view is needed, to maintain the functioning ecosystems on which we depend.

Land management supporting natural beauty and landscape

Landscape is not static and it is not the purpose of the AONB to prevent change or turn back the clock. Change is inevitable, but can be beneficial or harmful, and the Management Plan seeks to influence the directions of change. The continuation of farming in ways that are sensitive and sympathetic to the landscape is vital to the conservation of the qualities that are valued in the AONB. Working with the natural characteristics and processes of the area rather than battling against nature will also be important in the long-term future of farming itself. Farming plays an important role in maintaining many of our most sensitive landscapes, but the balance is not always optimal – habitats are fragmented, much of our biodiversity is in decline, and the water environment is far from ideal.

Farming and land management remains key to the economy of the Shropshire Hills, employing more than a quarter of its residents, and providing a higher proportion of the jobs actually within the AONB. Pasture-fed livestock is the main activity, with some more arable and dairying in the lower lying fringes of the area. Food production will remain an important objective in the AONB, but the many other public benefits from land management also need to influence how this is carried out. The long-term capacity to continue producing food depends on looking after natural capital (such as soils, clean water and pollinators) as well as social capital (e.g. by promoting farm support networks, encouraging succession, and retaining and developing skills).

Brexit brings opportunities in the development of new domestic agricultural policy and funding arrangements which could serve our countryside better. There are also uncertainties, such as regarding trade deals, especially for the sheep sector. Upland farming, with a higher dependence on income from government schemes, will be particularly affected by new schemes. This is all overlain on longer-term structural changes, such as the growth in large and small holdings along with a reduction in the number of medium-sized farms.

Desired outcome: Effective land management is conserving and enhancing the landscape character and special qualities of the AONB. Rural land managers are successfully adapting to national policy changes and implementing sustainable land management practices which reinforce the distinctive landscapes and natural capital assets of the Shropshire Hills.

Summary of landscape issues and priorities in the Shropshire Hills

Landscape feature	Threats	Opportunities	Priorities for action
Hills and common land	Marginality of upland farming, recreation pressure, climate change	New UK policies and funding schemes	Grazing to maintain open habitats in good condition, enhancing wetlands and woods
Farm woodlands	Lack of management, Ash dieback	Local demand for woodfuel	Advice and support for Ancient Woodland Sites, new planting to enhance woodland networks
Forests	Volatility of timber prices, larch disease	New UK policies and funding schemes	High standards of management for landscape, wildlife, water protection
Meadows, unimproved grasslands (& road verges)	Small size, pressure to intensify use	New networks, e.g. Marches Meadows Group	Support and advice, funding
Enclosed pasture farmland	Uncertain drivers for livestock farming, diffuse pollution, soil compaction and loss	New UK policies and funding schemes	Sustainable stocking models, high standards of management, watercourse buffer strips, more tree planting
Arable farmland	Diffuse pollution, soil degradation and loss	New UK policies and funding schemes	Field margins, high standards of management, more tree planting
Rivers and streams	Diffuse pollution, poor water quality, siltation, non-native species	Funding for priority catchments	Watercourse buffer strips, sustainable drainage solutions
Archaeological features	Scrub and bracken, damage from pressure of livestock and visitors	Partner support for a new project	Advice, support volunteer activity
Historic buildings	Lack of funds, inappropriate works	Greater awareness	Advice
Footpaths and access routes	Lack of funding for maintenance, damage from extreme weather	Visitor giving and appeals	Support volunteer activity
Towns and villages	Loss of character from inappropriate development	Community led plans	Design guidance for housing

Natural capital and ecosystem services in the Shropshire Hills

Natural capital and ecosystem services have not been quantified specifically for the Shropshire Hills. However, a 2016 study for the Marches (Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire) calculated an estimate Natural Capital value of £14.8 billion and the annual flow of ecosystem services was valued at £358.1 million (underestimates due to partial data). The capitalised baseline value of those ecosystem services assessed for Shropshire was as follows:

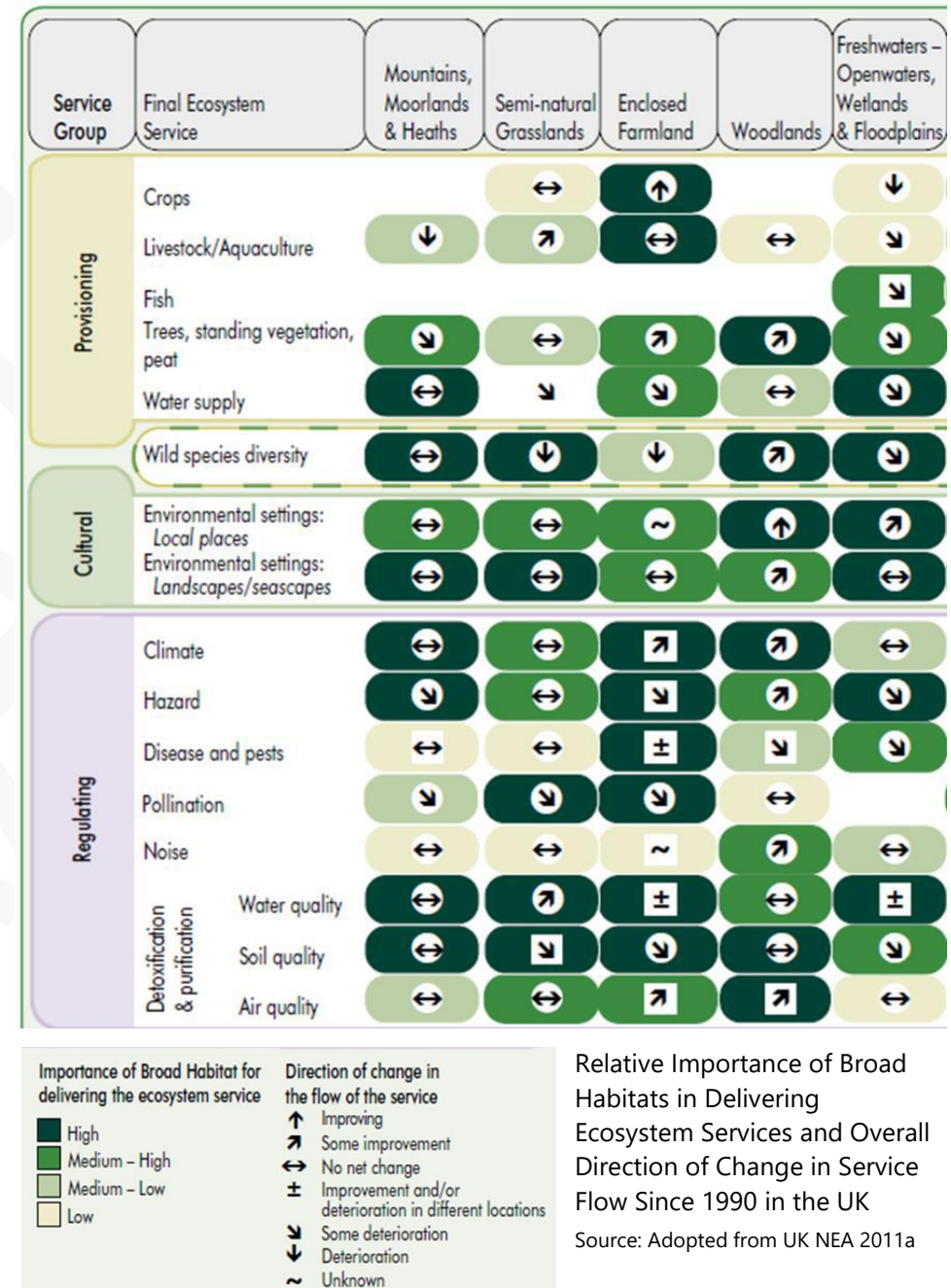
	Ecosystem service	Shropshire value (central estimate)
Provisioning services	Wild Food	£34m
	Non-food products	£42m
	Water supply	Data unavailable
Cultural services	Wild species diversity	£647m
	Recreation & aesthetic	£544m
	Health	£1,536m
Regulating services	Productivity	£237m
	Flood regulation	£915m
	Water quality regulation	£25m
	TOTAL	£3,981m

N.B. Capitalised value represents present value of ecosystem services provided over a time period of 25 years. The values are based on assessment of 171,878ha of higher quality habitat – figures for the whole county would be much larger. Many ecosystem services or elements of them could not be valued e.g. because of lacking evidence, therefore the figures understate the total value.

Natural capital specific to the AONB includes:

- Diverse geology including minerals and soils
- Farmed land - grazing and some arable
- Woodlands providing timber
- Extensive upper catchment areas, especially of the Teme, providing natural flood management and supporting water supply and river base flow
- Rivers and streams, and clean air
- Biodiversity, including important habitats and species
- Rich cultural-historic landscape
- A beautiful and accessible place for recreation, relaxation and learning.

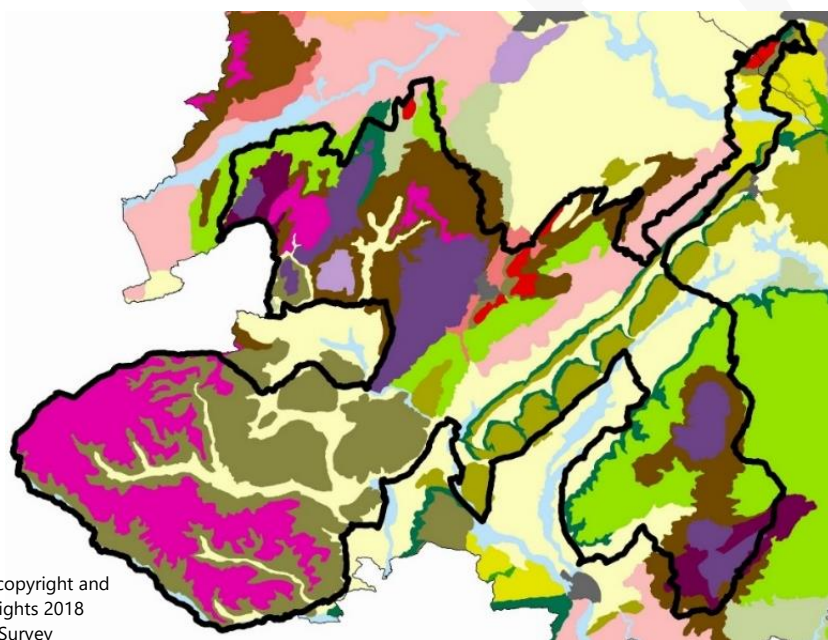
In the AONB the water environment gives the most cause for concern, and this is seen also in the table opposite of national trends in ecosystem services.



Landscape character

Understanding what makes each landscape special helps to conserve and enhance their distinct character and sense of place whilst enabling them to adapt and support the needs of people and communities. The AONB contains 17 of the county's 27 landscape types:

Grouping	Landscape Types	Found in the AONB at
Upland landscape types	High Open Moorland	Long Mynd, Stiperstones, Clee Hills
	High Enclosed Plateau	Clun Forest, Shelve
	Volcanic Hills and Slopes	Stretton Hills, The Wrekin
	Upland Smallholdings	around Clee Hill and Stapeley Hill
	Upstanding Enclosed Commons	Norbury Hill
Intermediate landscape types	Pasture Hills	Upper Onny, Clee Hills
	Principal Wooded Hills	Wenlock Edge, fringe of Clee plateau, Eastridge
	Wooded Hills and Farmlands	Clun & Teme catchments
	Wooded Hills and Estatelands	SE dip slope of Wenlock Edge
	Timbered Plateau Farmlands	Clee plateau, fringes of Stretton & Rea valleys
Lowland landscape types	Principal Timbered Farmlands	Habberley area
	Wooded Estatelands	Leighton, Sheinton, Buildwas
	Estate Farmlands	Corve Dale, Ape Dale
	Settled Pastoral Farmlands	Stretton Valley
	Principal Settled Farmlands	Ape Dale, Longnor
	Riverside Meadows	Teme, Clun, Onny and Corve
	Urban	Church Stretton



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Biodiversity and natural environment

The Lawton Review of 2010 set out the principles of “bigger, better, and more joined up” habitats to develop a resilient ecological network capable of coping with climate change. The UK government has a legal commitment to reverse declines in biodiversity, and the Biodiversity 2020 Strategy set out four themes:

1. A more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and sea
2. Putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy
3. Reducing environmental pressures
4. Improving our knowledge

The Shropshire Hills AONB contains a high concentration of the county's priority habitats, and the strength of habitat networks is relatively high compared to some areas, though much reduced from the past. Based on Natural England's most recent inventory data, there are 147km² of priority habitats in the Shropshire Hills AONB, making up 18.4% of its area.

Upland heathlands and grasslands are some of the largest areas of high quality habitat. Small meadows and grasslands are often without protection and especially vulnerable. Woodlands are slow to change and rather less vulnerable, but there is great potential both to improve their management and to expand tree cover through new woodland creation. Hedgerows are a vital element in the landscape, and good quality hedges can be excellent ecological corridors.

The Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership has identified a number of 'Priority Areas for Action' for landscape scale conservation. The Long Mynd – Stiperstones – Stretton Hills area has the strongest and largest habitat networks of any part of the AONB, and the Stepping Stones project is working in this area (see below). In the Clun catchment, the water environment is a key consideration, and work throughout the catchment on a variety of habitats will benefit the rivers. The Clee Hills are the third significant area of upland in the AONB, but as yet there is no structure or project promoting landscape scale action. Wenlock Edge is one of the longest continuous woodlands in England, linking to the woods of the Wrekin and the Severn valley. It is also highly valuable for geology and for limestone grassland.

Achieving ecological networks across the landscape depends on changes in land use on privately owned land. The resources currently available through existing mechanisms such as agri-environment are not adequate to meet the aspirations and progress is relatively slow.

Soils

The nature of soils in combination with slope, aspect and land use determines vulnerability to soil erosion. Loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage often supporting pasture are easily compacted when wet, and are prone to capping/slaking, increasing the risks of erosion, especially on steeper slopes. With a weak topsoil structure these soils are easily poached by livestock and compacted by machinery when wet. Soils with poor water infiltration increase the risk of diffuse pollution and flooding. More freely draining, loamy soils typically supporting arable cultivation are at risk of erosion on sloping land where bare soil is exposed, or where soils are compacted. The area has seen significant activity by farmers and various projects related to soil health and conservation, and this should be built on in future. Catchment Sensitive Farming has supported this, but there have been other changes in agricultural practice that have had positive impacts.

Air Quality

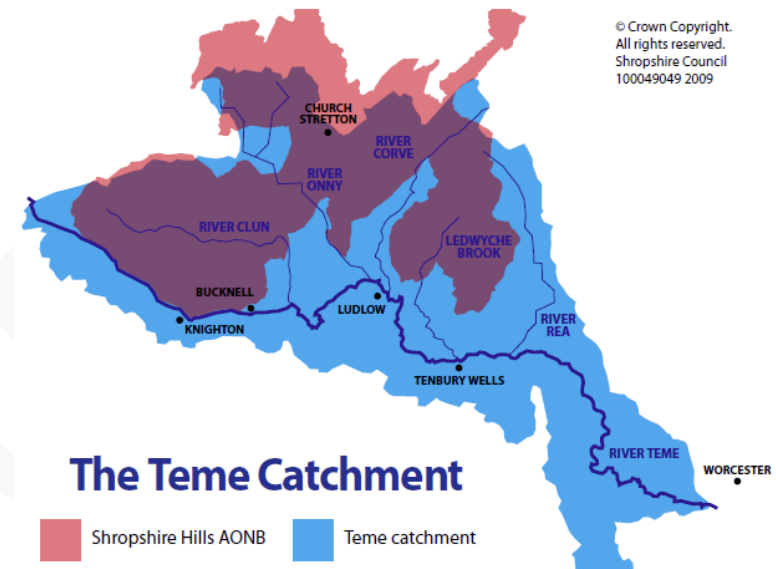
Air in the AONB is relatively clean regarding human health. However, ammonia and aerial nitrogen deposition are significantly affecting habitats. Shropshire Council has issued guidance on assessing the impact of ammonia and nitrogen on designated sites and Natural Assets from new and expanding livestock units. This is because very high background levels of ammonia are found in the county, with examples of international wildlife sites already at c200% to 600% of their Critical Levels or Critical Loads (i.e. the levels of ammonia and loads of nitrogen deposition above which species will be lost and habitats damaged). Also, recent caselaw has called into question how sources of pollution are to be considered 'in-combination' for internationally protected wildlife sites.

Water and catchment management

The AONB forms the majority of the headwaters of the Teme catchment, running into the Severn, as shown opposite. People well outside Shropshire are therefore affected by how land is managed for flood risk and water quality.

Catchment management is an integrated approach with drivers including water quality legislation, the poor condition of river SSSIs and the need to reduce flood risk. The Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative has worked in the AONB for many years. A particular focus for project work in Clun catchment is a site of European importance for the freshwater pearl mussel and the need to improve water quality, riparian habitat quality, and reduce sedimentation.

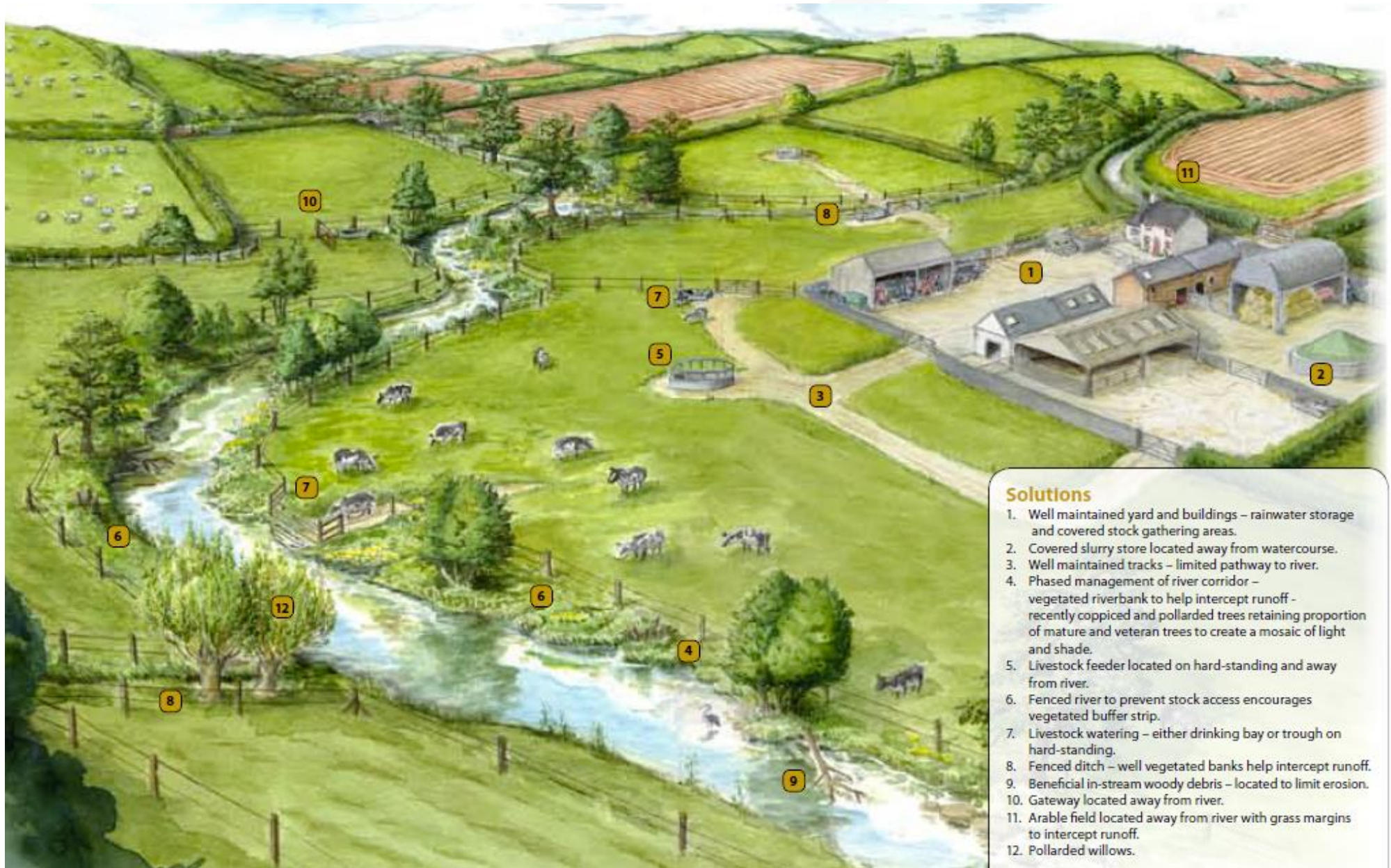
The speed of run-off in a river catchment is affected by factors such as geology and surface deposits, vegetation height, soil compaction, land drains and woodland cover. Changes beneficial to habitat quality such as reducing grazing and re-wetting grasslands and heath may not prevent flooding, but can have some effect in slowing down the flow of water and therefore reducing peak flood levels.



Natural Flood Management projects are putting in place measures such as small leaky dams high in the catchment to 'slow the flow'. There is still much misunderstanding about flooding and some attempts to reduce flooding by removing obstacles and speeding up flow simply cause flooding downstream. Holding more water higher in the catchment for longer is a better solution which helps both to reduce flooding and maintain baseflows in periods of low rainfall to prevent rivers drying up. Water can be held on taller vegetation e.g. heath, scrub and trees, in or on the ground in soils and wetland pools, on floodplains and actually in stream and river channels.

The unusually hot summer of 2018 has highlighted issues of drought and fire risk which may be encountered more frequently in the future. Wildfires are thankfully relatively uncommon in the area, but moorland areas are at risk. Drought has affected forage output for farmers and put pressure on wildlife habitats. Improved water storage capacity will help build resilience.

Water Friendly Farming guidance



Woodlands and Trees

Woodland covers 14% of the AONB, slightly above the national average. Over a third of this is ancient woodland, made up of 1,478ha of ancient semi-natural woodland and 2,689ha of Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

Trees outside woodlands, individually or in small groups, are also very important in the landscape – from small, scrubby trees softening upland gullies, to majestic specimen and veteran trees in lowland fields and hedgerows.

Woodland and trees deliver a huge range of benefits – protecting soils, supporting wildlife and providing shade and shelter for stock, absorbing CO₂, slowing water flow to prevent flooding, supporting crop pollinators, as well as providing beauty and inspiration to people. Trees can also be harvested sustainably to provide timber and other products.

Our existing ancient woodlands and veteran trees are a natural treasure trove and often of great cultural significance. These best features need to be protected and carefully managed. Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites retain aspects of the unique ancient woodland ecosystem and should be progressively restored to secure their unique characteristics, and move towards semi-natural cover. Commercial forest plantations should be managed to high environmental standards and sensitivity to the landscape, and can still be important for recreation, wildlife and water protection. Forest Design Plans are an important mechanism for discussion about management of the public forest Estate. There are many small woodlands on farms in the AONB which may not be of the best quality, but most can deliver more benefits for production, landscape and wildlife with some management, particularly when extended and linked throughout the landscape. Management of deer and grey squirrels is important to protect woodlands in some parts of the AONB.

More trees, of the right kinds in the right places, will enhance almost all of our landscape types, adding to their character and improving their ecological health. Because trees can also enhance hill land, rivers and farmland, increasing tree cover is possibly the single action with the most potential to increase the health of our landscape. Planting trees and farming can be complementary and need not be seen as competing land uses. The greatest ecological benefits will be derived from planting native species.

Our trees are under threat however – Ash Dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) is now found throughout the AONB, though the effects are not yet widely seen here. We are likely to lose a large proportion of our ash trees over coming decades, as already seen in parts of eastern England. In areas such as the lime-rich soils around Wenlock Edge, this will have a significant landscape impact. Our response to managing diseases will also make a difference – while safety must be maintained, excessive felling could exacerbate the impacts and reduce the potential for resistant strains to survive and spread. Along with *Phytophthora* in Alders and Acute Oak Decline, tree diseases will result in degradation of our landscape, unless action is taken.

Desired outcomes:

All ancient woodland sites are in a management plan that is based on condition assessment and long-term resilience. Landowners are enabled to actively manage towards their objectives and ancient woods managed to optimise biodiversity and to be sustainable.

Other existing woodlands are managed for a range of benefits.

Increase in woodland and tree cover, especially along watercourses and upland dingles and where it buffers, extends or links ancient woodland as priority.

Widespread planting of new trees to offset losses from tree diseases.

Tree and woodland are more integrated with farming and valued for their agricultural benefits.

Ancient trees are recorded and have appropriate management plans to retain their landscape and biodiversity benefits.

Where new trees should be planted:

- On land which is not valuable open habitat, e.g. species-rich grasslands, meadows, heathlands or wetlands, except in character with mosaic habitats
- On land which does not have archaeological value
- Field corners and hedgerows where individual trees and small groups of trees will enhance the landscape

Historic environment

The historic environment covers a wide range of heritage assets including buildings and features with statutory protection, together with features which are locally valued and important, and also the historic character of the wider landscape and settlements. Historic and natural aspects of the environment are closely inter-related – for example hedgerows, veteran trees, parkland and ancient woodland. The character of the landscape more generally, such as the small fields around squatter settlements and different enclosure patterns, has important cultural influences. The physical remains of people interacting with places over time also include features currently unrecorded or unknown.

The historic environment is a finite resource and is continuing to decline and be lost due to development, changes in land management and a lack of understanding and management. This is particularly true of the wider historic landscape and the less visible and undesignated sites which have no protection. There is a need to understand and promote the connectivity of historic sites and their settings as part of the wider landscape character in order to effectively conserve and manage the historic environment and Historic Landscape Character.

At 2017, 14 of the Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the AONB were classified as 'At Risk', and 78 as 'Vulnerable'. Scrub and tree growth was the top vulnerability, followed by stock erosion.

Projects such as 'Helping Hillforts and Earthwork Castles' within the Landscape Partnership Scheme have shown the potential to engage volunteers to help in the care of monuments. Partners are working to scale up and continue this approach across the AONB.

Offa's Dyke is the largest and most important single heritage feature in the AONB, with 17.5km in 14 fourteen sections protected as Scheduled Monument, comprising 19% of the total Scheduled length of Offa's Dyke. The Dyke is separated into condition sections and of the 26 of these in the AONB, not one is in favourable condition, and only 11% are improving. A lack of active management, or 'benign neglect' accounts for the main threat types for the Dyke within the AONB – including erosion by livestock and growth of various sorts of vegetation.

A new Offa's Dyke Conservation Management Plan is being developed, led jointly by Historic England and Cadw (the Welsh heritage agency). Scrub and bracken growth is a major factor in poor condition of archaeological features, plus in a smaller number of cases damage by livestock or occasionally people. The significance of Offa's Dyke is heightened by its being an extensive, linear monument, where the pressures are disproportionate because of its scale. The scale of it also means the Dyke provides significant benefits to the local and wider communities.



Traditional skills are an important factor in maintenance of heritage. Acton Scott Historic Working Farm remains a valuable training centre, and courses were provided through the Stiperstones & Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme, such as in care and maintenance of pre-1919 buildings.

Helping farming to support natural beauty

Current changes to agriculture policy bring great opportunities for farming and conservation to align better over coming years. This will require an honest dialogue and recognition different interests, and this Plan aims to contribute to that process.

The uplands deliver public benefits disproportionately and are also the place where farming and rural businesses are often the most marginal. There is a particular need for land managers in the uplands to be supported financially for a range of public benefits in addition to food production, and gradually to shift perceptions of what the 'products' are. These need to include more aspects of natural capital such as landscape, wildlife, carbon storage, water, soil etc, which have previously been 'by-products' of production focused farming, but are too important to leave to chance in that way.

Farmers will want to evolve and modernise their businesses. If approached in the right way, the high quality of the environment of the AONB provides an asset which can benefit the land management economy of the area rather than being a constraint. Integration of environmental practices and conservation with business development will be valuable. The combination of reaching local markets, differentiating products with high environmental credentials, accessing environmental grants and reducing costs - including through environmental measures such as waste and energy reduction - provides a sustainable means of developing agricultural businesses. New schemes supporting productivity need to be environmentally sustainable. There is a need for a wider debate about large scale farm enterprises which can have significant impacts on the landscape and natural environment.

Farmers themselves will identify things on which support is needed – including succession and opportunities for new entrants, farmer clusters and networks, specialist technical knowledge. Various projects using Farmers Dens (drop-in advice clinics), talks and farm visits have been successful.

Regulation has a role to play. Some targeted enforcement in the most significant cases can go a long way to creating a wide incentive for compliance. This can be welcomed by other farmers, who may see someone flouting rules as 'getting away with it', and/or giving the industry a bad name.

New Environmental Land Management Schemes

At the time of writing this plan, preparations for Brexit, government agriculture policy and plans for a new Environmental Land Management System are developing fairly rapidly. The principle of public money for public goods has been established, and various tests and trials will be carried out. AONB Partnerships are likely to play a role, and the National Association and AONB Family will continue engaging actively with Defra on this. New schemes will be one of the most important mechanisms to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The high previous uptake of agri-environment schemes in the AONB is a foundation on which to build. More recently however, uptake has been coming down due to lower attractiveness and complexity of the newer schemes, as well as uncertainty about the future.

The following principles should underpin new schemes:

- Sustainable land management
- Conserving and enhancing natural capital, ensuring flows of ecosystem services are identified, maintained and protected
- Mitigating the impact of climate change
- Locally devised targeting statement should link clearly to Management Plan objectives
- Whole farm plans should seek to integrate business planning with environment and conservation planning
- Integrating delivery at the local level, for simpler, cheaper, more effective schemes
- Co-ordination measures to minimise cross-border issues with Wales, which may result in different arrangements for different parts of the same farm.

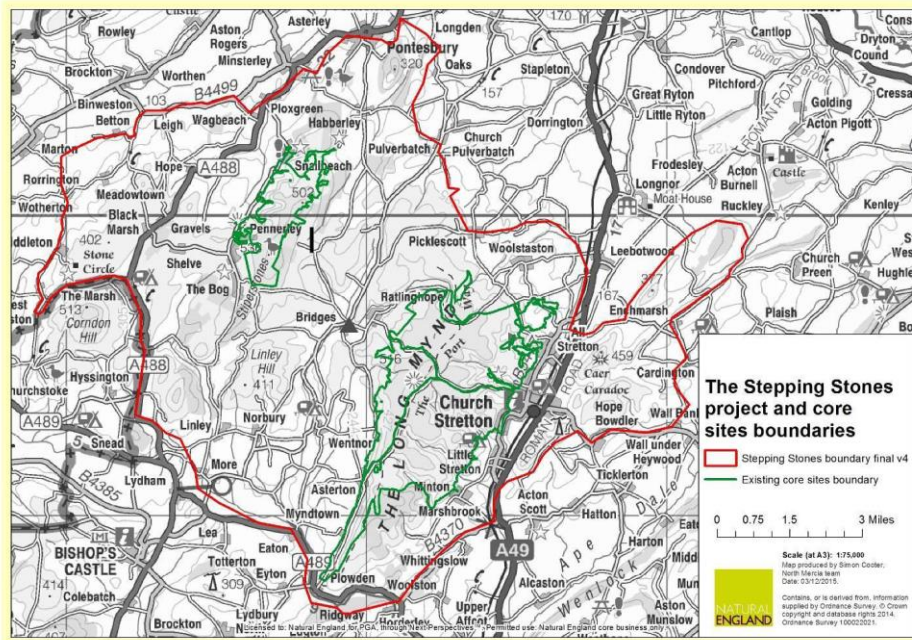
An agricultural transition period up to 2024 has been defined, so the period of this Management Plan will be when these schemes are developed. Detailed commentary on how new schemes may work is likely to be quickly overtaken, but the current Management Plan has a role to play in clarifying some of the priority outcomes for the Shropshire Hills which new schemes might deliver (see outline priority outcomes in Appendix 2).

Integrated area projects

In addition to government schemes, area focused projects have been very successful in the Shropshire Hills and other places. Two in particular will be significant in delivering aims of this Plan over the next five years:

The Stepping Stones project is a long-term initiative focussed on the Long Mynd and Stiperstones area, led by the National Trust with partners. Its aims are:

1. **Better nature reserves:** providing greater resilience for the 'core areas'
2. **Bigger nature reserves:** buffering and enlarging habitats for greater resilience
3. **Joined up habitats:** creating and enhancing corridors and 'stepping stones' to help species move and adapt, and ensure natural processes function effectively
4. **Vibrant wildlife:** reversing declines to recover special wildlife species
5. **People looking after the land:** conserving the landscape through land use
6. **People being inspired:** supporting people's enjoyment, understanding and participation, contributing to their health and wellbeing.



Our Common Cause: Upland Commons project

Common land managed by traditional husbandry systems has a centuries-old heritage and delivers many public benefits. In Dartmoor, the Lake District, Shropshire Hills and Yorkshire Dales, the project will carry out work to:

- Enable collaborative management
- Reconnect people with commons, and
- Improve public benefits

Activities will include collectively building skills, trialling practical conservation, and through learning and volunteering, celebrate heritage and enhance environmental assets. A 20 month development phase is running during 2018 and 2019 funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Subject to further successful funding bids, this will be followed by a three year delivery phase.

Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons

Creating Bridges of Learning and Action to Secure at Risk Heritage Across England



Land Management Supporting Landscape and Natural Beauty – Management Plan Policies

Habitats and Networks

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

Climate Change Adaptation

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

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 with landowners wherever possible, but mechanisms for legal enforcement should be employed where necessary. While known blackspots and problems should be targeted 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.

~~Agri-Environment Funding~~New Environmental Land Management Schemes

The Shropshire Hills should ~~remain be~~ a priority area for ~~agri-environment~~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.

Woodlands and trees – Management Plan policies

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.

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.

Land Management

~~Farmers and land managers should be supported as the main stewards of natural beauty, and for their vital role in maintaining the Shropshire Hills landscape. Policies and public funding relating to farming and forestry should recognise this and help to support ways of farming which generate these public environmental benefits.~~

~~Because the vitality of the local agricultural economy is so integrally linked with the natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills, the AONB Partnership will actively support appropriate and sustainable forms of farming and diversification enterprises where these are compatible with the AONB designation.~~

~~Farm advisory services on environmental issues should make better links with business approaches such as selling direct into local markets, which are also of benefit to the AONB.~~

Management Plan Actions – Land Management Supporting Landscape and Natural Beauty

Action	Type	Lead & partners	Priority
Work with Defra, NAAONB and local partners to ensure new Environmental Land Management Schemes deliver Management Plan priorities in the AONB	New action	AONB, NE, NT, SWT, NFU, CLA	H
Develop guidance material for land managers – about landscape features and about utilising environmental assets sustainably	Aspiration	AONB	H
Implement 'Our Common Cause' upland commons project with local and national partners (subject to delivery phase approval)	In progress	AONB, FCL, NT, NE	H
Develop the Stepping Stones project into a long-term delivery initiative for the Long Mynd – Stiperstones area.	In progress	NT, AONB, NE, SWT	H
Continue to improve habitat and water quality in the River Clun for Freshwater pearl mussel	Ongoing	AONB, EA, NE, SRT	H
Co-ordinate catchment management through the Teme Partnership and Clun Catchment Partnership	Ongoing	SRT, AONB	
Work with landowners through the Water Environment Grant (subject to funding approval)	New action	AONB, SRT	
Establish a large programme of planting of trees outside woodlands, partly to help offset losses from Ash dieback disease	New action	AONB, WT	H
Support well planned woodland creation to enhance landscape, biodiversity and resource protection	Ongoing	FC, WT	
Develop an Upper Teme project – including expanding tree and woodland cover and enhancing the river SSSI	Aspiration	AONB, SRT, NE, EA, NRW	

Action	Type	Lead & partners	Priority
Develop a 'Monumental Volunteers' project for management of historic sites	New action	AONB, HE	H
Work with landowners on restorative management of Plantations on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS)	New action	AONB, WT	
Develop a social forestry project with funded officer capacity, and a hub linking service providers and users	Aspiration	AONB and partners	
Support management of trees and woodlands along with natural flood management in the Wenlock Edge area, and look at potential for an integrated area project	New action	NT, SWT, AONB, NE	
Support continued understanding of the geology of the AONB and the conservation and management of geological and geomorphological sites	Ongoing	SGS, NE, AONB	
Promote training opportunities for land management and conservation, and seek to address gaps in provision where identified	Ongoing	AONB, NE, NT, HE	
Work with landowners regarding management of county Wildlife Sites	Ongoing	SWT	
Seek opportunities to improve co-ordination of farm and conservation advice, and address gaps if possible	Ongoing	NE, AONB, SWT	
Continue network of Shropshire Hills Uplands Forum linking with national Uplands Alliance	Ongoing	AONB and partners	
Consider establishment of a woodland owners network	Aspiration	WT, AONB, FC	
Collate environmental data relevant to the AONB	Ongoing	AONB, NE, SC	

Planning for a Sustainable Economy and Communities

The Rural Coalition in 2010 set out an overall objective which is still relevant, for *“Sustainable rural communities in which people enjoy living and working; which are vibrant, distinctive and in keeping with the character of their surroundings, with a full range of good-quality local services; and which enhance local landscapes, heritage and biodiversity while meeting the challenges of climate and economic change”*.

The Shropshire Hills AONB is 23% of Shropshire but contains only 6% of the county's population. Its economy is therefore different from much of the county, with more small dispersed rural businesses. Although agriculture is the largest land use, tourism is actually larger economically.

The high quality of the AONB's landscape underpins the area's economy. Development which draws on this quality without harming it is sustainable, while activities which undermine the area's natural capital will have a long-term detrimental effect on the economy.

The planning system is the main mechanism for protection of an AONB, and planning policy and decisions should give the designation due recognition.

The AONB designation is not about preventing change, and a large majority of planning applications in the AONB are granted. Appropriate development within the AONB is necessary for the economic and social wellbeing of those who work and live in it. However, it is important for the planning system to protect the qualities which people value about the area, and some forms of development which may be appropriate elsewhere should be controlled in the AONB.

All development should be sustainable and should create a high quality built environment with suitable infrastructure whilst at the same time protecting the natural and historic setting and complementing existing built forms.

Ensuring the conservation and enhancement of the built environment in the AONB (and adjacent to it), through high quality design is paramount. The intrinsic character and beauty of the varied landscapes within the AONB should be recognised when considering the type and scale of any development or building modifications in rural communities.

Sustainable development at a high level is summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is also described in terms of balancing economic, social and environmental objectives, and this is at the heart of most planning decisions.

Decisions on whether a particular development is sustainable development are not always clear-cut, and the contradictions and trade-offs are always subject to negotiation. Different people will inevitably have different views on the priority factors, and, where conflicts are highlighted, choices have to be made.

However, the decision-making process should ensure these choices are explicit, making negotiation of different outcomes possible.

There are too many examples of where the balance has not favoured the AONB landscape. A 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' is not simply a presumption in favour of development. There are distinctive features of natural capital that distinguish it from other forms of capital – including its basic life-support function, its necessity for production, and often the irreversibility of its destruction. Taking this into account is not putting the environment before the economy – the long-term requirements of the economy can be compromised by poor development, and require environmental resources to be looked after. In practice this means:

- not depleting natural capital and assets
- net biodiversity gain
- integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision-making process.

Planning and AONBs – national policy and context

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty enjoy the same levels of protection from development as those of UK National Parks. Responsibility for local planning policy and decisions in AONBs lies with the relevant local authority (in National Parks it lies with the National Park Authority). While AONB Management Plans themselves do not form part of a local development plan they are nevertheless vitally important documents in the planning system. They are

- the basis for identifying those aspects of the AONB which are critical in contributing to its natural beauty and potentially influential in development planning policy and

- a 'material consideration' in the determination of individual planning applications and at appeal.

In particular, the AONB Management Plan can propose criteria for judging what might count as sustainable development within the AONB, and identify the components of the AONB's landscape and scenic beauty.

National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF was revised in 2018 and former paragraphs 115 and 116 relating to AONBs were reworded and amalgamated into a new para 172. The importance of this policy to the AONB justifies its inclusion here in full as follows:

172. Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:*

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.*

** For the purposes of paragraphs 172 and 173, whether a proposal is 'major development' is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.*

The presumption in favour of sustainable development and its footnote relevant to AONBs have been amended, and is now para 11 of the revised NPPF:

11. Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

*For **plan-making** this means that:*

- a) plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area, and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change;*
- b) strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:

 - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area⁶; or*
 - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.**

*For **decision-taking** this means:*

- c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*
- d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

 - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed⁶; or*
 - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.**

Footnote 6. The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 176) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 63); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

Shropshire Council Local Plan

Shropshire's Local Plan is a collection of documents which consider a wide range of important planning issues such as housing, employment, retail, the environment, and transport. Two of the key policy documents are:

- Core Strategy - adopted 24 February 2011
- Site Allocations and Management of Development Adopted Plan – adopted 17 December 2015

From 2016-17 Shropshire Council has been carrying out a partial review of the Local Plan. An Issues and Strategic Options consultation looked at housing requirement, strategic distribution of future growth, strategies for employment growth and delivering development in rural settlements. A further consultation on the Preferred Scale and Distribution of Development ran in the autumn of 2017 and this will lead to the development of 'Preferred Options'.

Telford & Wrekin Local Plan

Following Examination and an Inspector's report, Telford & Wrekin's Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted in January 2018.

An important supporting document is the Strategic Landscapes Study provides an analysis of three Strategic Landscapes in the Borough (including the Wrekin Forest partly within the AONB). The aim of the study was to:

- identify and evaluate the significant landscape characteristics, special qualities and key sensitivities of each Strategic Landscape.
- identify the extent of each Strategic Landscape.
- identify the broad parameters and nature of change which are compatible with the appropriate protection and conservation of each Strategic landscape.

Protection and enhancement of the AONB and its special qualities

The planning system is the most significant way in which the AONB designation is actually protected. The designation should not only be considered in relation to visual aspects but for the full range of its special qualities. The 'detail' of biodiversity and heritage value within the landscape is an intrinsic part of natural beauty, as are the ways that people enjoy and value the area.

Tranquillity has a positive influence on people's physical and psychological wellbeing and contributes to the rural economy by attracting visitors to the area. Particular attention should be paid to preserving dark skies especially where an area such as the Long Mynd, has Dark Sky Status.

The role of planning in relation to the AONB is not just about stopping things – planning can also drive enhancement of the AONB. All Local Plan documents, Neighbourhood Planning, and planning decision-making processes should identify opportunities to achieve a biodiversity and wider environmental net gain from development. Such gains are valuable locally, and make important contributions towards regional and national priorities for nature conservation. Opportunities could include any of the following:

- Include, protect or enhance green infrastructure
- Connectivity of sites and species
- Biodiversity offsetting
- Future management of and access to sites or wider countryside
- Use of CIL funding.

'Integrity' and 'authenticity' are concepts central to all aspects of heritage protection, being recognised by UNESCO and enshrined in international conventions to which the UK is a signatory.

- integrity: wholeness, honesty
- authenticity: those characteristics that most truthfully reflect and embody the cultural heritage values of a place.

Protection and conservation of the AONB should therefore take account of the integrity of the whole area, not just specific locations, attributes, or features, and also the authenticity set out in the full range of special qualities.

Major development

Within AONBs the definition of major development is at the discretion of the decision maker. In some cases, thresholds lower than the NPPF definitions may be appropriate. The Management Plan defines here some criteria that should guide judgements of whether a development affecting the AONB is major:

1. Where the scale of development is likely to have a detrimental visual impact that harms the scenic quality of the AONB, either within the AONB or in its setting;
2. Where the location of development would erode the special qualities and features of the area of the AONB where the development is proposed (landscape, cultural, biodiversity, tranquillity, etc);
3. Where the type of development is not directly compatible with its surroundings; and/or
4. Where the development would conflict with the economic and social needs of local communities and the AONB's guiding principles of sustainable development.

Any proposal affecting the AONB deemed to be major development should be accompanied by a report identifying any detrimental effects upon the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities. This should relate directly to the special qualities of the AONB as a whole as well as those specific to the development site.

Any mitigation identified to moderate these impacts should be:

- clearly detailed, in line with the duty to conserve and enhance the AONB,
- be compatible with the objectives of the AONB Management Plan, and
- be capable of realisation through robust planning conditions or obligation.

AONB Management Plan Policy - Protection of the AONB

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.

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 and visual amenity. Exceptionally where a significant

adverse impact associated with development cannot be avoided, appropriate mitigation measures including habitat creation or community benefits, should be sought.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Setting of the AONB

Development in the area around the AONB which may result in a negative impact on the setting of the AONB should not be supported. 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].

Landscape

Planning has an important role in both protecting landscape and supporting positive change in the landscape.

The impact of development on key features of the landscape character should be assessed and where adverse impacts are found to occur, modifications or mitigation measures should be required to remove or reduce the impact of any development. Development which would have a significant effect on landscape character, quality or features should be refused or may be required to have conditions imposed.

New landscaping may compensate for loss or degradation of landscape features, but this should not be an easy way of avoiding good design adapted to retain existing features. New planting for example cannot compensate for loss of mature trees or hedges. The use of fast-growing conifers to screen a development for example can in itself create an intrusive feature. If a development is proposing major earthworks to create screening bunds, these also are a major permanent effect on the landscape and in these cases a smaller scale or alternative locations for the development should be considered.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is an important part of Environmental Impact Assessment for more significant planning applications. The two aspects of landscape and visual impact are often wrongly conflated, and both need to be considered.

“Landscape impact assessment, in common with any assessment of environmental effects, includes a combination of objective and subjective judgements, and it is therefore important that a structured and consistent approach is used. ... Landscape and visual impacts are separate, although linked procedures. Landscape effects derive from changes in the physical landscape, which may give rise to changes in its character and how this is experienced. Visual effects relate to the changes that arise in the composition of available views as a result of changes to the landscape, to people’s responses to the changes, and to the overall effects with respect to visual amenity.”

From Guidelines for Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition

The weighting of landscape impacts will often come down to fine judgements within the detailed process of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, which

in our system are made by people employed by developers to help secure permissions. Decision-makers and objectors are often not well enough informed to challenge professional judgements buried deep within this detailed process. Approaches within this process which can lead to conclusions which significantly underplay significance to the landscape of a proposal include:

- Describing the landscape of the location as of lower sensitivity, even within an AONB
- Weighting highly some mitigation measures such as new tree planting as ‘enhancements’ to the landscape, sometimes even to the point of describing new developments of large buildings as ‘positive’ for the landscape overall
- Combining slight downgrades of both impact and sensitivity in the matrix process which leads to a much-reduced assessment of significance
- Failing to acknowledge that large scale earthworks to hide a development visually, have a large physical impact on the landscape and its character
- Failing to recognise the often inter-connected impacts on landscape character, heritage, biodiversity and amenity by dealing with each in isolation.

In support of the Management Plan, a Landscape Guidance document is being developed derived from the Landscape Character Assessment. This will provide further detail on the location, design and landscaping of developments and when available should be taken into account in planning decisions.

The surroundings and setting of the AONB are important to its landscape and scenic beauty. Views out of the AONB and into it from surrounding areas are a significant consideration.



Good practice for landscaping of new developments would include:

- Careful location, form and design of development (simple 'screening' of poorly considered development is not a substitute for good design, taking into account the character of the local landscape)
- Good landscaping plans which can be understood and commented upon
- Adopting sustainability principles such as use of local materials, low energy consumption, water conservation, decreasing run-off, etc
- Retaining and incorporating existing landscape features, including mature trees, old boundary features such as walls and hedges
- Landscaping which reflects the rural character of the location
- Minimising use of earth bunding with un-natural form
- Avoidance of industrial style fencing and especially fencing on top of banks
- Use of appropriate materials in hard landscaping reflecting rural character, including suitable timber, stone and appropriate bricks where used
- Well-designed mixed planting of trees and shrubs suitable for the soil type and location. Tree and shrub planting should be predominantly native especially in open countryside locations, but non-native species in character with the area are also acceptable close to clusters of domestic buildings. Native species common in the area include pedunculate and sessile oak, birch, alder, hazel, holly, field maple and various species of willow. Seek advice and see what grows near your site. Avoid conifers such as Leylandii.
- Inclusion of grasslands with higher species diversity, which will often thrive on poorer soils
- Good maintenance of tree and shrub planting to ensure establishment and growth, including weed control and mulching, protection from browsing animals, and replacement planting where necessary

AONB Management Plan policy - Landscape

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.

Heritage

Planning will most often need to take account of heritage in relation to particular heritage assets such as buildings or archaeological features. These may be significant for their archaeological, architectural, artistic, historic or other values, even if not individually designated. Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets out an over-arching principle of avoidance of harm to the significance of heritage assets, including their setting. Where harm cannot be avoided, there is a need to take account of the degree of harm to their significance, and implement mitigation measures to reduce this harm. It is important to remember that not all heritage assets are recorded and known, and the potential archaeological interest of sites should also be assessed. Cumulative impacts to heritage may arise from development, over time or simultaneously, and should also be considered.

Development proposals affecting the historic environment are much more likely to succeed if they are designed with understanding of the significance of the heritage assets they may affect. The significance of a heritage asset is the sum of its archaeological, architectural, historic, and artistic interest. Applicants should seek advice and appropriate expertise.

The historic environment plays an important role in sustainable development, and contributes to delivering social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits. The heritage sector is an important source of economic prosperity and economic growth - direct, indirect and induced heritage activity together account for 1.5% of total GVA in the West Midlands. The historic environment is also a huge draw for visitors, and heritage-related construction sustains many jobs.

Developments which materially detract from an asset's significance may also damage its economic viability and therefore possibly threaten its ongoing conservation.

Development and existing buildings of heritage value

Individual buildings of heritage value are protected through Listing, with processes of consent required for many works and alterations.

Conservation Area designation is a valuable tool for protecting the character of settlements. These should be backed by a conservation area appraisal involving the local community, ideally leading to a Design Statement. The production of Design Statements should be supported, especially but not exclusively for settlements with Conservation Areas, and adopted statements should be given due weight in planning decisions (see Core Strategy CS6: Para 4.83 88). Local Heritage Lists are also valuable for recording non-designated but locally valued heritage assets.

Farm-based developments will often have implications for historic farmsteads, which are a significant feature of the AONB. A high proportion of farmsteads are outside villages and isolated. Some have shrunk back over time from hamlets to a single farmstead and will retain archaeological features. In Shropshire a high proportion of farmsteads have retained some or all of their working buildings, the rates of survival being even higher in the uplands.

Finding a future sustainable use for historic farmsteads and their buildings requires an integrated approach, considering their merits as heritage assets, their contribution to landscape character and their potential role in the changing structure of rural communities and economies.

Setting of heritage assets

With better information available, development proposals which would directly damage defined archaeological features are thankfully rare, but the setting is more often overlooked.

Setting is the surroundings in which an asset is experienced, and may be more extensive than its curtilage. All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not.

Setting is often considered mainly in relation to views, but other factors such as quiet and tranquillity can be an important part of a setting. The contribution that setting makes to the significance of the heritage asset does not depend on people's current ability to access or experience the setting.

Extensive heritage assets, such as historic parks and gardens, landscapes and townscapes, can include many heritage assets, historic associations between

them and their nested and overlapping settings, as well as having a setting of their own.

AONB Management Plan policy - Buildings of heritage interest and development

Existing traditional buildings of heritage interest should be repaired and reused in preference to being replaced by new building, and conservation advice should be sought.

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.

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

Housing

Construction of new houses in Shropshire and the AONB has accelerated in recent years, and Shropshire's targets for new housing development are significant. Though policy focuses most development on larger settlements, this still does have implications for the AONB. Bucknell, Clun, and Clee Hill are defined as Community Hubs, and with Community Clusters comprising:

- Aston on Clun, Hopesay, Broome, Beambridge, Long Meadow End, Rowton, Round Oak and Horderley
- Priest Weston, Rorrington Middleton
- Twitchen (with Clungunford)
- Hope, Bentlawnt, Hopesgate, Hemford, Shelve, Gravels (inc Gravelsbank), Pentervin, Bromlow, Meadowtown and Lordstone
- Snailbeach, Stiperstones, Pennerley, Tankerville, Black Hole, Crow's Nest, The Bog
- Wentnor and Norbury
- Bache Mill, Bouldon, Broncroft, Corfton, Middlehope, Peaton, Seifton (Great/Little) Sutton, and Westhope
- Stoke St Milborough, Hopton Cangeford, Cleestanton, and Cleedownton
- Wistanstow
- Buildwas

Church Stretton is the only market town within the AONB which is required to take new development. As the only town in Shropshire within a nationally protected landscape, the scale and design of development here needs to be of high quality and be sensitive to the location. The fact that no communities have come forward as Hubs or Clusters within Church Stretton's hinterland places greater pressure on the town itself to accommodate housing, while at the same time there are real physical as well as environmental constraints on the availability of sites in the town. There will however be some development in settlements not defined as Hubs or Clusters through the single plot exception sites policy.

The supply of affordable housing remains a significant issue for rural communities. Recent housing delivery has tended to provide more larger, detached properties, and the housing mix is not well matched with local needs, especially for low wage earners. The cost of buying a house in Shropshire ranges from 5.72 to 9.27 times the median income (ref). Shropshire Council encourages affordable housing through the Type and Affordability of Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) through which all new market housing developments are required to make a contribution towards the

provision of affordable housing. The thresholds for funding for affordable housing from open market developments have been reduced by central government which is lowering delivery of affordable housing by this means. The Council is therefore proposing to encourage greater use of other mechanisms including self-build and exception sites.

The AONB Management Plan supports a vision of sustainable rural communities and of development which enhances local landscapes, heritage and biodiversity. Housing developments need to be of appropriate scale to the location and its landscape sensitivity, and of a high standard in terms of design. The policies below provide guidance and it is intended during the life of this Management Plan to develop a more detailed design guidance document for domestic developments.

AONB Management Plan policy - Housing and Design of Development

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.

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.

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 and are expected to be of a higher design quality than outside the AONB. These Such 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.

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. ~~Inappropriate design, layout and materials should be avoided.~~ 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.

~~Where possible, locally occurring building materials should be used.~~ 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 Policy CS20].

Agricultural development

Developing and flourishing farm businesses will from time to time require some new buildings. Modernising infrastructure enables farms to develop and can help support improved environmental performance. This does not mean however that any kind and scale of agricultural building is suitable anywhere in the AONB. Smaller types of agricultural building are classed as permitted development and only require notification to the planning authority rather than full planning consent. The AONB Agricultural Buildings Design Guidance identifies ways in which new farm buildings can be designed to fit better into the AONB landscape. Farmsteads with clusters of buildings are a historic part of our landscape. New buildings inevitably change the character of these, but in many cases careful location, design and landscaping will minimise negative impacts, and new buildings are often better placed near to existing ones.

Very large agricultural developments such as multiple sheds for intensive livestock rearing such as poultry, are some of the biggest human structures within our landscape and among the most contentious form of development, including among other farmers. Aside from landscape and visual impacts, there can be significant issues with poultry from cumulative ammonia emissions and factors such as disposal of wastes and heavy goods traffic. The strong policies restricting major development in AONBs to 'exceptional circumstances' do not seem to be borne out by the extensive recent consenting of such developments in the AONB. There is a greater argument for new buildings where these support farm activities which directly maintain the AONB landscape, e.g. winter housing of livestock. Many poultry operations bring in feed, and therefore have less connection to the landscape. Direct employment is often very limited, and jobs and economic benefit is often outside the AONB or the county.

Diversification

Diversification activities involving new development should work with the qualities of the AONB not against them, and respect the quality of the landscape, which is the basis of many other businesses in the area. If the AONB designation is perceived as a limitation to a certain kind of development, this is an indication that an approach working in harmony with the high quality landscape is not being adopted. There are many types of developments of farm enterprises and diversification which can be done without harm to the AONB, including:

- Adding value to products

- Alternative livestock
- Sustainable tourism including accommodation and sensitively planned events
- Care farming
- Crafts and training
- Woodlands
- Alternative uses of buildings

A simple Sustainability checklist for diversification:

- Using previously developed land and re-using existing buildings
- Using locally sourced materials and minimising waste
- High quality and sustainable design and construction methods
- Energy efficiency, renewable energy and recycling
- Reducing need for travel and transport
- Protect and enhance landscape, heritage and biodiversity

AONB Management Plan policy - Agricultural development

Farm enterprises need to be in harmony with the environment and sympathetic to the purposes of AONB designation. Any enterprise should not degrade ~~this resource~~ the landscape, which ~~also~~ 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.

Design of new agricultural buildings 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.

Housing related directly to agricultural development should be appropriate to the needs of agricultural workers and not a short-cut to open market housing.

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.

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.

Criteria indicating that poultry applications should be refused include:

- Where the number and scale of buildings would more than double the built footprint of the farmstead
- Where location close to existing significant scale sheds would create significant combined impacts
- Where buildings are proposed in open field locations away from other farm buildings
- Where significant earth-moving or bunding is proposed
- Where the topography means that the development will be easily visible
- Where harm to landscape character cannot be satisfactorily mitigated
- Where proximity to residential properties or other businesses will cause nuisance
- Where the number and size of vehicular movements associated with the application would be inappropriate for small rural roads

Roads

The design and management of the rural road network should reinforce the local character and distinctiveness of the AONB. The distinctive character of minor roads contributes to the character of the wider AONB landscape and they are an important means for people to experience the AONB. Insensitive, over-engineered changes to these roads can have a detrimental impact. The increasing use of larger vehicles is having damaging impacts.

AONB Management Plan policy - Highways & Road Management

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.

~~They should also take into account~~The potential impact on freshwater habitats should be borne in mind and, using rural SuDS principles should be used where possible.

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.

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.

Renewable energy

Lowering carbon emissions from the area is an over-riding priority, and should influence all areas of decision making. Energy conservation should be given the highest priority, and should always accompany renewable energy generation. Low carbon community initiatives are supported. In addition to carbon from energy use, the ability of land management to reduce carbon emissions should be optimised. Integration of energy efficiency and renewable energy should be encouraged in all development – new or refurbishment - of any scale, having regard where necessary to the significance of heritage assets.

The rationale for the AONB is that small and appropriate scale renewable energy generation can be accommodated within the landscape, drawing on the area's natural resources without harming its special qualities. Larger scale installations should be outside the AONB. As solar energy can be generated anywhere to enable it to enter the grid, the special qualities of the landscape and the purposes of the AONB's designation should take precedence over industrial solar installations.

AONB Management Plan policy - Renewable Energy

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~~146 can be fully satisfied.

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.
- Use should be made of brownfield sites over greenfield sites.
- Small scale domestic renewable installations (such as solar panels) are encouraged and AONB designation should not be used to constrain or refuse proposals for this type of development. 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 monument. 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. Greater sensitivity may will be required in Conservation Areas ~~and on Listed Buildings, but even in these circumstances, effort should be made to enable energy benefits to be achieved.~~

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.

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. 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).

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.

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.

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.

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).

Visitor Economy

The Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy for 2018-23 has recently been prepared by the Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership. The vision of the Strategy is that

“The Shropshire Hills is a nationally recognised, sustainably managed tourism destination, valued for its outstanding landscape, wealth of visitor experiences and important contribution to the economy of Shropshire.”

Planning is of relevance both in regulating the forms of tourism development, and in regulating all types of development to ensure the landscape retains the qualities which people come to enjoy.

Managing the conservation Impacts of tourism and recreation

Experience shows that real or potential conflicts between access, conservation and land management can usually be avoided by careful planning and management. This will include appropriate promotion for locations that are robust and can be managed while maintaining a low profile for some sensitive conservation sites. Maintaining a good standard of paths in suitable locations is a simple and positive way of managing pressures, though some of the most popular locations do not have adequate mechanisms or resources, e.g. the Wrekin, Caer Caradoc. In some places there will also be a need for raising awareness and understanding of conservation issues, sensitive features and appropriate behaviour (e.g. controlling dogs on moorland where ground nesting birds are found). Greater levels of use bring greater pressures and require more management resources.

Recreational off-road use of motor vehicles and motorbikes can have a significant physical impact on soils, vegetation and paths as well as on tranquillity. This is especially likely where it is carried out irresponsibly in illegal circumstances. The recreational use of off-road vehicles is generally considered incompatible with the special qualities of the AONB.

AONB Management Plan policy - Tourism and recreation development

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 are recommended:

- 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.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

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 (a Green Events Guide is available on the AONB website).

Sustainable Communities

There are a number of challenges facing rural communities and businesses in the Shropshire Hills, in common with other upland areas of England:

- Transport – not necessarily ‘connectivity’, but cost and availability
- Broadband coverage
- Affordable housing – availability is an issue especially in rural towns, though in deeper rural areas available properties can sometimes be harder to let due to transport limitations.
- Mobile phone coverage.
- Challenges in delivery of rural services
- Keeping farming viable and sustainable environmentally

The loss of European funding including LEADER will require new approaches from government to rural development and funding in a cross-sector, integrated way.

Shropshire Council Place Plans are focussed on the market town areas, covering the AONB area as shown below:



These are complemented in many places at a more local level by Community Led Plans (formerly Parish Plans).

Management Plan Actions – Planning for a Sustainable Economy and Communities

Action	Type	Lead & partners	Priority
Press for stronger status for AONB structures as a statutory consultee in planning and the necessary resources to fulfil duties which go with this	Aspiration	AONB, NE, LAs	H
Expand capacity within the AONB team for work on planning consultations	New action	AONB	H
Develop Design Guidance and a checklist for domestic development	New action	AONB, LAs	H
Develop a Landscape Guidance document	New action	AONB, LAs, NE	H
Continue to foster links and understanding between Partnership and planning officers and committee members	Ongoing	AONB, LAs	H
Monitor and report on planning applications in the AONB	Aspiration	LAs	
Continue to foster stronger links with other relevant planning consultees – including Natural England, CPRE and other Council departments	Ongoing	AONB	
Support new Community Led Plans to take the AONB fully into account	Ongoing	AONB	
Make the case for an Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for motorsports in the AONB	New action	AONB	
Develop guidance on management and design of roads in the AONB	Aspiration	AONB, LAs	
Undertake work to identify key viewpoints within the AONB, and looking into it from surrounding areas	Aspiration	AONB and partners	
Demonstrate value of landscape to economy through tourism	Aspiration	AONB, LAs	

People enjoying and caring about the landscape

Enjoyment of the landscape in many forms is a key public benefit from the Shropshire Hills and their designation as an AONB. This includes recreation by local people and visitors, but also the ways people can become more attached to the landscape e.g. through work and volunteering. This section links a number of important themes, as shown in the diagram below. We need to understand how people's experiences affect their motivation in order to harness this into active support for conservation. This can also help us to clarify the actions by organisations and providers which enable people to enjoy and care about the landscape.



Experiences of the countryside can be transformative for people, creating an emotional link with places and landscape, which is not necessarily mainly about knowledge. We cannot create that emotional bond by seeking to 'educate' people or just pushing information at them. People who have formed their own attachment to the place will seek to know more, and to do things to conserve and support the area, and we should feed this demand. But we also need to facilitate and support more people to have those initial experiences of the Shropshire Hills which will capture their imagination. These may be very different – from active sports to art, wildlife watching to camping.

The Management Plan supports promoting enjoyment, but also fostering an ethos of care for the landscape, of enjoying it without harm. There is a strong case for updating national AONB purposes in relation to this topic.

Recreation, health and wellbeing

The health and wellbeing benefits of contact with nature and outdoor exercise are now well documented. In addition to this, practical volunteering brings the additional benefits of social connections and building sense of belonging and purpose. The AONB is visited by several million people a year and offers an accessible 'natural health service'. Health sector funding has been accessed for countryside volunteering activities in Shropshire, but this is now declining. Many forms of countryside recreation are increasing, but there are still real challenges in involving the least active groups in society.

Wellbeing from nature and the landscape should be for all sections of society. Young people are one target group, as there are many factors contributing to a downward trend in their contact with nature and the outdoors. Technology may play a role in helping to engage. The ongoing need for outdoor and environmental education is matched by a need for raising awareness of the countryside and of farming.

A high proportion of the local population is however in older age groups, and these people can also benefit hugely from being outdoors and in nature. The highly successful Walking for Health programmes are an example of this. The activities to engage different age groups may vary, but some things will span age groups, maybe very consciously, such as involving children with older people doing reminiscence.

Recent work by the AONB Partnership has included extensive work with children on the John Muir Award, support for Young Rangers groups and an environmental traineeship scheme. These activities have provided opportunities for young people across a range of ages, and need to be expanded.

The continued expansion of population in Telford and its fringes provides new audiences to engage with the AONB, and of a different demographic profile to most of the rest of the area.

Understanding and learning

Raising awareness needs to be about the AONB landscape and its special qualities, the issues and need for looking after it, and how it is managed, including activity of the AONB Partnership and of many other organisations. The AONB Partnership has a Communications Strategy which is periodically reviewed. Limited resources are focused on 'impact groups' within target audiences more than the general public.

For formal education, the AONB is a great resource for further and higher education in a range of subjects, and links could be strengthened with a number of local universities and colleges.

Further work could also be done on career training and pathways in to working in conservation or the land management sector.

Active volunteering

Active volunteering brings benefits to the landscape and to people. In the same way that people bond with a place more by visiting it than by reading about it, the attachment is even stronger as a result of working on the land, and volunteering provides a means for many people to do this.

Engaging with some 'hard to reach' groups in society is usually labour intensive and requires particular techniques such as outreach activities. Examples such as Shropshire Council's 'Wild Teams' volunteers, working with adults with learning disabilities and mental health issues, show how effective this can be. Projects are likely to need a critical mass of resource and activity in order to work. An effective balance needs to be struck between reaching 'new' people, and meeting the demand from those already interested.

Contributing

There can be a cross-over of involvement and support to fund-raising. The Shropshire Hills AONB Trust which is now in place is a good vehicle for this as a registered charity, but other organisations also fund-raise for activity which contributes to the AONB Management Plan. People are much more likely to give for direct and tangible project activity than for organisational core costs.

There is a need to help communities and businesses within and around the AONB identify and celebrate being part of a nationally recognised landscape.

Access and activity providers

The Shropshire Great Outdoors Strategy recognises the reduced resources in public sector and proposes an increasing focus on countryside close to centres of population. There is a sound rationale for this, but high quality landscapes are still important as they offer a different experience. Volunteer activity through Parish Paths groups for rights of way maintenance is increasing, and brings health, social and wellbeing benefits to those taking part.

Sustainable tourism

The objectives of the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy are:

- i. To orientate and spread visitors across the area and through the season
- ii. To support the visitor economy through promoting year round events and activities, local businesses, food, drink and crafts
- iii. To work closely with businesses, attractions, communities and other tourism bodies
- iv. To increase enjoyment and understanding of our outstanding landscape's nature and heritage
- v. To promote the area's outstanding qualities for enjoyment, health and wellbeing whilst safeguarding them for the future

The Strategy is the basis of the Shropshire Hills AONB holding the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The Charter award recognises the importance to tourism of the quality of our countryside and towns, and the need to develop tourism in ways which do not undermine these qualities.

Some honeypot sites and places in the AONB are under visitor pressure. There is a need to manage these and encourage people to visit different places. This will require active co-ordination between partners, including outside the AONB.

Communications

Making the AONB more relevant to more people will involve continuing to forge new and stronger links. Through continuity of staff, Partnership members and activities, the AONB Partnership has built up very strong networks, which are a huge asset. There is of course scope to do much more.

There is a continuing need to manage communications with these and wider audiences effectively. Websites, email and social media have transformed

communications and reached thousands of new people, but do not substitute entirely for face-to-face relationships and targeted printed material.

The 'sense of place' that people have is often more local than the scale of the whole AONB scale, and there are particular places within the AONB which people attach to. Sometimes for engaging people it will be better to lead with these names than the Shropshire Hills or the AONB, such as those below:



People enjoying & caring about the landscape - Management Plan policies

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Management Plan Actions - People Enjoying and Caring About the Landscape

Action	Type	Lead & partners	Priority
Develop a youth engagement project incorporating the John Muir Award, Young Rangers, and traineeships	New action	AONB	H
Actively engage partners to develop the role and influence of the Destination Partnership, especially to oversee implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy	Ongoing	AONB, SHT and partners	H
Promote less well known locations in the AONB in order to spread the load and benefits of visitors	Ongoing	SHT and partners	
Publicise the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and use it as tool for engagement, including possible Charter Part II with businesses	Ongoing	AONB, SHT and partners	
Continue to operate Shropshire Hills Shuttles, seeking new funding and refining service	Ongoing	AONB, SC, NT	H
Establish a new sustainable tourism business network for the Shropshire Hills	New action	AONB, SHT	
Support visitor centres – Cardingmill Valley, Discovery Centre, Bog Centre, Acton Scott, Much Wenlock, Bishop's Castle Town Hall	Ongoing	SHT, AONB, LAs	H
Maintain rights of way and promoted walking routes to a good standard, especially prime routes such as Offa's Dyke Path and the Shropshire Way	Ongoing	LAs	H
Support places within the AONB to develop and promote their walking offer	Ongoing	LAs, AONB	

Action	Type	Lead & partners	Priority
Improve provision and promotion for cycling of different kinds and levels	Ongoing	LAs, AONB and partners	
Pursue 'Caering for Caradoc' fund-raising appeal and explore possibilities to replicate this, perhaps at the Wrekin	In progress	AONB and partners	
Repeat five yearly visitor survey	New action	AONB, SHT	
Continue to link Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre with AONB landscape and as an orientation centre for visitors to the area	Ongoing	GCL	
Promote the area's best qualities to the business community and encourage an 'ambassador' approach	New action	AONB, SHT	
Expand membership of Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB	Ongoing	AONB & Trust	
Develop and promote a varied programme of events and optimise relevance to the AONB	Ongoing	All	
Develop the annual leaflet swap event into a sustainable tourism conference	New action	SHT, AONB	
Seek to develop conservation holidays involving practical volunteering	Aspiration	NT, SWT?	
Improve roadside signage marking AONB at entry points	New action	AONB, LAs	
Foster links with the Shrewsbury University Centre for higher education and research	New action	AONB	
Improve links with Duke of Edinburgh Award and other outdoor activity providers to raise awareness of the AONB	New action	AONB and partners	
Demonstrate value of landscape to health and wellbeing	Aspiration	AONB, LAs	
Develop an interpretation plan for the AONB	Aspiration	AONB & partners	

The AONB boundary and Zone of Influence

The Shropshire Hills AONB boundary has not been changed since it was drawn up in 1957 prior to the designation. The conclusion from a study of the AONB boundary commissioned in 2006 was that the boundary was fit for purpose, and the AONB Partnership and the local authorities have for ten years had a clear policy against changing the boundary. It is possible the Glover Review may result in changes to the process for boundary changes, which may change the context for this policy.

The AONB Boundary – Management Plan Policy

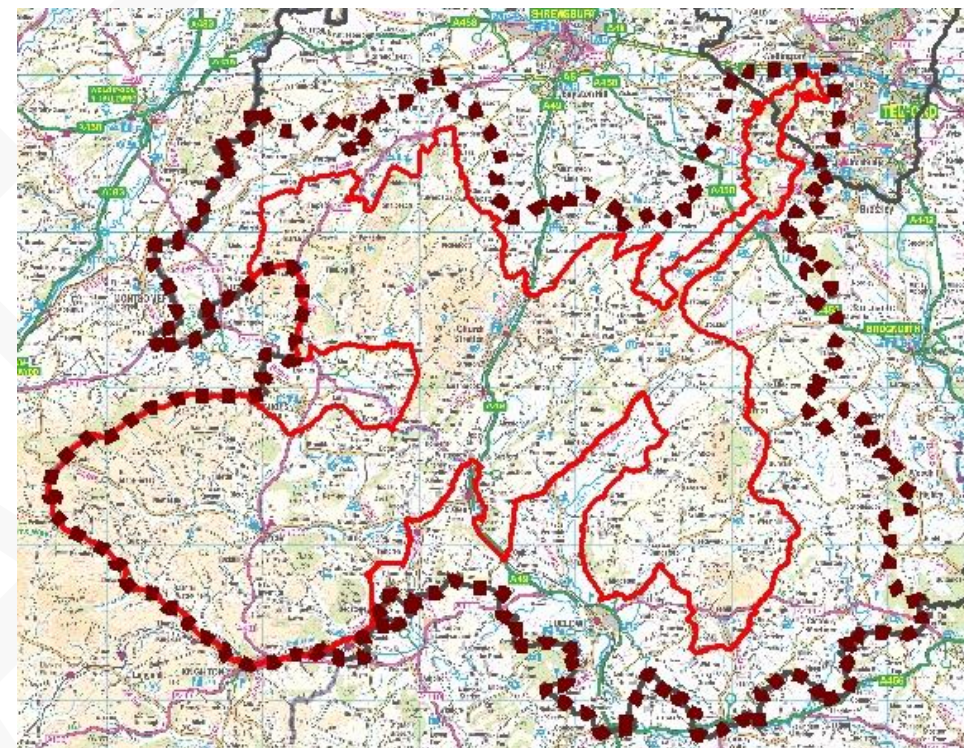
At the current time in the foreseeable future, the benefits of formally amending the AONB boundary would not be justified against the considerable costs and resources this would entail. The AONB Partnership and local authorities will work, and encourage partners and others to work, in ways which strengthen 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.

(see www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk for position statement approved Feb 2008).

Zone of Influence

The last Management Plan adopted an area slightly larger than the AONB including the surrounding market towns and most parishes spanning the boundary, as a 'zone of influence'. This is not any formal designation, but it does provide recognition that the AONB and its high quality landscape has significant economic and social influence beyond the boundary. This area was used for the 2009-13 LEADER rural development programme, and since 2012 has been the basis of the Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership for co-ordinating tourism activity and marketing. The zone of influence is not regarded as a hard boundary, and further links beyond it (e.g. with Ironbridge, Shrewsbury, North Herefordshire and mid Wales) are all important. Natural England are now more actively encouraging the management of AONBs in their wider geographical context, and the zone of influence is felt to be still of relevance and value.

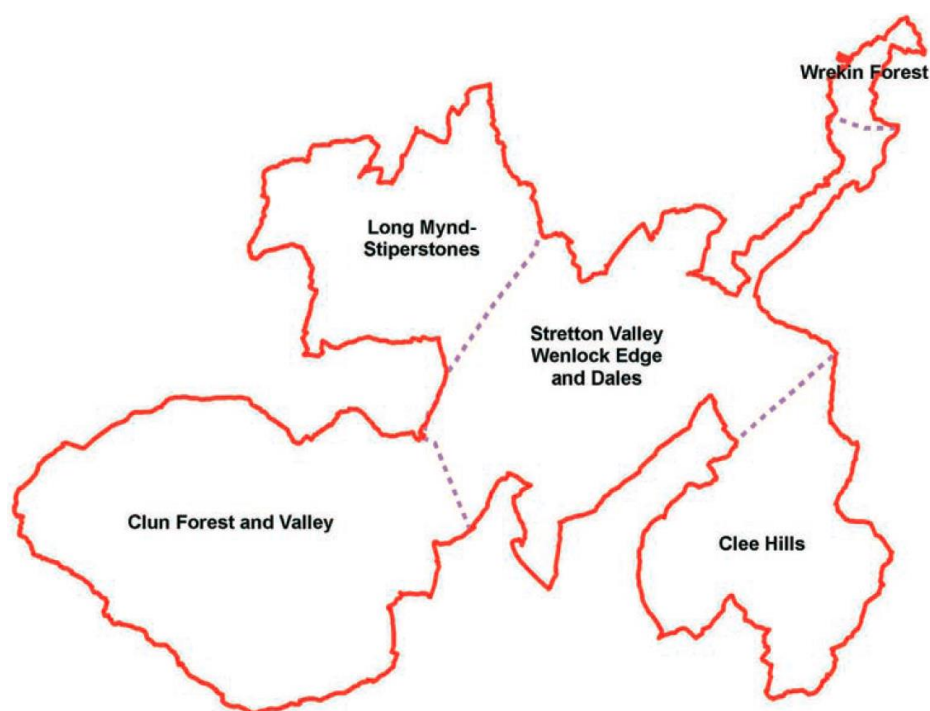
Zone of Influence (brown dashed line) and AONB boundary (red)



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Local priorities for areas of the AONB

The AONB is large and has much diversity in its landscape. This section of the Plan divides the AONB into five areas and describes some of their locally distinctive features and their particular issues and priorities for management.



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Long Mynd – Stiperstones (including Stapeley Hill and Hope Valley)

This is a 'core' part of the Shropshire Hills in terms of landscape, identity and biodiversity. Some of the most important large conservation sites in the region are also popular walking destinations, and lie among hill farms undergoing significant change, and sparse remote communities. Finding ways to integrate farming with conservation, and of enabling local people to benefit from sustainable patterns of use by visitors, are key to the future of the area.

The area has the biggest concentration of upland and of semi-natural habitat within the AONB, including the largest areas of heathland. Although there is a sense of wildness, the upland commons are carefully managed and linked with the surrounding farms. The Long Mynd and Stiperstones themselves are among the most popular walking destinations in Shropshire, and the area also has a good bridleway network, is crossed by the Shropshire Way and served by the Shropshire Hills Shuttles bus service.

Much of the high ground is designated for nature conservation, and land ownership by conservation bodies (including Natural England, National Trust and Shropshire Wildlife Trust) is more extensive here than anywhere else in the AONB. The mosaic of habitats on farmland is of great value, and grazing by commoners and neighbouring farmers remains important to maintaining heathlands on the hilltops. A high priority needs to be given to retaining and building the inter-relationship between conservation sites and farmed land.

The Onny Valley between the Long Mynd and Stiperstones has a strong farming character, with sparse villages, and some focal points for visitors such as Bridges and Wentnor. There is a gradual transition down the valleys from upland to more intensive lowland farms with more arable land. To the west of the Stiperstones there is more small-holding, and links become stronger across the border with Wales.

The area is important for species such as harebell and mountain pansy, small pearl-bordered fritillary and holly blue butterflies, otter, dormouse, curlew, lapwing and barn owl. Small hay meadows survive, with woods on steeper slopes, and high quality rivers like the East and West Onny. The area has an

interesting geology, being crossed by the Pontesford–Linley Fault, and with minerals formerly exploited including lead and barytes. Historic features include hillforts and prehistoric settlements, classic Parliamentary enclosure field patterns on Prolley Moor and mining relics around the Stiperstones. Other significant landscape features include Mitchell's Fold stone circle, Linley Beeches and Bromlow Callow.

Community involvement in wildlife and heritage is strong through groups such as the Upper Onny Wildlife Group and those involved with mining sites such as Snailbeach and the Bog.



Key Issues

The area has long views and is quiet, making it very sensitive to inappropriate development, either visually or through intrusive activities. Retaining upland farming and encouraging its activity to be in keeping with the environment is key to conserving the area's character.

The transition of farm conservation funding to the New Environmental Land Management Scheme will be significant. Pasture-fed sheep and cattle are the

main enterprises, but mixed farming can also have some environmental benefits. Many farms cross the border with Wales, thus adding an extra level of complexity for being in schemes.

Diversification is likely to continue, and the area has high potential for wildlife, landscape, and heritage based approaches. Increasing visitor numbers could create problems, and a sustainable, low-impact approach is necessary, minimising traffic and noise. Encouraging visitors to stay longer, experience more and spend more is preferable to simply chasing greater footfall.

Much has been achieved in this area through the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme which finished in 2018. While this level of activity cannot be sustained, maintaining a legacy from the scheme is important and ongoing support from organisations active in the area will help with this.

Priorities

- Farm environmental schemes are vitally important as a means of delivering conservation activity on the ground, and the period of transition over the coming years is crucial. Continued active engagement with farmers and with the wider community, and advice and exchange of practical ideas have an important role to play.
- For visitors, the connection to the AONB and links into it from the north should be developed, e.g. from Pontesbury and Minsterley. Both these settlements should benefit economically from development of more services for visitors. The profile of the AONB in Shrewsbury should be raised and its proximity to this part of the AONB is an advantage. The possibility of developing a cycle/multi-user route out of Shrewsbury in this direction would be of benefit to the AONB.
- Local food activity has significant potential to act as a bridge between farming, conservation and visitors. The pubs and limited visitor facilities in the area provide an important means of developing this.

Clun Forest and Valley

This very rural area is more dependent on farming than any other part of the AONB. Strong networks have been established, and these are important for managing change in farming to provide the best outcomes for both the landscape and the community. The River Clun catchment is a focus for conservation activity, and people enjoy the heritage and tranquillity of the area.

The Clun area is the most deeply rural part of the AONB, and is amongst the most sparsely populated parts of England. Bounded to the west by the Welsh border, the area comprises the catchment of the River Clun and part of that of the River Teme, extending from the uplands of the Clun Forest to the lower Clun Valley. Shales and siltstones create a rolling topography, with enclosed and cultivated fields right up to the hilltops, except where remnant and restored heathland remain, such as at Rhos Fiddle and Mason's Bank. Woodlands, predominantly coniferous, are of substantial size in the lower Clun valley, while smaller ones higher up are valued for shelter. Broadleaved woodlands are less common and tend to be small and on steeper slopes and gullies.



Just outside the AONB, the River Clun holds a European level protected site for a population of the rare freshwater pearl mussel which is in serious decline. The river and its tributaries are largely tree-lined, but alder disease, stock access to riverbanks and factors affecting water quality, such as nutrients and siltation, are

contributing to poor condition of the river for the pearl mussel and other wildlife. Project work targeted at these factors has made progress, but the issue is becoming more critical.

Offa's Dyke runs north-south across the area, in some of its best preserved and dramatic sections. It connects the Shropshire Hills with other areas along the border. Other archaeological earthworks include Bury Ditches hillfort, and the Upper and Lower Shortditches near the Kerry Ridgeway. The large village of Clun is a natural centre for the area, and its prominent ruined castle shows that this has long been the case. The market towns of Bishop's Castle and Knighton lie just outside the AONB to the north and south, with Craven Arms to the east.

The pattern of landholding is more of medium-sized family farms, with fewer large estates and less smallholding than elsewhere. Livestock dominate, but as the soil is relatively good, potatoes and other crops are cultivated even high up. Tourism and recreation are generally at a much lower level than elsewhere in the AONB, although Clun, Bury Ditches and Offa's Dyke Path National Trail are popular with visitors, and promoted walks are helping to develop the area's potential for sustainable tourism.

Key Issues

Changes in farming will probably have the greatest influence on this area's future. A high age profile, rising costs and the difficulty of making livestock products pay in a competitive global market are felt as keenly here as anywhere, sometimes compounded by the relative isolation of the area. Uptake of former agri-environment schemes was very high, and the transition to new schemes will be significant for both the landscape and farm incomes.

The AONB Partnership has given close support over some years to the Land, Life & Livelihoods group which aims to bring farmers and the rest of the community together and help to secure a sustainable future for the upper Clun Forest part of the area. The group has held many events and practical steps such as advice workshops for farmers. The Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group is also well-established in monitoring important species, and encouraging land-owners and managers to maintain and improve habitats for them.

The AONB Partnership has worked in the Clun Catchment for many years, working with farmers on riparian habitat management, community involvement

and an integrated catchment approach. The Clun Catchment Partnership helps to improve co-ordination and raise the profile of the issues with organisations, landowners and community representatives.

Large scale poultry farming has been expanding and is now found further up in the catchment, with concerns about landscape impacts and cumulative nutrient input.

Priorities

- The condition of the rivers (the River Clun SAC and the River Teme SSSI) is an over-riding priority, and links with many other aspects, as it is dependent on activity throughout the catchments. The quality of water and habitats is affected by land management practices near to the rivers themselves, but will also benefit from restoration of heath and wetland habitats and any increase in woodland cover. Continued co-ordinated partnership working and funding for the Clun catchment will be necessary to address the significant issues here.
- The future of farming brings big challenges and issues which are not easily tackled. The continuation of both livestock and appropriate cropping are both important for the landscape. Initiatives to reach local markets have been used by some farmers, but the capacity of local markets may not be adequate for this to work for a majority of farmers. Continued development of farmer and community networks and working together will be crucial.
- Tourism development will need to be very sensitive to avoid spoiling the area's character. Approaches which make the most of tranquillity and opportunities to slow down and appreciate the natural, historic and cultural features of the area will be the most appropriate.

Clee Hills

This large part of the AONB contains very contrasting areas, but is characterised by the influences of the minerals industry, of traditional farming and of larger settlements further to the east. Maintaining and enhancing quality in the landscape and making the most of the area's undervalued features of interest are important challenges for the future.

The south-eastern part of the AONB is dominated by the main hills of Brown Clee (Shropshire's highest point) and Titterstone Clee. Heath and common land on the tops of these are accompanied by disused and active quarries as well as prominent telecommunications and radar structures. The mark of industry is strong here, and the beauty of a harsher kind than elsewhere in the AONB.



The Clee Hills are a distinct area of uplands separated from those further west. The hills are surrounded by a high plateau of sandstone with red soils and mostly enclosed pastoral land. Villages are often small and scattered, and there are some medieval deserted settlements. Clee Hill is the largest village, and bears a strong influence of past and present mining and quarrying. The high point of the A4117 on Clee Hill Common provides remarkable views south to the Malvern Hills, Herefordshire and beyond. The old squatter settlements associated with former mining result in a surviving pattern of small land holdings, including non-agricultural uses. Small hay meadows and high quality grasslands survive amongst these. Catherton Common is owned by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

In the west the area extends to the perimeter of Ludlow and along the edge of the Corve Dale, where larger traditional country estates are found. To the east

lie very rural villages like Ditton Priors and Burwarton, but there are increasingly good links with the market towns of Bridgnorth and Cleobury Mortimer, and also more commuting to the West Midlands conurbation. There are substantial woodlands on the eastern flanks of Brown Clee near Burwarton.

Key Issues

The issues of change in farming, especially in the livestock sector, are found here as elsewhere. The proximity of Ludlow and its local food culture is a factor in the south of the area. Woodlands are also a valuable resource in the area, and retaining their landscape value is important as they are affected by fluctuating timber prices and trends such as increased use of woodfuel.

There is pressure for development, including large poultry units, tourism and affordable housing, and concern about appropriateness in the way these can be carried out.

The AONB Partnership supported a Clee Hill Partnership for the area around Titterstone Clee, which has lapsed but there is some local interest in reviving it. The Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group is well established. Clee Liberty common is participating in the new national Upland Commons project.

Priorities

- Improving habitat networks, especially around the main hills is important. Farm environmental schemes and co-operative working with landowners and commoners will be important means of achieving this.
- Developing tourism sustainably will mean a small scale of developments in remoter locations, connecting to walking, cycling and horse riding opportunities. It should involve making the best of industrial archaeology and geological interest through improved interpretation. Patterns of anti-social use of some of the less attractive former mining and quarrying sites may require concerted efforts to influence.
- The heritage of the area including 19th Century quarrying remains and hydro scheme are significant and there is potential for conservation activity, community involvement, volunteering, and interpretation linked to these.

Stretton Valley, Wenlock Edge and Dales

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. 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 in 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 Apedale 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 Clee 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.

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 conservation and access opportunities 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.

Wrekin Forest

This area has distinct features and needs that are different to the rest of the AONB, and extending into the Borough of Telford & Wrekin brings different partners and contacts. The same principles of retaining landscape quality and engaging with local people are nevertheless still relevant. The need here to protect the environment and to manage people's enjoyment of it is as significant as anywhere in the AONB. Well established partnership approaches to co-ordinating management of the Wrekin area need continued support and complementing with new practical project activity.

The Wrekin is Shropshire's iconic hill, and being surrounded by lower ground affords excellent views over much of the county and beyond. An outlying hill, the Wrekin area is the least typical part of the Shropshire Hills, lying on the urban fringe of Telford, with development pressures nearby and high levels of recreational and community use.

The woodlands on the Wrekin and the Ercall are of high quality (SSSI), and important for their geology. The area is rich in industrial archaeology, and has strong connections to the nearby Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The town of Wellington has very strong cultural links with the Wrekin. The AONB boundary is drawn tight around the wooded hills of the Wrekin and the Ercall, and so the quality of the surrounding area is very important as a setting for the AONB. The 'Wrekin Forest' area includes the AONB and surrounding area. The Wrekin is very important, both locally and for those visiting the area, especially

the main path up the north side of the hill, which is valued by a wide cross-section of people for exercise.

Key Issues

The high level of recreational use of the Wrekin creates pressure, and for there is no robust framework or the resources to manage this, resulting in the quality of the landscape and visitors' experience being less than optimal.

Since 2007 the Wrekin Forest Partnership supported by the AONB Partnership has helped to provide a forum for the discussion of issues and co-ordination, and the Wrekin Forest Plan now in its third phase covering 2015-20 has provided direction. Practical activity and community engagement by partners including the Shropshire Wildlife Trust has made a real difference on the ground and raised the profile of the value of the area. Volunteers are active in a number of groups, and there is involvement from large companies in Telford.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust manage the main car park at Forest Glen. Visitor management at the Wrekin would however benefit from a more co-ordinated approach, and adequate resources given its importance and scale of use. There is scope to improve parking provision and visitor facilities at or in proximity to the Wrekin, strengthening the leisure offer the area provides. These however would need to be planned with sensitivity to the location and to visitor management issues, and have a viable business model. Continued co-ordination of activity to manage the Wrekin Forest will depend on partners working together and with local landowners.

Telford & Wrekin Council have defined the Wrekin Forest as a Strategic Landscape, which gives it some additional recognition and protection.

The redevelopment of the former Ironbridge Power Station close to the AONB near Buildwas will be a big factor over the coming years. This large site lies between the AONB and the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, and the scale and design of development need to be appropriate and sensitive.

Priorities

- Development on the eastern fringes of the Wrekin needs to respond to the distinctive character of the area.

- A stronger mechanism is desirable for managing the high environmental quality of the Wrekin Forest area and its continued use by visitors. On the ground capacity to take practical action and engage with visitors is key to maintaining the quality of a well-used countryside site. Planning gain from new development nearby should be considered to help manage the increased pressure it will come under, and opportunities should be explored for using this to establish project work or a longer term arrangement.
- Enjoyment of the Wrekin Forest countryside should go along with promoting understanding of its qualities. Opportunities for participation through activities such as conservation volunteering can be improved.
- Recognition of the national importance of the AONB designation remains important and should be given a higher profile in the Wrekin area. Management of the Wrekin Forest area should link both ways to the wider Shropshire Hills AONB, to Telford's green infrastructure, and to the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.
- Priority areas for conservation action will continue to include the woods, other habitats and wildlife, and cultural heritage. Strengthening connections with local people, improvements to access, and community involvement through events, education and volunteering also remain key themes.

The Wrekin Forest - Management Plan Policy

The management of the wider Wrekin Forest area is crucial to the integrity of the Wrekin itself within the AONB and should be 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 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.

Implementation and monitoring

Structures supporting the Shropshire Hills AONB

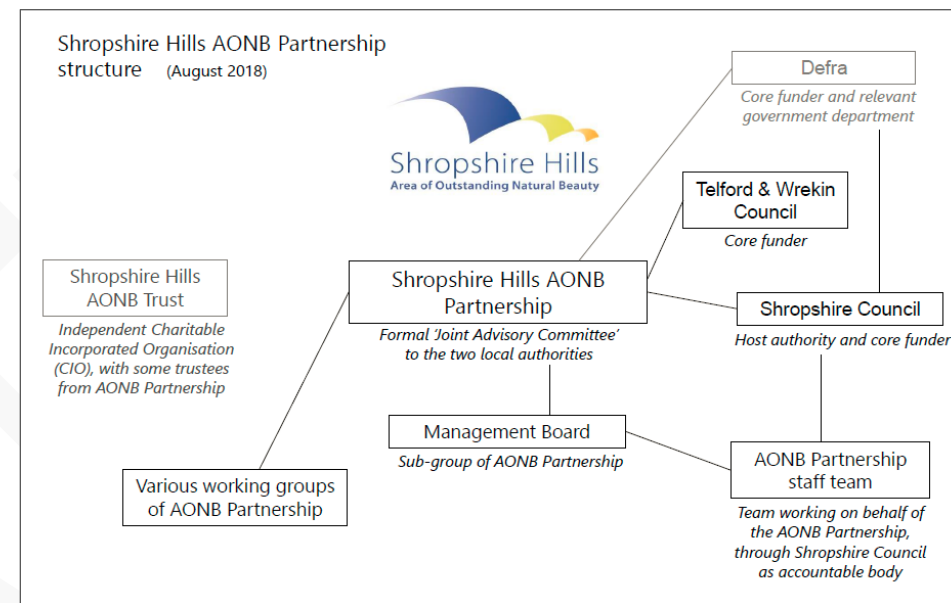
Many people and organisations contribute to conserving the AONB. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is a broad group of stakeholders and supporters, working together with a small professional staff team. It is a Joint Advisory Committee under the Local Government Act, formed by Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to assist meeting their statutory duties. the Partnership currently has 41 members representing a wide range of interests. The approach to managing the AONB has a strong ethos of working with local people, valuing their contribution, involving people through events and community projects, and representation in decisions. The Partnership structure of the AONB enables communication and understanding between many different interested parties, and building synergies.

The Partnership is supported by a number of sub-groups and a staff team hosted by Shropshire Council. The AONB team currently has eight members. Through the team and the whole structure, the AONB Partnership's main activities are:

- **Taking action** - on the ground and in our communities - to conserve and enhance natural beauty and to promote enjoyment and understanding
- **Influencing others** - leading and championing the delivery of public benefits from the AONB, working strategically and collaboratively from grassroots to policy level.
- **Managing our business** - developing a robust, effective and financially sustainable AONB organisation.

The AONB Partnership was formed around 1993 and while updated considerably, its basic form has not changed. There has been a reduction in the number of organisations involved (due to factors such as amalgamation and winding up of some public bodies), and a rise in the representation of individuals and Parish Council members.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Trust was formed in 2016 with charitable objects strongly aligned with AONB purposes. Its main activities are to raise funds and distribute these to local projects supporting the AONB. The Trust has taken over the running of the AONB Conservation Fund, and jointly with the AONB Partnership runs the Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB.



Conservation Board proposal

Over 2016-2018 the AONB Partnership with the two local authorities developed and put to Defra a formal proposal for the creation of a Conservation Board for the Shropshire Hills AONB. This was shelved due to the announcement in 2018 of the national Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs, but may be revisited depending on the outcome of this review.

A Conservation Board was seen to have advantages of a stronger, more independent voice solely for the AONB, being able to take effective action, raise funds and manage itself more efficiently. The need for this change was perceived to be mainly due to ongoing structural changes in local government and growing pressures on the natural environment and funding availability. A Conservation Board would in addition to the main legal purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty, have responsibility to increase public understanding and enjoyment of the AONB's special qualities.

In common with other AONBs, there is a widespread feeling among partners that the legal status and influence of the AONB Partnership is not adequate for the tasks it has. The Partnership retains the aspiration to achieve a strengthened structure in the future.

Delivery of the Management Plan

Partnership and the actions of many people supporting the AONB - especially farmers, landowners and local communities – are key to delivery of the Management Plan.

Through the Management Plan, the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership aims to provide co-ordination, advice and assistance. Total membership of the various steering and co-ordination groups led by the AONB Partnership involves several hundred people. Adding the membership of Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB and recipients of grants and advice increases this figure significantly.

The role of the AONB team will vary – sometimes it will be to deliver directly, sometimes to encourage others. Some actions are aspirational, and dependent on resources, either financial or through people's time. These are included as experience shows that opportunities may arise unexpectedly to pursue things, e.g. new funding programmes.

The AONB Partnership itself needs to continue to develop, and a proactive, multi-partnership approach is needed to realise additional activity through new funding sources and increased participation of local people. From 2018-2020 the Partnership jointly with the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust has Heritage Lottery Fund 'Resilient Heritage' funding for capacity building including business planning, training and income generation. Continuing to work with wider protected landscape networks will be valuable, including the National Association for AONBs and the Europarc Federation.

The Actions set out in this Plan are mostly (but not exclusively) focused on organisations that are part of the AONB Partnership. Some additional actions may be suited to implementation by volunteers, e.g. fixed-point photography, a design award.

Many different local authority departments are important stakeholders in the AONB and can contribute to its purposes.

Local authority function	Interaction with AONB purposes
Planning	Protect the AONB against inappropriate development, encourage sustainable and compatible development.
Economic Development	Promote sustainable forms of development, including in tourism, farming and environmental technology
Environment	Specialist support on biodiversity, landscape and trees
Heritage	Responsibility for heritage designations.
Outdoor Recreation	Manage and promote responsible access, manage sites
Communication	Support appropriate promotion of the AONB
Community working	Support promotion of social and economic development compatible with the AONB, strengthen communities
Education	Encourage understanding of landscape. Environmental Education, Forest Schools, etc.
Youth services	Encourage participation and enjoyment of the countryside
Museums & Arts	Raising awareness and interpretation, training and skills.
Social care	Encourage wider participation and enjoyment
Highways	Support sustainable transport policy, manage roads to sympathetic designs and standards
Transport	Provide public transport, promote sustainable transport
Waste	Encourage sustainable behaviour and resource use
Maintenance	Manage council land to appropriate standards
Public protection	Enforce Environmental Health and pollution standards, maintain standards in food and animal health
Legal & Democratic services	Support for legal requirements of the designation, minuting and circulation of papers for AONB Partnership meetings, administer aspects of Common Land

Monitoring

Progress with Management Plan activity will be monitored through reporting at the meetings of the AONB Partnership, and the Management Plan Actions will be updated and progress reported widely on a regular basis. This is in addition to continued monitoring of indicators of landscape condition and trends.

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Abbreviations

Acronyms have been avoided wherever possible and most are defined in the text.

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
CPRE	Campaign to Protect Rural England
CROW	Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000
Defra	Department for Food & Rural Affairs
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Area
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions pour Development Economique Rural
NCA	National Character Area
PAWS	Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site
PWP	Plantation on Wood Pasture
RDPE	Rural Development Programme for England
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SAM	Scheduled Ancient Monument
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
TPO	Tree Preservation Order

The AONB Management Plan is produced by Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership on behalf of Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

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Working together to conserve and sustain the landscape

Appendix 1 Headline indicators are key statistical measures which can help to summarise the condition of the AONB. Those shown below are based on national guidance for condition monitoring of AONBs, and influenced by local priorities. They are linked to the special qualities of the AONB, but are dependent on what data is available, and are not intended to be comprehensive.

Special qualities of the AONB	Headline Indicator and status for 2009-14 Plan		Trend at 2009	Trend at 2013	Trend at 2018	Current status (at 2018, or most recent data available)
Diversity and contrast (landscape character)	Character is classed as being 'maintained' in the two National Character Areas in which the AONB falls ^a		→	→	→?	No new data is likely – indicator to be dropped.
Hills	70.5% of farmed land (46,625ha) is managed under some form of agri-environment scheme ^a					77.6% (2016 latest data) Assumed increase due to transition of ESA to ELS/HLS and greater scheme take up outside of ESA areas
Farmed landscape			↗	↘	↗	
Woodlands	50% of overall woodland (6,800ha) is managed under a Forestry Commission Woodland Grant Scheme agreement ^b		→	↘	↗	38.5% in Jan 2018 ^b 31.8% in 2013 ^b NB does not include FC holdings
Rivers and river valleys	0% of river SSSIs are in favourable or recovering condition ^a (one site – River Teme including River Clun SAC)		→	→	↘	Unit 6 (Clun) Declining in 2014 - Considerable activity but no sections are yet in recovering condition ^a
Geology	99.6% of geological SSSIs (by land area) are in favourable or recovering condition ^a		→	↘?	↘	97.4% - small decline data checked Jan 2018 ^a
Wildlife	58.2% of biological SSSIs (by land area) are in favourable or recovering condition ^a		↗	↗	↗	96.7% Major improvement due to prioritised work by Natural England ^a

	Key farmland and upland bird species are declining ^c		↘	↘	↘	Curlew and Lapwing declines continuing - 2016 reporting period ^c
Heritage	52% of Scheduled Ancient Monuments (86) are classified as 'At High or Medium Risk' ^d 2% of Listed Buildings (3) are classified as 'At Risk' ^d		↘*	↘*	↗	23.42% of Scheduled Ancient Monuments (41) are classified as 'At Medium or High Risk' ^e 0.93% at risk 2018 ^e
Environmental and scenic quality	60.3% of all SSSIs (by land area) are in favourable or recovering condition ^a 32% of river length is 'good' water quality ^f		↗	↗	→	96.8% in 2018 ^a 97% in 2012 ^a 15% of River length is Good Ecological Status (Cycle 2 2016) ^f % Decline due to improved data collection
Tranquillity	70% of the AONB is classified as 'tranquil' ^g		↘	↘?	↘?	No new data.
Culture and enjoyment	86.8% of rights of way are classified as 'easy to use'		↗	↘?	↘?	New data not yet obtained

* Downward arrow indicates a negative trend for condition of the AONB

- a Data supplied by Natural England
- b Data supplied by Forestry Commission
- c Based on data from Shropshire Ornithological Society, Upper Onny Wildlife Group, Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group and Kemp Valley Community Wildlife Group
- d http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/SUKB_2012_tcm9-328339.pdf
- e Data supplied by English Heritage
- f Data supplied by Environment Agency
- g Data supplied by CPRE, 2005¹⁶. Definition of 'tranquil' based on green colour

Appendix 2 Outline priority outcomes for New Environmental Land Management schemes in the Shropshire Hills AONB

Biodiversity

Maintaining priority habitats (especially SSSIs), including:

- heathland
- upland flushes, fens and swamps
- damp pastures with purple moor grass and rushes
- species-rich meadows and grassland
- ancient and native woodland
- riparian habitat linked to rivers and lakes
- wood pasture and parkland with veteran trees
- arable field margins

Priority habitats for restoration as part of habitat networks include ancient and native woodland, upland heathland, unimproved grassland meadows.

Priority species that need tailored management and advice include:

- Lapwing – nest on spring-tilled arable land or on short grassland with a low stocking rate
- Willow tit – found in damp, scrubby woodland, and nest in standing deadwood but rapidly declining
- Small pearl-bordered fritillary – damp grass, woodland clearings and moorland, larval plant violets
- Lesser horseshoe bat – roost in old mines and buildings, sensitive to disturbance
- Freshwater pearl mussel – filter-feeding mollusc requiring clean water streams with gravels
- White-clawed crayfish – need small, clean streams
- Woodland bird assemblages - 4 or more from: lesser spotted woodpecker, tree pipit, redstart, pied flycatcher, spotted flycatcher, wood warbler, marsh tit, lesser redpoll, hawfinch
- Breeding waders – lapwing, redshank, curlew, snipe
- Great crested newt - managing ponds and ditches

Enhancing farmland habitats: by sowing nectar flower mixes, increasing flowers on grassland, sowing winter bird food mixes to benefit wild pollinators,

farmland birds such as grey partridge, tree sparrow and yellowhammer, plus bats and brown hare.

Resource protection

- Fencing watercourses to prevent excessive poaching of riverbanks by livestock and encourage natural regeneration of trees and shrubs
- Restoration of hedgerows and boundary features will reduce soil erosion and benefit soil quality, water quality, pollinating insects, habitat connectivity, biodiversity and flood risk management
- Grass buffer strips in arable farming systems

Water quality

- Works to reduce water-borne phosphate, nitrate and sediment, especially in the River Clun and River Teme SSSI catchments.
- Controlling the source or the movement of potential pollutants, including: nutrients from fertilisers, manures and organic materials; sediment from soil erosion and run-off; pesticides from their use and disposal

Flood risk

- Works that reduce the amount and rate of surface water run-off, reduce soil erosion and slow the movement of floodwaters on floodplains, especially in the:
- River Corve: Seifton and Diddlesbury Brooks upstream of Brockton & Bourton.
 - Strand & Clee Brooks upstream of Peaton
 - Shyte Brook upstream of Much Wenlock
 - Habberley Brook upstream of Pontesbury
 - River Onny, Rea Brook (west Shropshire)

Woodlands and trees

Bringing existing woods into management especially:

- SSSIs and ancient semi-natural woodland
 - Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) – progressive restoration to broadleaf woodland
- Plus other unmanaged broadleaved woodland and unmanaged conifer woodland within catchments subject to eutrophication and acidification

New woodland planting:

- to buffer and link existing woodlands, in particular ancient woods, and other semi-natural open habitats within priority woodland habitat networks

- to reduce and intercept diffuse pollution, especially in the River Clun and Teme catchments
- to increase infiltration, reduce erosion, or slow the flow of floodwaters on floodplains

A combination of enhancing existing woodlands and expanding woodland cover can benefit landscape character, biodiversity, water quality and flood risk, and key locations include the valleys of

New planting of trees outside woodlands will be a high priority, especially where ash is common and impact of Ash Dieback will be greatest. Management of alder and replacement planting along rivers is also a priority due to the effects of *Phytophthora*.

Maintenance of hedgerow trees, bankside and in-field trees is a priority, along with planting new ones, especially native trees. Species need to be chosen appropriate to the location.

Historic environment

Active management which ensures the long-term survival of historic environment features and protects them against damage and decay, in particular addressing common threats of scrub and tree growth, erosion from livestock and animal burrowing.

Highest priorities are for:

- designated features - archaeological features of national significance (Scheduled Monuments) and Registered Parks and Gardens (RPG)
- designated and undesignated traditional farm buildings and non-domestic historic buildings on holdings
- undesignated historic and archaeological features of high significance which are part of the Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (SHINE)

Also other works to:

- revert archaeological sites under cultivation to permanent grass
- reduce damaging cultivation and harvesting practices through minimum tillage or direct drilling where this offers a suitable level of protection
- remove scrub and bracken from archaeological or historic features
- maintain below-ground archaeology under permanent uncultivated vegetation or actively manage earthworks, standing stones and structures as visible 'above ground' features

- maintain and restore historic water management systems, including those associated with water meadows and designed water bodies
- restore historic buildings that are assessed as a priority in the area
- maintain or restore Registered Parks and Gardens
- safeguard designated and undesignated traditional farm buildings
- maintain priority undesignated historic parklands

The following are particularly relevant to collaborative working across farms:

- Habitat restoration
- Flood mitigation
- Water quality
- Recreation
- Woodlands and forestry
- control of invasive non-native species, and action to safeguard and enhance populations of pollinators