



Cabinet 21st January 2026

Item

Public



Approval of Shropshire Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 and new Shropshire Hills National Landscape Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

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| Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder): | | Cllr James Owen | |

1. Synopsis

The statutory Shropshire Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 is put forward for formal approval. The plan is delivered in partnership, and so also presented for approval are new Terms of Reference for a re-formed Joint Advisory Committee for the National Landscape.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. A **Management Plan** for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape (renamed but still formally designated as an 'area of outstanding natural beauty') is required every five years under the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. The new Plan has been prepared over the last two years by the National Landscape Team and Partnership, and the draft Plan was out for public consultation between mid-May and mid-July. The National Landscape covers 23% of Shropshire and also extends into Telford & Wrekin, whose Council must also approve the Plan.

2.2. The Plan's Vision is that:

- **Nature** is restored and natural processes regenerated,
- **Climate** is stabilised through decarbonising, and we are resilient to change,
- **Land** is nurtured so it can sustain us,
- **Water** is clean, and its flows and cycles support our lives, and all life,
- **People** are healthy and connected to nature – in vibrant communities and as welcome visitors,
- The Shropshire Hills are valued and cared for as a special **Place**.

2.3. The **final draft Plan for approval is provided as Appendix A**. The Plan is for the area and not for any particular organisation. It sets out policies, recommendations and aspirations to guide a wide variety of stakeholder organisations and individuals. Implementation is through a large range of mechanisms, and there is no single budget or programme for delivery of the Plan. The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team is hosted by Shropshire Council but majority funded by DEFRA. The Team have an important role to support delivery of the Plan, but have roles to animate, facilitate and co-ordinate partner activity in addition to direct delivery.

2.4. A **Partnership structure** for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape (formerly AONB) has existed since 1993 in the legal form of a local authority Joint Advisory Committee. Since 2002 this has been known as the Partnership, and enables the Council to fulfil its legal duty to prepare and review the Management Plan jointly with Telford & Wrekin Council, as well as involving a variety of other stakeholders (36 members in total). Following a review during 2025 to modernise partnership structures, Terms of Reference have been drawn up and consulted on for a new Joint Advisory Committee of 12 members. **The proposed Terms of Reference for approval are provided as Appendix B**.

2.5. The new Advisory Committee will include representatives appointed by Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council, plus open seats appointed through an application process. The Committee will provide scrutiny and advisory oversight of work of the National Landscape Team and provide advice to the two local authorities in relation to the National Landscape as necessary. The Committee will operate in close co-ordination with other partnership arrangements for the National Landscape, including collaboration arrangements with key delivery partner organisations (including those with a statutory duty) and a new Shropshire Hills Forum. The Forum will engage a wide and inclusive range of stakeholders, including all Ward Councillors, Parish & Town Councils, community groups and individuals, in a flexible and more informal format. The new structure will provide stronger governance as well as targeted collaboration and broader general engagement.

2.6. **The Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA) covering both the Plan and the new Advisor Committee is included as Appendix C.**

3. Recommendations

3.1. That Cabinet formally approve on behalf of Shropshire Council the new Shropshire Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030.

- 3.2. That Cabinet formally approve on behalf of Shropshire Council the Terms of Reference for the new Shropshire Hills National Landscape Advisory Committee.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. The Management Plan, while statutory, relates to what could be termed the strategic place-shaping role of the Council for Shropshire rather than large scale delivery of direct Council services. Overall therefore, risks associated with this are relatively low for the Council. There is a reputational risk around the Council's stewardship of this national designation – there are 36 National Landscapes in England and Wales, making up around 15% of the land area.
- 4.2. Since December 2023 the legal duty on all public bodies in relation to National Landscapes has been strengthened from 'having regard' to the purpose of designation ('to conserve and enhance natural beauty') to 'seeking to further' the purpose of designation. For the Council, this applies to any service or function which may have relevance to, or impact upon, the National Landscape. The Management Plan will provide significant assistance in enabling any Council department to understand how to fulfil their legal duty.
- 4.3. Risk table

| <i>Risk</i> | <i>Mitigation</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Statutory requirement to review the Management Plan not fulfilled. | The new Plan has been prepared by an experienced team, taking account of the latest nationally published guidance, and good practice from elsewhere in the National Landscape network. Stakeholder involvement has been strong both through the Partnership and more broadly, and the consultation process has been robust. Approval of the Plan is now needed by both Councils to fulfil the legal requirement. The deadline for completion was extended by ministerial letter from the end of March 2024 to the end of December 2025. |
| Failure to fulfil required supporting procedures. | A Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating statutory Strategic Environmental Assessment) has been prepared, as has a Habitats Regulations Assessment. |
| Failure to fulfil legal duty to 'seek to further' the purpose of designation. | The Management Plan will provide significant assistance in enabling any Council department to understand how to fulfil their legal duty. |
| Inadequate structures to support delivery of the Management Plan, and review and preparation of the next Plan. | In absence of an Advisory Committee and associated partnership structures to encourage and co-ordinate delivery, the potential of the Management Plan to deliver benefits for the National Landscape and fulfil its aims would severely limited. |

- 4.4 At this stocktake moment, the initial assessment of likely equality and social inclusion impacts of the Management Plan is for these to be positive for people across all nine Protected Characteristics as set out in the Equality Act 2010, as well as for people in our additional local groupings of Carers, Social Inclusion, and Young People Leaving Care. The anticipation is also that impacts would be neutral to low positive for people in the grouping set out in the Armed Forces Act 2023, i.e. veterans and serving members of the armed forces and their families. There is potential for the impacts to move from neutral to low positive to low to medium positive, where partnership efforts may achieve positive outcomes for those in the groupings of Age and Disability, particularly people with neurodiverse conditions or sight or hearing loss. This would draw upon good practice around use of signage and wayfinding materials, and link with related policy work across the Council around accessing the built and natural environment.
- 4.5 The Council is already working with the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin ICS at national level, with the University of Leicester and with Cornwall Council and Natural England, to co-produce a national policy briefing paper during 2026 on anti-racism actions in the countryside and develop case studies and associated materials for wider use.
- 4.6 This follows a University of Leicester research report* around rural racism in the countryside, which identified myths including that “minoritised communities have no respect for or affinity with the countryside”, that “racism in the countryside is a figment of people’s imagination”, that “there are no genuine barriers to accessing the countryside” and that “forming Black and Muslim walking groups is unnecessary and divisive”. (*“The rural racism project: towards an inclusive countryside”*). Through this high profile work, building upon recommendations including the need to make rural spaces welcoming and accessible, there is potential for the impacts for people in the groupings of Race and of Religion and Belief to move from ‘neutral to low positive’ to ‘low to medium positive’, serving to strengthen overall outcomes in the National Landscape Management Plan for everyone.
- 4.7 The Plan contributes importantly to people’s physical and mental health and wellbeing, acting as a preventative measure to improve people’s quality of life and to save money on services to address problems that would otherwise arise or be worse. This links in to joined-up approaches across Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin, including through the ICS, around the positive impacts and the likely increase in walking/hiking and physical/mental benefits.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands and a financial emergency was declared by Cabinet on 10 September 2025. The overall financial position of the Council is set out in the monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has been instigated at all levels of the Council reducing spend to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports to Members provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers and/or Portfolio Holders review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. All non-

essential spend will be stopped and all essential spend challenged. These actions may involve (this is not exhaustive):

5.2.

- scaling down initiatives,
- changing the scope of activities,
- delaying implementation of agreed plans, or
- extending delivery timescales.

5.3. There are no binding financial commitments for the Council from approving the Management Plan.

5.4. The high quality landscape of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape supports the economy of Shropshire and people's wellbeing. Care and stewardship of the landscape, guided and supported by the Management Plan, is good for the prosperity of Shropshire. It also contributes importantly to people's physical and mental health and wellbeing, acting as a preventative measure to improve people's quality of life and to save money on services to address problems that would otherwise arise or be worse.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1. Climate change is one of the six core topics of the Plan and runs right through it. The Climate section of the Plan includes content on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, carbon storage and sequestration, adaptation, renewable energy, attitudes and behaviour change, just transition, and nature-based solutions. The National Landscape team is very active on the topic of climate change and at the forefront of knowledge on carbon storage and sequestration in land, soil and vegetation. The connections of climate change to the Plan relate much less to the Council's corporate carbon footprint and more to influencing the footprint of the whole county. This is valuable as this aspect has received less attention by the Council. The Plan also has important content on climate change adaptation. Protected landscapes have provided input collectively to the Government's National Adaptation Programme, and content in the Plan draws on this work. At present the Council centrally has not undertaken Adaptation risk assessment or planning, and content in the Plan should be of assistance to this process, which is a legal requirement.

7. Conclusions

7.1. The new Management Plan 2025-2030 provides a good basis to guide the future of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape for the next five years.

7.2. The new Advisory Committee is a robust update of the existing structure, which will provide improved governance for the National Landscape, and in conjunction with the linked Forum and key partner structures, improved partnership working and stakeholder engagement.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

State of the Shropshire Hills report

Habitat Regulations Assessment baseline report

Sustainability Appraisal report, matrix and non-technical summary

All available at <https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/a-special-place/management-plan/2025-30-management-plan>.

**Local
Members:**

Cllr Samuel Walmsley
Cllr Colin Stanford
Cllr Ruth Houghton
Cllr Heather Kidd
Cllr Joshua Dickin
Cllr Mark Morris
Cllr David Davies
Cllr George Hollyhead
Cllr Charles Shakerley-Bennett
Cllr Chris Naylor
Cllr Pamela Davies
Cllr Dan Thomas
Cllr Susan Coleman
Cllr Nick Hignett
Cllr Andy Boddington
Cllr Roger Evans

Appendices

Appendix A Shropshire Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30

Appendix B Terms of Reference – Shropshire Hills National Landscape Advisory
Committee

Appendix C Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESHIA)