

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET – 20 FEBRUARY 2014

SHROPSHIRE HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY (AONB) MANAGEMENT PLAN 2014-2019

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: PLANNING SPECIALIST

LEAD CABINET MEMBER: COUNCILLOR CHARLES SMITH

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

1.1 Local authorities with an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in their boundary have a statutory requirement to produce a Management Plan for the area. Part of the Shropshire Hills AONB includes the Wrekin. In accordance with an agreement with Shropshire Council, the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership produces a management plan on behalf of Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to cover the whole area. The plan is updated every five years and last approved by Cabinet in May 2009 to cover the period 2009-2014. Cabinet approval is therefore sought for the updated version of the plan covering the period 2014-19.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet approves the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 – 2019

SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-Operative Council priority objective(s)?	
	Yes	The objectives of the AONB management plan are compatible with the priorities of the Council, in particular the objectives to raise awareness and participation, especially among young people and local working with communities. The management plan also supports tourism and associated in-ward investment.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	The management plan supports equality of access to the AONB by all members of the community.
TARGET COMPLETION	The management plan covers the period 2014-2019	

FINANCIAL/ VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	<p>Responsibility for funding the management of the Shropshire Hills AONB is split 75% DEFRA and 25% Local Authority. The Local Authority contribution is split proportionately between Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council. Telford and Wrekin's contribution in 13/14 was £2,694 and there is ongoing budgetary provision for this contribution in 2014/15.</p> <p>The AONB Partnership also actively seeks external funding and third party grant funding opportunities to support management actions at The Wrekin. JAC 14/01/14</p>
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	<p>Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the Council has a duty to prepare and publish a plan setting out its policy for management of the AONB and for carrying out its functions in relation to it. The Council also has a duty under the Act to review the management plan before the end of 5 years after publication and, after that, at intervals of not more than 5 years. (IR 14.01.14)</p>
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	<p>The Management Plan will help secure the future of the AONB. Its examination of environmental, economic and social issues in a Sustainability Appraisal will reduce potential conflicts.</p> <p>Production of the Management Plan is a condition of DEFRA's core funding for the AONB Partnership. There are a number of opportunities identified in the plan to enhance the AONB and Wrekin Forest, maximising benefits to the natural environment, local residents and those visiting the area.</p>
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	<p>The Wrekin and associated Wrekin Forest fall within the Wrockwardine ward. The actions contained in the Management Plan have the potential to benefit this ward directly, with broader benefits to other wards. The Ward Members are Councillor Terry Kiernan and Councillor Jacqui Seymour.</p>

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Shropshire Hills AONB is a national designation, with the principal purpose to 'conserve and enhance natural beauty'. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 requires local authorities to "act jointly" in the preparation of a management plan, and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is the body established to do this.
- 3.2 The Partnership consists of 40 members who form a "Joint Advisory Committee" to the local authorities within whose area the AONB falls; in this case Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.
- 3.3 The management plan aims to influence and guide organisations and individuals on a wide range of topics. The Management Plan is reviewed every five years. As a consequence, the AONB Partnership has reviewed the 2009-2014 version and up-dated it to cover the period 2014-19. A public consultation was held during July and August 2013 and Natural England made formal observations on the Plan in early January 2014, before formal approval by the two local authorities.

- 3.4 The amendments made were largely to update priorities, actions and policies in the plan, reflecting changes at both a local and national level. It was noted that since the last management plan, there has been an increase in the number of local area groups within the partnership structure and, as a co-operative council; this is something which is supported by Telford & Wrekin.
- 3.5 The Key Delivery Priorities for the 2014-19 Management Plan are:
- Joining up the conservation effort
 - Valuing the AONB in planning and decisions
 - Supporting a sustainable land management economy
 - Supporting enjoyment and a visitor economy in harmony with the AONB
 - Raising awareness and participation, especially among young people; and
 - Local working with communities
- 3.6 Of particular relevance for Telford & Wrekin is the section on Local Priorities for areas within the AONB which includes a sub-section on the Wrekin Forest (page 63). This sets out key issues, priorities and a management plan policy.
- 3.7 The Wrekin is identified as a priority area in recognition of its high quality landscape, status as “Shropshire’s iconic hill” and value to the local community and those visiting the area. It forms a significant part of the borough’s tourism and leisure offer, drawing people into the area, helping to support in-ward investment as well as improving people’s health and well-being. The Wrekin is also rich in industrial archaeology, connecting it with the nearby Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site (WHS). The protection and enhancement of these aspects through the management plan therefore support the Council’s Destination and Invest in Telford initiatives.
- 3.8 The Wrekin is referred to as the Wrekin Forest in the plan on the basis of the Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Management Plan which was adopted by the Wrekin Forest Partnership in 2007. This group are formally linked to the AONB Partnership and act as a forum for the discussion of issues and co-ordination of action, largely delivered over recent years by Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) and the Wrekin Forest Volunteers. There is also regular involvement from Ricoh who support their employees in undertaking volunteer conservation work.
- 3.9 Appendix 1 shows the project boundary of the Wrekin Forest which extends beyond the AONB in recognition of its wider area of influence.
- 3.10 A summary of the main contents of the management plan in relation to the Wrekin Forest are set out below.
- 3.11 **Key issues**
While management of the main visitor access point at the Forest Glen has improved in recent years under the ownership of SWT, the management plan identifies that the overall management of visitors and associated issues such as car parking would benefit from a more co-ordinated approach. The council will therefore continue to work with the relevant stakeholders to help achieve this. The plan also recognises that there is scope to improve parking provision and visitor facilities which are sensitive to the location and have a viable business model.

3.12 **Priorities**

The management plan sets out the important relationship with the statutory planning process of both Local Authorities to support its policies. In relation to the Wrekin, the plan makes links with Telford & Wrekin Council's Shaping Places Local Plan process which is exploring mechanisms for the protection, promotion and management of the area, particularly in relation to development proposals which could affect land within its vicinity.

3.13 The plan also identifies the need to:

- Strengthen the current tourism and leisure offer, increasing opportunities for participation in conservation activities and events, improving parking and visitor facilities and raising its profile to further attract in-ward investment, establishing stronger links with the Shropshire AONB, the Ironbridge Gorge WHS and the centres of Telford and Wellington.
- Increase on the ground capacity to take practical action and engage with visitors, including consideration of potential planning gain from new development to support a dedicated countryside management officer
- Deliver conservation actions on habitats and wildlife, areas of cultural heritage and access routes

3.14 **Management Plan Policy**

3.15 The plan sets out the following statement for the Wrekin Forest:

3.16 "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.

3.17 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".

3.18 The importance of the Wrekin forest is recognised by Telford & Wrekin Council and will continue to be taken into consideration in the Shaping Places plan making process. The Authority is also represented on both the AONB Partnership and Wrekin Forest Partnership, and supports their endeavours to identify resources to take action.

3.19 The full Management and supporting documents are available at:
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/management-plan/>

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4.1 The AONB Management plan is accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Report which sets out the findings of an assessment of the plans objectives and policies against environmental, economic and social criteria.

4.2 While most effects of the plan are positive against those criteria, the SA identifies a potential conflict with policies which do not support larger scale wind energy and the need to address climate change by reducing CO2 emissions. A number of options are explored, and mitigated by policies which support energy conservation and renewable energy technologies of types and scales which are compatible with the AONB and its landscape.

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 5.1 Cabinet 11th May 2009: Approval of Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2009-2014

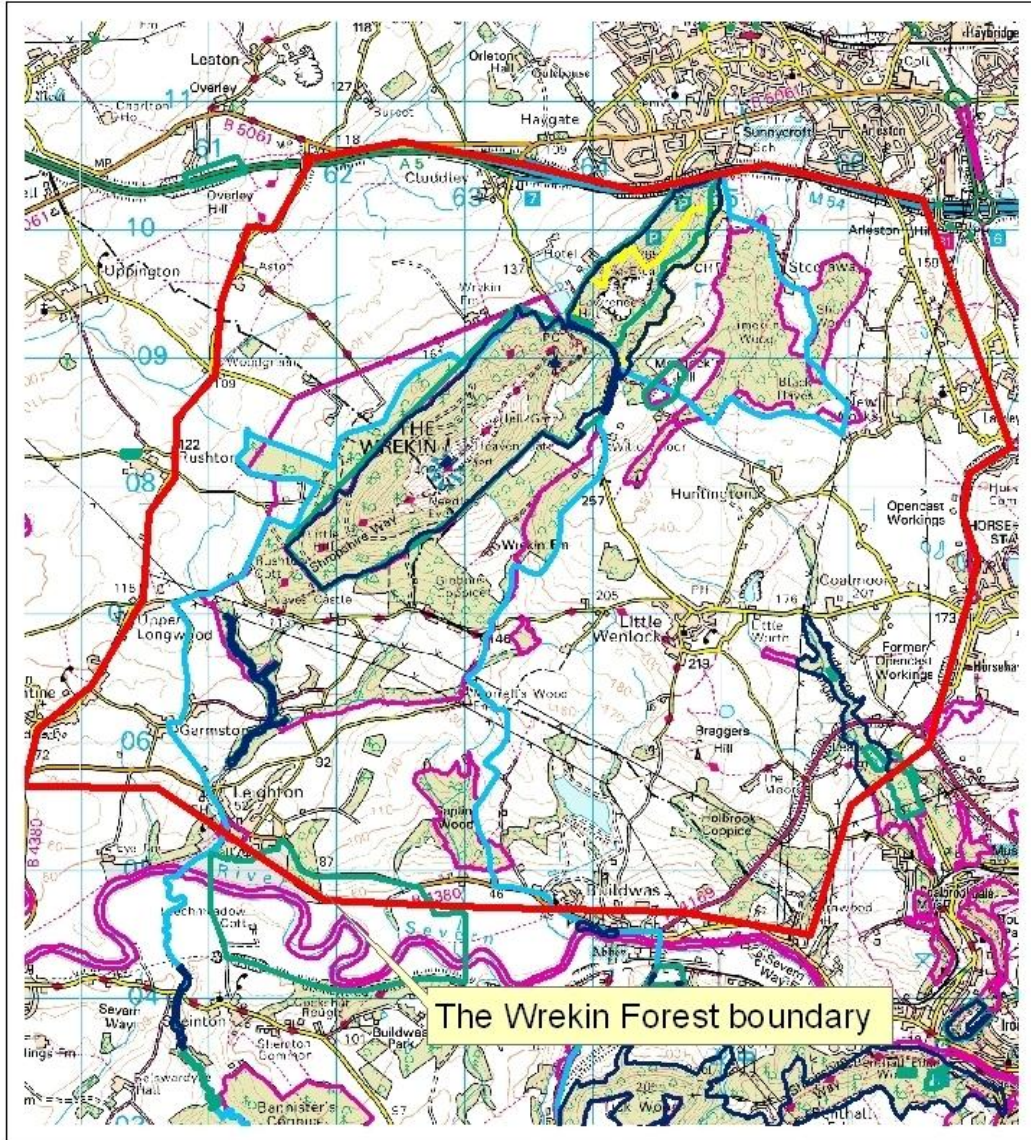
6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 July 2013 AONB Management Plan 2009-14 Sustainability Appraisal Report:
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Sustainability-Appraisal-Report-with-Appendix.pdf>
- 6.2 6th March 2012: Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Agreement between Natural England, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council
- 6.3 December 2007: Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Management Plan 2008-2013

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Appendix 1: The Wrekin Forest Boundary

The Wrekin Forest



Legend

-  sssi
-  rigs
-  aonb boundary
-  wildlife sites 2000r
-  swt nature reserves



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