Extracts from Vision:

Nature

is restored and natural processes regenerated

- Existing good habitats are managed well for nature and better connected
- The best sites for nature are in good condition
- Networks of wildlife-rich habitats have been restored and created
- Trees and woodland are increased

"On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;
His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;
The gale, it plies the saplings double,
And thick on Severn snow the leaves."

A E Housman

Subsections in this 'Nature' section of the Plan:

Nature recovery

Habitats – grasslands, heath and moorland, woodland and trees, ffridd and scrub, wetlands

Condition of existing sites, habitat creation and restoration

Species – mammals, birds, invertebrates, plants, fungi, micro-organisms

Natural processes, biosphere integrity

Ecosystem services, natural capital

Pests, diseases and biosecurity

Air quality

*Key link to other Plan themes - **Nature connection for people***

Nature recovery

The legal purpose of National Landscapes to 'conserve' has always been accompanied by 'enhance' and is not entirely static. But the decline in nature is reaching critical levels which worldwide threaten humans' survival as well as quality of life. 'Conserving' is no longer enough – we need to help nature recover. Natural systems have remarkable capacity to recover, if we can prevent further harm and allow and nurture the right conditions, but there are also positive things we can do to help.

Current government targets are set out in the Environment Act and the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023: ***"The Nature Recovery Network is central to the government's 'apex goal' of improving nature, taking us from protection to active restoration of the natural world. By creating more wildlife-rich places that are bigger, better and joined-up.."***

Key government Environmental Improvement Plan targets include:

- protect and manage 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030
- halt species decline by 2030
- increase species abundance
- restore or create wildlife-rich habitat

Progress nationally is not good however:

"many of the key actions and policies required remain at the early stages of design and implementation. Policy and delivery gaps remain. As things stand, the prospects of meeting key targets and commitments are largely off track." Office for Environmental Protection, Progress in improving the natural environment in England 2022/2023

The Lawton principles of 2010 set out what needs to be done:

(i) Improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management

(ii) Increase the size of current wildlife sites

(iii) Enhance connections between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones'

(iv) Create new sites

(v) Reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites

The Shropshire Hills draft Nature Recovery Plan of 2021 contains information and principles relating to nature recovery in the Shropshire Hills which are still valid. The statutory process of the county level Local Nature Recovery Strategy being prepared at the same time as this Plan takes this a stage further. Our Plan will be updated further over the course of 2025 to align with the content of the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin LNRS as this develops.

The draft Shropshire Hills Nature Recovery Plan summarised the kinds of changes sought in our landscape as:

- More natural river channels and corridors, with more tree and shrub cover and wider margins separating rivers from farmland.
- More complex and varied vegetation on hills, including more and better heathland (with appropriate grazing), wooded gullies, and headwater springs and flushes allowed to take natural form.
- Naturally wet areas allowed to develop as wetland habitats by rewetting or reducing drainage, and minimising eutrophication.
- Species-rich grasslands and hay meadows expanded and managed carefully by cutting and/or grazing.
- Expanding woodland cover (potentially doubling) in ways which reflect pattern of natural woodland, and more trees integrated in farmland (hedges and field boundaries, agro-forestry etc), and sustainable management of existing woodlands.
- 'High Nature Value' farmland with variety of habitat (including productive pasture and arable land), good hedgerows, regenerative practices to improve soil health, and protecting features of interest and expanding habitat networks.

Our priorities for nature recovery in the Shropshire Hills are:

Best possible management of existing high quality habitats as 'core areas' of a nature recovery network.

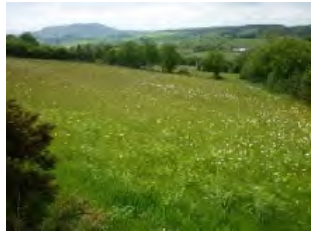
Improving margins and buffer areas to heathland and rough grassland hills – to soften transitions, including mixed and mosaic 'ffridd' habitats, scrub and woodland.

Re-naturalising catchment headwater areas – rewetting and roughening improved and drained pastures, including restoring remaining peatlands and flushes.

Regenerating and expanding upland semi-natural woodlands by excluding stock, and sustainable management of all existing woodlands.

Woodland creation to improve habitat networks - especially on steep banks, upland gullies and streams, field corners, and new planting of trees outside woods including hedgerow trees and agroforestry. Restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and sensitive management of commercial woodland. Also new tree planting as a response to tree disease and restoration of hedges.

Habitat improvement of river and stream corridors including buffer strips with tree and shrub planting and control of stock access. Restoration of flood plain wetland habitats.



Managing and re-creating wildflower meadows and species-rich grasslands, including roadside verges.

More regenerative management of farmland e.g. pasture regimes which increase soil organic content and reduce water run-off (e.g. through reduced compaction, buffering streams and wetlands), arable farming avoiding soil loss and harm to rivers by avoiding steep slopes and erosion-vulnerable land.

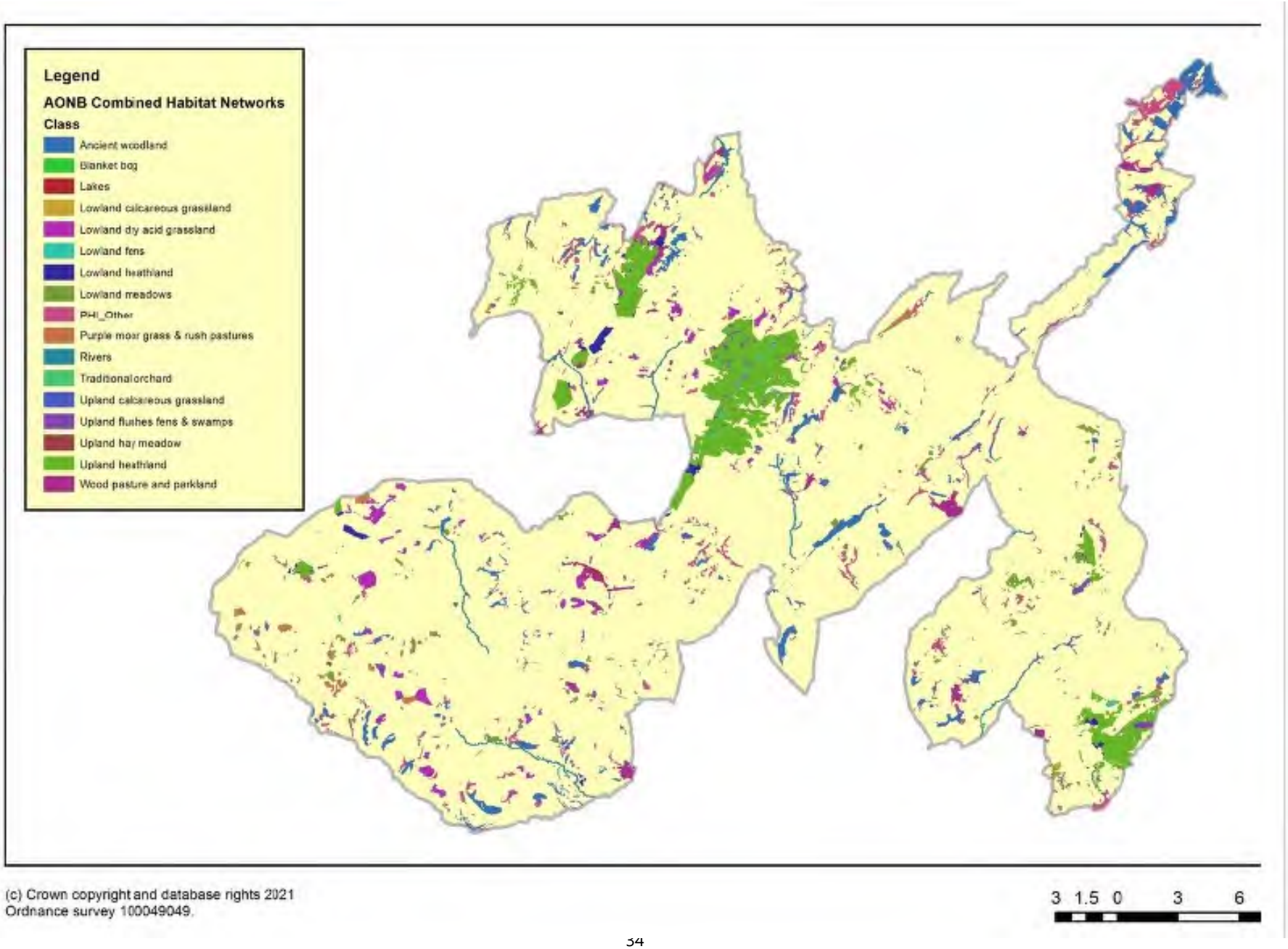
Management of invasive non-native species such as Signal Crayfish, Himalayan Balsam.

Connecting people to nature
Nature's future depends on people caring about it, which only comes from people connecting with nature in their lives. This also has huge benefits for people's wellbeing and quality of life.

Priority habitats in the Shropshire Hills now

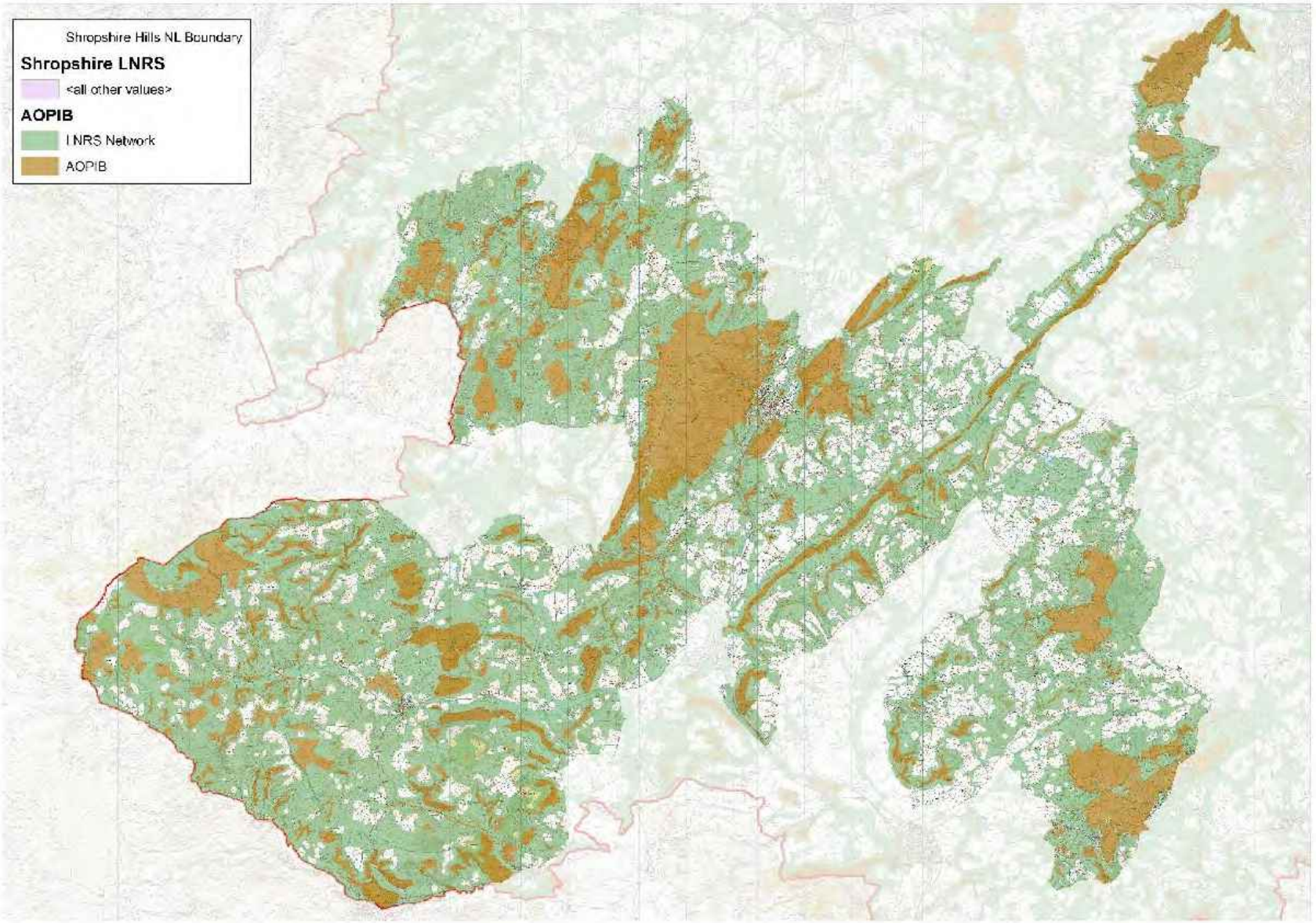
Everywhere is habitat of some kind, but these are the good quality 'semi-natural' habitats identified as threatened and requiring conservation action.

They cover around 13% of the area. It is clear that these are highly fragmented, and the nature recovery network is about expanding and connecting good quality habitats through restoration and creation.



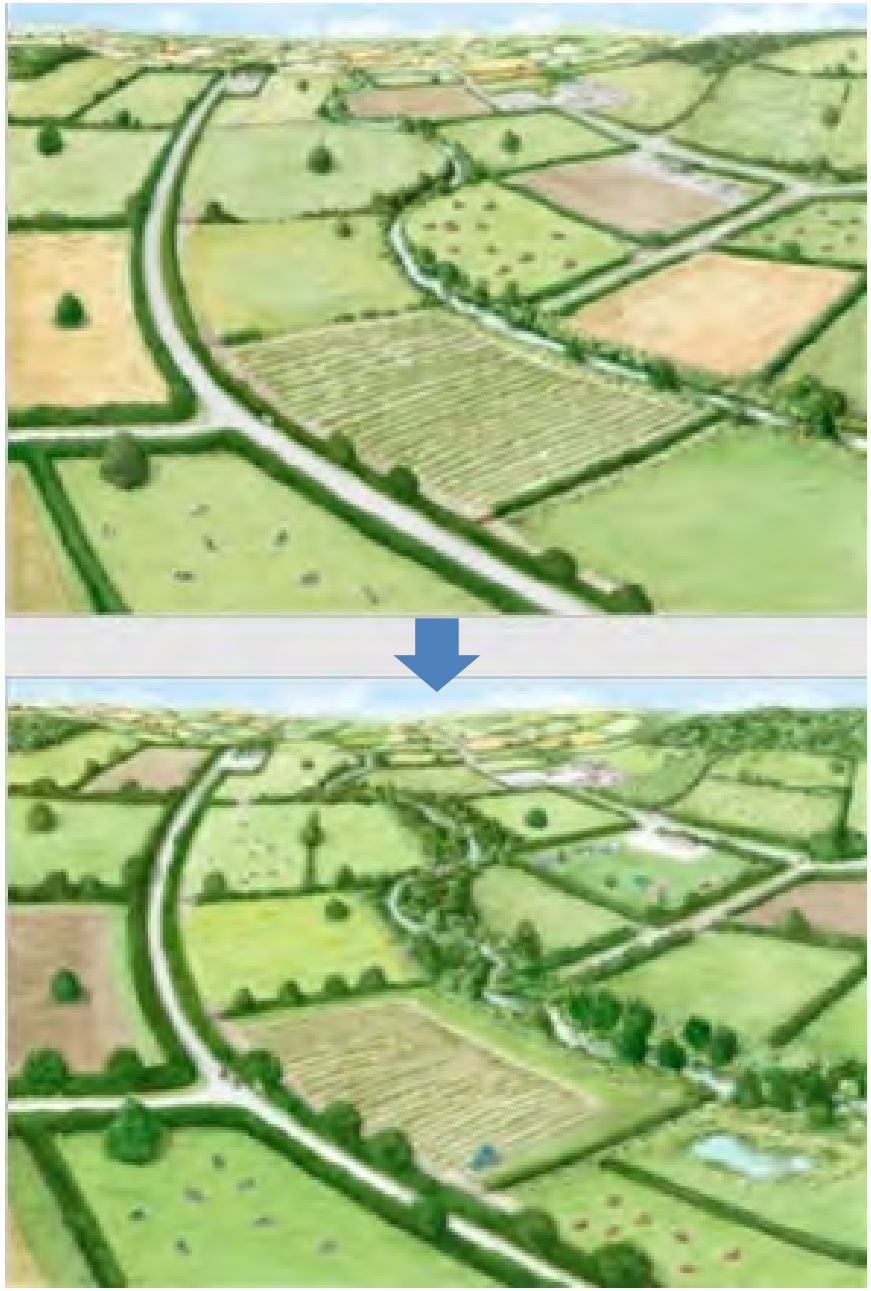
Shropshire Nature Recovery Network
from draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (pre-publication)

The green areas show where the best places to create or restore new habitat will be (and not that all green areas need to change).



What might this look like?

In the lowlands:



In the uplands:

These drawings are intended to be broadly illustrative of the kinds of changes which would help to deliver nature recovery

Habitats

The Shropshire Hills have a wide range of habitats, and these can be classified and defined in different ways. At a simple level we can divide these into grasslands, heath and moorland, woodland and trees, rivers and streams, ponds and wetlands, ffridd and scrub. What habitat classifications can overlook is that what is best for nature is habitat mosaics and dynamism. Our birds, invertebrates, etc all evolved in a dynamic environment, with both dense and more broken wooded areas through to open heath and grassland, across a spectrum of wet to drier ground. We no longer have the bison, woolly rhinos, wild boars etc which maintained this dynamic landscape and we tend to manage land in neat parcels – fields, woods, ponds, hedges, etc. Where possible we should look to allow space for nature to be dynamic, and make our interventions mimic the effects of the large wild herbivores which are no longer here.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is currently developing priorities and measures to support these. A summary of relevant LNRS current draft priorities is shown below (note that these may evolve):

Proposed **Farmland** priorities for LNRS include:

- Establish Farmer Groups
- Enhance soil health and nature on arable land
- Enhance soil health and nature on pastures
- Plant more trees in the farmed landscape
- Create, enhance and appropriately manage riparian buffers
- Create, restore and manage nature-rich farmland mosaics
- Establish new, and safeguard traditional, orchards
- Utilise less productive land to deliver nature- based solutions

Proposed **Woodlands** priorities for LNRS include:

- Restore and expand nature rich ancient semi-natural woodland & long-established woodland
- Restore plantation on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)
- Improve condition of deciduous and mixed woodlands
- Create new woodlands
- Restore and expand wood pasture
- Restore parkland

Proposed **Hedgerows and veteran trees** priorities for LNRS include:

- Restore, enhance, expand and appropriately manage the hedgerow network
- Identify, appropriately manage and safeguard the future of veteran trees

Proposed **Waterways and wetlands** priorities for LNRS include:

- Improve water quality in rivers
- Reduce both flood risk and low flows
- Re-naturalise rivers
- Restore natural ecosystem function in upland headwaters
- Safeguard, restore and rewet bogs, fens, mosaics of wetland habitats and areas of peat
- Control Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) across whole catchments

Proposed **Grasslands** priorities for LNRS include:

- Develop grazier networks and register of hay donor sites
- Safeguard traditional hay meadows and create species-rich neutral grasslands
- Restore, enhance and buffer species-rich calcareous grasslands
- Restore, enhance and buffer species-rich dry acid grasslands
- Restore grassland on roadside verges and railway verges

Proposed **Heathland** priorities for LNRS include:

- Restore, connect and expand heathland sites

Proposed **Open habitats and habitat mosaics** priorities for LNRS include:

- Enhance, restore and expand ffridd habitat areas
- Create, enhance and appropriately manage close mosaics of open habitats on former mining and post-industrial sites
- Safeguard open habitats on scree

Proposed **Air quality** priorities for LNRS include:

- Improve air quality near sensitive habitats

Proposed **Public access, health and wellbeing** priorities for LNRS include:

- Nature for health and wellbeing

Condition of existing sites

Condition of SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest)
This is now measured by each SSSI 'feature' rather than by area compartment, so the newer data is not directly comparable with older data. The previous trend was of gradual improvement.

There are 48 designated SSSIs in the Shropshire Hills National Landscape, occupying 4,626 ha (5.7%) of its area.

The Targets & Outcomes Framework sets a target to bring 80% of SSSI features within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042 (Target 2). Currently 59.3% of the SSSI features in the Shropshire Hills are in a favourable condition. This may rise once the status of the features not currently recorded is known. This is above the National Landscapes average of 42.3%, and the England level of 40.5%.

The Targets & Outcomes Framework Target 3 is the percentage of SSSI features within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition. The Shropshire Hills current level for this target is 16.1% (19 out of 118 features). This is behind the National Landscapes average 20.7%, and all England 20.9%, indicating some of the remaining issues are quite intractable.

Local Wildlife Sites are an important second tier of nature conservation sites, but these do not have much protection and there is little support available to advise owners of these how best to manage them. There are 214 of these non-statutory sites in the National Landscape, making up 6% of its area. Detailed data on their condition in the Shropshire Hills is not available.

Habitat creation and restoration

Target 1 in the Targets & Outcomes Framework is to restore or create wildlife-rich habitats. The basic apportionment for the Shropshire Hills by area of all National Landscapes is 6,383.6ha by 2042, or 319.2ha/year. This would be very difficult since most of the potential land being currently farmland. A challenging but potentially feasible target for the Shropshire Hills is proposed as follows:

Potential habitats for creation/restoration	**20 years (ha)**	**5 years (ha)**
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	480	120
Mixed woodland (minimum 70% native broadleaves)	480	120
Upland oakwood	90	22.5
Wood pasture and parkland	90	22.5
Ancient woodland restoration	200	50
Arable field margins	18	4.5
Scrub - blackthorn, gorse, hawthorn, etc	16	4
Upland heathland	18	4.5
Hedgerows	14.4	3.6
Lowland meadows	14.4	3.6
Purple moor grass and rush pasture	10.8	2.7
Wet woodland	10	2.5
Neutral grassland	14.4	3.6
Traditional orchards	6	1.5
Mesotrophic lakes	4	1
Acid grassland	3.6	0.9
Blanket bog restoration	10	2.5
Wet heathland restoration	20	5
Rivers and streams	4	1
Floodplain wetland mosaic	2	0.5
Lowland calcareous grassland	2.4	0.6
Upland hay meadows	2.4	0.6
Upland flushes, fen and swamp	1.2	0.3
Ponds	1.5	0.38
Line of trees	4	1
Inland rock and scree	0.8	0.2
Totals (in hectares)	**1,517.9**	**379**

Woodland creation

Targets & Outcomes Framework Target 8 is: *"Increased tree canopy and woodland cover: Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline)".* A basic apportionment of this target by area of all National Landscapes arrives at a figure for the Shropshire Hills of 2,424.7 ha by 2050, equivalent to (86.6 ha per year). A more detailed consideration of potential and recent experience in the Shropshire Hills has been carried out for the Plan preparation. **A figure for the Shropshire Hills for Target 8 of 58ha per year is suggested (= 1,680ha 2022 - 2050).**

The total of the estimated target figures for categories of woodland classed as 'wildlife-rich habitat' in the Target 1 breakdown above is 41ha/year. Target 8 also includes other woodland, e.g. mixed woodland of less than 70% broadleaves and conifer woodland. There is less congruence of these woodland types to the aims of the Management Plan, so a lower amount is allowed for of these in the local target proposed.

With woodland creation a numerical target is insufficient since the way it is done makes a big difference to the potential environmental benefits or indeed disbenefits if done in the wrong ways. Further guidance is set out in the Policies and Recommendations and in woodland creation guidance. It is notable that the target includes tree canopy i.e. trees outside woods.

Peat restoration

Targets & Outcomes Framework Target 7 is to *"restore 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050".*

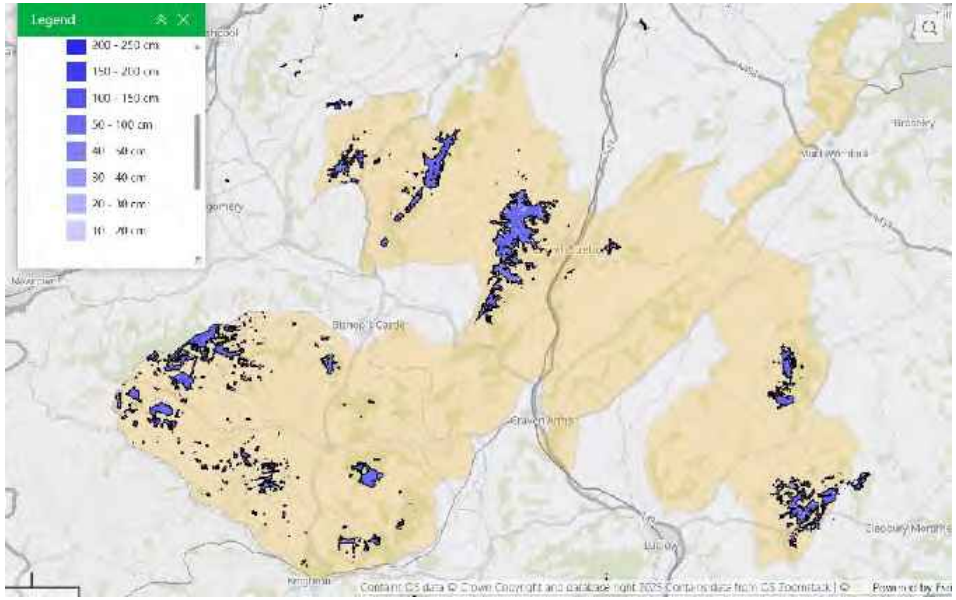
New pre-publication data based on Natural England's England 2025 Peat Map (May 2025) indicates a larger are of peaty soils than previously recorded:

Peaty soil 3,519.8ha (= 4.4% of the National Landscape), made up of:

- 10-30cm depth 140.8ha
- 30-40cm depth 321ha
- 40+cm depth 3,058ha

The total area of deep peat in the Shropshire Hills recorded previously was only 41.91 ha. Given the significant change in the data, further work will be necessary using the new England Peat Map to apportion a local target for restoration of deep peat in the Shropshire Hills by 2050.

Most deep peat is in poor condition and a source of carbon emissions, so restoration, mainly by rewetting, is a high priority.



Distribution of peaty soils in the Shropshire Hills
(England Peat Map, Natural England 2025)

Species – mammals, birds, invertebrates, plants, fungi, micro-organisms, invasive non-native species

The Shropshire Hills spans upland and lowland and includes a mix of species of northern Britain and those more associated with the south. 41% of species have declined in the UK since 1970, and unfortunately the situation in the Shropshire Hills reflects national trends. Some of the threatened species are obscure, but these are nevertheless important parts of ecosystems.

Mammals

11 of the 47 mammals native to Britain are classified as being at risk of extinction, a further five are classified as 'near threatened' and since 1970 the average distribution of mammals has declined by 26%. Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills are: Lesser horseshoe bat, Noctule bat, Polecat, Eurasian Otter, Hazel dormouse, European Hare, Harvest Mouse, Hedgehog, Pine marten.

Dormouse

Birds

The Shropshire Hills is important in a regional context for upland and farmland birds, including Curlew, Lapwing, Dipper, and Snipe, but the breeding populations of all these species except Dipper have fallen to critically low levels. As elsewhere, these long-term declines are linked principally to loss of habitat, with predation becoming significant when numbers reach low levels.

Priority bird Species in the Shropshire Hills are:

Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Common Cuckoo, Common Sandpiper, Curlew, Grasshopper Warbler, Kestrel, Nightjar, Pied Flycatcher, Red Grouse, Snipe, Tree Pipit, Wheatear, Whinchat, Willow Tit, Wood Warbler, Lesser Redpoll, Redstart.

Those from the Farmland Bird Assemblage such as Cuckoo, Curlew and Kestrel would benefit to a greater or lesser extent from:

- uncultivated field margins, rich in invertebrates
- more hedgerows, and increasing the width, height and species diversity of those that remain.

Curlew (Leo Smith)

Curlew are arguably a special case, as it is regionally and nationally important. Nationally curlew has declined by 65% since 1970. In Shropshire, the population declined by an estimated 77% between 1990 and 2010, down to 160 pairs, with a further decline since. The Shropshire Hills holds around 60 pairs, over 12% of the population south of a line from the Dee to the Wash. Curlew is "the most important bird conservation priority in the UK" (Brown et al, 2015). Predator pressure is known to be a factor, and there is strong evidence from the Shropshire Ornithological Society's Save our Curlews project work that the high level of gamebird releases in contribute to this. Up to 2/3 of released gamebirds may not be shot, and so are available as supplementary food for predators and scavengers including those which take Curlew eggs and chicks (and other ground-nesting birds).

The Long Mynd is the only site where Whinchat now breed regularly, and it holds the large majority of the Red grouse population (the only other, smaller, population is on The Stiperstones). Whinchat nest primarily in bilberry heath mosaic, and Grouse are totally dependent on heather.

Case study - Pine marten monitoring in the Shropshire Hills

Pine martens are England's rarest mammals and were thought to be extinct in Shropshire for over 100 years. They have been found again recently in the Shropshire Hills and are now being monitored. In 2024, the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust supported three pine marten projects through the Conservation Fund, aiming to empower communities to get involved with surveying for the presence of this mammal in key areas, using camera tapping and den box surveys.

These projects have trained volunteers to use camera traps in woodlands near the Stiperstones, Snailbeach, Poles Coppice, as well as near to Church Stretton and Wenlock Edge. Monitoring by volunteers is also taking place in Wheathill Parish and on Pontesford Hill, with camera traps here helping to confirm whether pine marten are present. At Wheathill, a three mile stretch of Cold Green Dingle is now monitored, informing where to locate den boxes to encourage resting and breeding places for pine marten. The Friends of Pontesford Hill group now has a dedicated volunteer team of 15 people monitoring the site, which will help to inform better management for pine marten here.

A number of public events and talks have also been held, to continue awareness-raising in local communities on the importance of not only pine martens, but the overall need to improve and connect existing habitats and to create better quality habitats to support nature recovery.

Pine marten on camera

Installing cameras at Nipstone

<u>Butterflies, Bees and Beetles</u>

Invertebrates are the very heart of our natural systems but are suffering the greatest declines. As Buglife puts it - "it is the small things that run the planet". Many of our bugs are specialists with specific habitat requirements and therefore at greatest risk from rapid environmental change. There are thousands of UK invertebrate species and two out of three UK bug species are in decline.

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills: Grayling, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Wood White, White Letter Hairstreak, Drab Looper, Bilberry bumblebee

Grayling

<u>Molluscs</u>

The Shropshire Hills used to be a stronghold for the freshwater pearl mussel. 16th Century accounts affirm that the River Clun was once carpeted with mussels, perhaps in the hundreds of thousands. These populations were sustained by our unpolluted rivers, but in recent decades populations from the Rivers Teme and Onny have been lost, and the Clun population is now limited to less than one thousand individuals, is contracting in range, and restricted to waters outside the National Landscape. Influenced by unsustainable practices in the Shropshire Hills, recruitment of juveniles is thought to be zero and the Clun population is considered functionally extinct. Critically endangered, the freshwater pearl mussel is at risk of global extinction.

Freshwater Pearl Mussel

BAP Priority Species: Freshwater pearl mussel - critically endangered and decreasing (occurs just outside the National Landscape)

Crustaceans

The Clun, Redlake and Onny catchments support populations of White-clawed crayfish (our only native crayfish).

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills: White-clawed crayfish

White-clawed crayfish

Reptiles & Amphibians

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills:

Adder, Grass Snake, Common Lizard, Slow Worm, Great Crested Newt, Common Toad

Adder

Fish

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills:

European Eel, Atlantic salmon, Brown Trout, Grayling, Bullhead, Brook Lamprey, Nine-spine Stickleback, Three-spine Stickleback

Vascular plants

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills:

Green winged orchid, Marsh Gentian, Lesser Butterfly-orchid, Floating Water Plantain, Annual Knawel, Basil Thyme, Yellow Bird`s-nest, Spreading Bellflower, Mountain Pansy, Black poplar

Green-winged orchid

Non-Vascular plants

The Shropshire Hills has one of only seven sites known in the UK for Marsh Flapwort (*Jamesoniella undulifolia*), an endangered species found in wet flushes.

BAP Priority Species in the Shropshire Hills: Marsh flapwort

Micro-organisms

There is greater understanding of the role of beneficial micro-organisms e.g. in soil and animal health. This can help at a cultural level us to see that we are highly connected to and dependent upon other living things, which is the basis of a healthy and sustainable relationship with nature.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

There were 2,000 invasive non-native species in Great Britain in 2021, with 10-12 new ones becoming established every year, mirroring the global trend. They threaten biodiversity and ecosystems and have significant economic impacts. Climate change is expected to increase the risk from invasives, through more frost-free winters and increased flooding events, and stress on habitats causing more vulnerability.

The most prevalent invasive species in the Shropshire Hills are those that are common across the country, in terrestrial and freshwater habitats. Along riparian corridors, Himalayan balsam is widespread, causing erosion to river banks, forming dense stands that supress native plants and reduce biodiversity. Management and eradication of this rigorous plant is challenging and most effective if carried out at a catchment-scale as the plant uses watercourses for seed dispersal .

Populations of the native white-clawed crayfish are under increasing threat from the widespread North American signal crayfish, which out compete our native crayfish and act as a vector the fungal disease ‘crayfish plague’. The signal crayfish are also known to modify aquatic habitats, through extensive bank burrowing, causing erosion and sediment release.

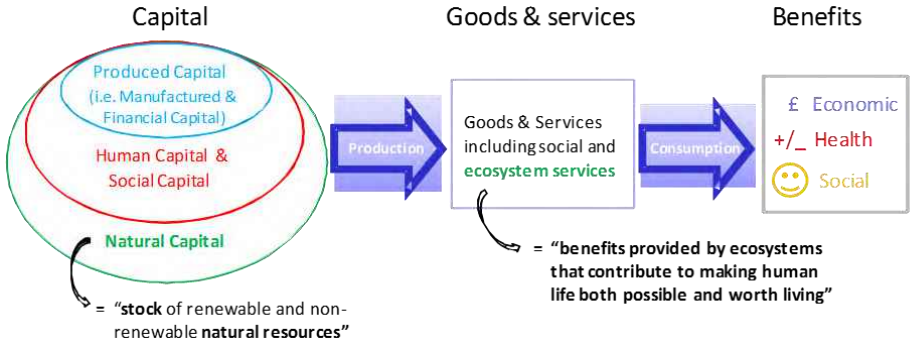
Natural processes, biosphere integrity

Nature is not just species and habitats, but natural processes and natural systems which shape and support our everyday lives, such as the water cycle, carbon and nutrient cycles, soil formation and climate regulation.

The biosphere is the whole living system on which we depend. We can't just keep a few pieces of it as protected bits of biodiversity. We need to maintain the integrity of the biosphere which includes bio-abundance and healthy natural processes.

Natural capital and ecosystem services are ways to think about the value which nature has to humans, though are sometimes criticised for encouraging an overly utilitarian human-centric view.

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, ecosystem. 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.



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.

Pests, diseases and biosecurity

This is increasingly an issue, as new diseases such as Ash Dieback affecting trees, bird flu affecting poultry and wild birds, and through threats or potential threats to livestock from diseases such as Bluetongue and Foot & Mouth. Most biosecurity measures are taken within the relevant industries, though at times of heightened threat, biosecurity measures by members of the public become very important too. There are sometimes cross-overs to risk to human health too, further raising the importance.

Air quality

Air in the National Landscape is relatively clean regarding human health, but ammonia and aerial nitrogen deposition are significantly affecting habitats. There are examples of wildlife sites already at c200% to 600% of their Critical Levels or Loads of nitrogen (i.e. levels above which species will be lost and habitats damaged). The cumulative impacts of intensive poultry units is a factor in levels of ammonia.

Key link to other Plan themes - Nature connection for people

"Nature connection is about our sense of relationship with the rest of nature – how we think about, feel towards and engage with the natural world."

Nature Connected Communities Handbook, University of Derby

People more connected to nature so that they care about it and see the benefits to their wellbeing, quality of life and prosperity.

Nature connection is not just about knowledge, but about emotional connection. It is associated with greater wellbeing for individuals, and pro-environmental behaviours including active participation in caring for nature. It is a route to us establishing a new and harmonious relationship in which we are a part of nature and can influence it positively rather than just reducing the harm we do.

Five pathways to nature connection have been defined:

Senses - Exploring and experiencing nature through all the senses

Beauty - Seeking and appreciating the beauty of the natural world

Emotion – Noticing and welcoming the feelings nature inspires

Meaning – Celebrating and sharing nature's events and stories

Compassion – helping and caring for nature

If you pause for a moment and think about a favourite place that you associate with nature, you probably feel a sense of calm, just in a few moments. It's a known thing that nature makes us feel better. We as humans evolved in nature, as part of it, those connections are deep rooted within all of us. People in hospital recover more quickly if they have a view of trees or nature, or even a picture of it on the wall. You felt calmer just by thinking about it, in a few seconds. So we know from our own experience that nature is good for us. Of course we need natural resources and processes actually to survive and live – clean air, water, growing food, but nature is also good for our wellbeing. Even the health value of physical exercise has been shown to be greater when it's done in a natural setting compared to indoors.

Nature connection is not just about knowledge, but about emotional connection

Summary of statutory requirements and duties – Nature
(not exhaustive)

Strengthened duty to seek to further the purpose of the National Landscape to conserve and enhance natural beauty

Strengthened 'biodiversity duty' on public bodies

Biodiversity net gain from new development

SSSI duties for public bodies and other occupiers

Protected species legislation

Environmental Impact Assessment requirements e.g. for ploughing up semi-natural grasslands

Controls on tree felling - Tree Preservation Orders and trees in Conservation Areas, felling licence requirements

Regulations relating to pests and diseases

Redstart

PLAN POLICIES - NATURE

(See the explanation of what the Policies are)

3. Existing assets

i) Further harm to nature should be prevented, and opportunities sought to enhance the status or condition of current nature assets. Designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) should be protected, maintained and enhanced.

ii) Appropriate use should be made of regulatory mechanisms to protect nature, e.g. protected species.

iii) Irreplaceable habitats should be protected (as defined at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/irreplaceable-habitats).

iv) Habitats and species of principal importance for nature conservation should be maintained and enhanced.

v) Natural capital should be protected and enhanced.

4. Nature Recovery

i) The recovery of nature should be encouraged through all opportunities, especially through public support for farmers and connected with built development and land use change.

ii) The nature recovery network of good quality habitats should be improved, as set out in maps and priorities of the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

iii) Ecological networks and green infrastructure should be maintained, and their connectivity enhanced through targeted habitat creation and restoration.

iv) The area's contribution to the 30x30 target should be maximised, and to the wider Convention on Biological Diversity goal of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050.

5. Development

i) Development under the planning system should have regard to the biodiversity duty, make use of wildlife surveys where necessary, and use the mitigation hierarchy: Avoid – Minimise – Mitigate – Offset.

6. Woodland and Trees

i) Ancient woodlands should be protected and managed, and Plantations on Ancient Woodland sites restored, according to good practice. All existing woodlands should be sustainably managed, for environmental, social and economic factors.

ii) The cover of native broadleaved woodland should be expanded with appropriate species in suitable locations, as set out in guidance within and referenced by this Plan.

iii) New planting of woodland should follow the highest standards of design to support landscape, nature, heritage and amenity. The proportion of native broadleaved trees should be as high as possible in commercial woods, and proportions of conifers over 50% are discouraged. The design of new woodland should take into consideration long term management and access requirements for harvesting and extraction.

iv) Trees outside woodlands should be cared for and retained where possible, and planting of trees outside woodlands should be increased – including hedgerow trees, wood pasture and agro-forestry. Opportunities should be sought to integrate trees and woodland more with farming, and to raise awareness of their agricultural benefits.

v) Where felling is to take place, high standards of resource protection (soils, water, etc) should be adopted, and opportunities should be taken to improve woodland design for landscape and to facilitate nature recovery.

vi) Where justified by a site's importance for open habitats, the on-site reduction in woodland footprint to enable the creation or restoration of open habitats should be allowed.

7. Other habitats

i) Where possible space should be allowed for dynamic evolution of habitats, and human interventions adjusted to mimic the more natural past disturbances of large wild animals.

ii) Hedgerows and hedge banks and should be maintained and managed for optimum wildlife value. Management using traditional methods such as hedge laying is encouraged.

iii) Creation of new hedgerows is encouraged. Planting should follow best practice, using a mix of native species characteristic of the local landscape.

iv) Areas of deep peat within the Shropshire Hills should be protected, and efforts made to improve their management and condition, especially by restoring more natural hydrology.

v) Wetland areas such as ponds, lakes, mires, flushes and wet woodland should be protected and restored where necessary. Creation of new wetland habitats in suitable locations is encouraged, avoiding harm to existing features of value.

vi) Species-rich meadows, unimproved grassland and road verges should be managed for their biodiversity value.

8. People's connection to nature

i) Opportunities should be taken to support greater connection to nature across all of society, including emotional connection, public engagement, education programmes and interpretation.

Plan Recommendations - Nature

(See the explanation of what the Recommendations are)

N 1. Support implementation of priority actions set out in the Shropshire & Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy, by farmers and landowners as well as smaller scale action by smallholders and communities.

N 2. Promote the nature recovery priorities set out in the draft Shropshire Hills Nature Recovery Plan.

N 3. Support Parish scale action for nature, including local nature recovery strategies, management of public land, and support for action by farmers, smallholders and for wildlife gardening.

N 4. Influence national policy relating to nature, especially to ensure consistency with other policy areas and to avoid portraying nature as a constraint.

N 5. Support strong delivery of new farm incentives for nature through Environmental Land Management (ELM).

N 6. Follow the Plan's guidance below about where new trees should be planted:

i. In field corners and hedgerows where individual trees and small groups of trees will enhance the landscape

ii. Along watercourses and in upland dingles, and where planting will buffer, extend or link woods, especially ancient woodland

iii. On land of lower agricultural value and no archaeological interest

iv. On land which is not valuable open habitat, e.g. species-rich grasslands, meadows, heathlands or wetlands, except in character with mosaic habitats

v. To offset losses where any mature trees may have to be removed

vi. Avoiding locations within 1km of nest sites of ground-nesting birds, to avoid improving conditions for predators. Every effort should be made to check local and national records of such birds.

N 7. Optimise delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain in the Shropshire Hills.

N 8. Maximise benefits of the new Stiperstones Landscape National Nature Reserve (incorporating land of a number of partners).

N 9. Support management of deer populations in a careful and sustainable way to enable natural regeneration in woodlands and enable planted trees to grow.

N 10. Raise awareness of ffridd and scrub habitats which are undervalued.

N 11. Improve the resilience of all woodlands and plantations to the effects of climate change.

N 12. Seek to minimise the harm from pests and diseases affecting wild populations by raising awareness and following best practice including biosecurity.

N 13. Control invasive non-native species where needed according to best practice guidelines.

N 14. Support provision of adequate advisory capacity for nature for different types of actor – including farmers, smallholders and community groups.

N 15. Continue the network of community wildlife groups.

N 16. Continue networking organisation for small meadow owners (Marches Meadows Group).

N 17. Rewilding initiatives should take account of the current nature value of land, and any nature conservation value which derives from a long history of sensitive management. Any species reintroduction should be done through official mechanisms.

N 18. Improve data and knowledge regarding key evidence gaps on nature, and share more nature recovery case studies. Continue to gather and make available data on nature, including through expansion of citizen science approaches.

Plan Aspirations - Nature

(See the explanation of what the Aspirations are)

N(a). Secure funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund for a Shropshire Hills Landscape Connections project delivering at a large scale for nature recovery.

N(b). Explore opportunities for Green Finance.

N(c). Conservation ownership of key sites which come on the market by suitable community or conservation organisations where appropriate.

N(d). Connect organisations who are active on nature – to share knowledge and ideas

N(e). Develop area and theme-based projects for nature, e.g. rivers, grassland, wetlands, etc.

N(f). Create new habitat to meet the Targets & Outcomes Framework target 1.

N(g). Targeted work on species, e.g. curlew, butterflies, including through local species action plans.

N(h). Ancient and veteran trees should be recorded and have appropriate management plans to retain their landscape and biodiversity benefits.

N(i). Reinstate advisory capacity for owners of Local Wildlife Sites.

N(j). Encourage skills development to support nature recovery.

N(k). Support people to take inspiration from their experiences of nature in the Shropshire Hills to become more sustainable and pro-environmental in their behaviours and choices.

N(l). Include regular content on the nature theme in public communication and engagement.

N(m). Increase the proportion of people who spend time in nature, especially reaching new people.

N(n). Use themes from the People's Plan for Nature to support engagement: Vision & Leadership, Regulation & Implementation, Nature-friendly Farming, Food Production and Consumption, Waterway & Catchment Management, Local Access to Nature, Using Evidence Effectively.