

Thriving in balance with nature



Shropshire Hills
National Landscape



Shropshire Hills National Landscape: An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty **Management Plan 2025-2030** *Guiding sustainable future directions for the Shropshire Hills landscape*

Final approved Plan, Feb 2026



Our vision for the Shropshire Hills...

Thriving in balance with nature

Everyone can play their part in looking after what makes the area special

Climate is stabilised through decarbonising, and we are resilient to change

Nature is restored and natural processes regenerated

People are healthy and connected to nature – in vibrant communities and as welcome visitors

Water is clean, and its flows and cycles support our lives, and all life



Land is nurtured so it can sustain us



Shropshire Hills
National Landscape

Summary of key Plan priorities

Under each Vision heading, these are headline summaries of the Plan's priorities, which are fleshed out in Policies, Recommendations and Aspirations within the Plan.

Nature is restored and natural processes regenerated

- Build the **nature recovery network** by restoring and creating more connected habitats for wildlife – woodlands, rivers and wetlands, meadows, scrub, hedges, road verges, etc.
- Avoid further harm and **manage existing good habitats**.
- **Integrate nature with farming** and land management.
- Increase **native tree and woodland cover**.
- Targeted action for particularly important **species**.
- Support and enable **natural processes**.
- Help people to **connect to nature**.

Climate is stabilised through decarbonising, and we are resilient to change

- **Face up to the challenge** – changing, preparing, adapting.
- Achieve **big reductions in greenhouse gas emissions** through technological, behavioural and structural changes in all sectors.
- Encourage **dialogue and collective action** on climate.
- Undertake more detailed work on **adaptation**.
- Maximise **storage and sequestration of carbon in land**, and apply nature-based solutions at scale.
- Appropriate deployment of **renewable energy**.
- Seek to ensure a **just transition** for all of society.

Land is nurtured so it can sustain us

- Forge a **new sustainable future for farming** - especially livestock farming in the uplands, balancing food production with nature.
- Transition to **more agro-ecological farming**.
- Understand and value our **exceptional geology**.
- **Look after soils**, especially through regenerative practices.
- Support the movement for a **fairer and healthier food system**.
- Ensure **appropriate forms of built development** on farms.

- Support **sustainable forestry**, balancing production with other benefits.
- Support **skills development** for land management.
- Develop the role of **farmer clusters and groups**.

Water is clean, and its flows and cycles support our lives, and all life

- **Re-naturalise our rivers and their catchments** - with less engineered stream and river channels.
- **Hold more water higher up for longer** to slow flood peaks and maintain flows in dry periods, including rewetting headwater land.
- **Reduce all forms of pollution** to achieve cleaner rivers.
- **Manage catchments in an integrated way** for multiple benefits.
- Improve **management and storage of water** as a resource.

People are healthy and connected to nature – in vibrant communities and as welcome visitors

- Support **meeting everybody's basic needs of wellbeing**.
- Take active steps to **address barriers faced by underserved communities** (including local people and visitors).
- **Involve and welcome a wider range of people** from all parts of society to enjoy the area.
- Encourage **active recreation for health and wellbeing**.
- Invest in improvements and maintenance of the **access network**.
- Manage localised **impacts and pressures from visitors**.
- Support **learning** related to all aspects of the landscape.
- Enable more opportunities for **volunteering and involvement**.

The Shropshire Hills are valued and cared for as a special Place

- Build a **regenerative economy** that supports a healthy environment and meets the needs of all of society.
- **Reject developments which harm** or take from the environment.
- Support transitions to **sustainable tourism and transport**.
- Protect **tranquillity and dark skies**.
- Value and celebrate our varied **cultural heritage**.
- Develop **sense of place** at local levels and for the Shropshire Hills.
- Build strong **communities**, and support **local action**.
- Optimise links between the Shropshire Hills and **surrounding areas**.

Contents (with links to relevant sections)

Plan Vision - Thriving in balance with nature (short form)

Summary of proposed key Plan priorities

Contents

Introduction

Forewords from the Minister and the Partnership Chair

3

Background

About the Shropshire Hills (with map)

Summary on legal basis and context with links to appendices

7

The Management Plan review

Special qualities and statement of significance

Key issues identified and drivers of change

Highlights and challenges in the last Plan period

The Doughnut Economics model as a framework

Summary of condition of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape

Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework

11

Plan Vision - Thriving in balance with nature (long form)

27

Priority theme sections - introduction

28

Overall protection of the National Landscape

Priority themes – with Policies, Recommendations and Aspirations

Nature is restored and natural processes regenerated 32

Climate is stabilised through decarbonising, and we are resilient to change 50

Land is nurtured so it can sustain us 62

Water is clean, and its flows and cycles support our lives, and all life 71

People are healthy and connected to nature – in vibrant communities and as welcome visitors 80

The Shropshire Hills are valued and cared for as a special **Place** 90

Local priorities for areas of the Shropshire Hills

102

Stretton Valley and Hills/ A49 corridor

Long Mynd & Stiperstones

Clun Forest & Valley

Clee Hills

Wenlock Edge & Dales

The Wrekin

Delivery

118

Analysis informed by Theory of Change

Deliverers

Funding

Partnership working

Potential project areas

Monitoring

Appendices

127

1. The Landscapes Review
2. Rebranding as National Landscapes
3. Legal framework including strengthened legal duty on public bodies
4. 30 by 30 and Environmental Improvement Plan targets
5. International context
6. Shropshire Hills National Landscape structures – the Team, the Trust, advisory oversight and partnership
7. National Landscapes Association and wider networks
8. The Plan review process
9. Supporting documents and processes:
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment/Sustainability Appraisal
 - Habitats Regulations Assessment

Introduction

Among the gentle folds of the Shropshire Hills are farms, woods, rivers and meadows. Villages and fields retain ancient patterns while the remains of hillforts, mines and quarries tell of historical chapters now passed. A varied geology forms the bones of the land, whose mantle of nature and natural processes have been shaped over centuries by human activity – sometimes sympathetic, and sometimes less gentle. The whole created by these natural, cultural and aesthetic qualities is a landscape that is loved and cherished, but shows signs of pressure, and sits in a delicate balance.



This Plan for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape aims to set a future direction for the area. It is based on the legal purpose for which the area is designated – to **'conserve and enhance natural beauty'**, and on addressing the challenges we face, both here and more broadly:

- The damage to **climate and nature** threatens human wellbeing and the balance of life on earth – we need a new goal and framework of **meeting everyone's needs within planetary boundaries**.
- **Finding a balance of land use** – where farming produces healthy food, sustaining the land and rural communities, and supporting nature recovery and other public benefits. This requires communication on differing viewpoints and building of trust and consensus.
- **Improving our water environment** – in terms of both water quality and management of water flows.
- We need to **de-carbonise and adapt rapidly** across all sectors through **behavioural change as well as technology**, embracing the huge opportunities for a new economy and better wellbeing.
- **Encouraging economic activity focused on meeting people's needs in harmony with the environment**, with all sectors urgently cutting emissions and adapting to climate change, to build resilience.
- **Supporting more people to have closer connection with nature**, be more active for health, help to nurture their environment and be part of vibrant communities.
- **Upscaling positive action** to achieve these things, stopping actions which continue to cause harm and go in the wrong direction, and winning hearts and minds for a harmonious relationship with nature.

This Plan aims to inspire, inform, connect ideas, co-ordinate activity, communicate strategic direction and gather support.

It is a plan for the Shropshire Hills area and not for any one organisation. **Making the Plan happen is a shared responsibility and everyone can contribute.** Its success therefore depends on the collective will of people to agree on the challenges and support the Vision and actions to address these. Organisations, land managers, businesses, communities and individuals all play their part in looking after the Shropshire Hills. All of these are audiences for the Plan, but this document has to be definitive and thorough, so summary supporting material will be developed to help engage people more widely.

The landscape has never stayed the same. Layers of human history are steeped into the land. People who live and work here have adapted to many changes and the different challenges of different times. They have responded with their skills and resilience, up to the present day. This plan looks forwards and is not about going back in time, or indeed about keeping things exactly as they are. Efforts to conserve nature and to make farming and visitor use more sustainable have already made much progress.

But other influences are pushing in unfavourable directions, and the challenges and urgency have increased. For climate we are at a critical point in time. A global rebalance is needed between human activities and the natural world, so that current and future generations can thrive, and is very evident in our local issues. We need to add to the best actions from the past, and do more, including in new ways. Changes in land use and our economies to recover the climate and nature can and should be done in a way that revives our rural area socially, economically and culturally.

“In every corner of the world can be found landscapes that have been shaped by the interactions of people and nature over time. These landscapes have been created by traditional patterns of land use that have contributed to biodiversity and other natural values, have proven sustainable over centuries, and are living examples of cultural heritage. They are rich in natural and cultural values not in spite of but because of the presence of people. Protecting these landscapes requires a conservation approach that recognises natural as well as cultural values, sustains traditional connections to the land, and engages people in stewardship of the places where they live and work.”

Brown, Mitchell & Beresford IUCN, 2005 The Protected Landscape Approach: linking nature, culture and community

A protected area is more an opportunity than a constraint. It should be a focus for collaboration and positive vision. The Shropshire Hills National Landscape (still formally designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty) has some legal protection, and the designation brings some funding to look after the landscape. But we have to be honest that current levels of protection and funding aren't adequate to meet the

challenges we face, nor the big goals which the government seeks from protected landscapes. The Plan has been developed by a broad Partnership set up for this purpose and supported by a small staff team. It represents local priorities as well as taking account of influences from outside the area, including global environmental change and national policies. The draft plan was open for public consultation from May to August 2025 and has been refined taking into account comments received. See [Appendix 8 for more about the Plan review process](#).

The Plan is a statutory document and the partners behind it want to maximise its influence, but the Plan does not seek to dictate or control. It adds no new regulation or restrictions. The Plan is the place where the legal purpose to 'conserve and enhance' which relevant authorities are now required to 'seek to further' is articulated in some detail. It seeks to set out how the relevant government environmental targets will be met locally. It provides guidance on a range of topics, signposting other documents where appropriate. It summarises statutory requirements, defines Policies and Recommendations on key topics to guide the actions of stakeholders and sets out Aspirations for actions by partners. This is a balance of ambition and realism.

While the Plan has now been approved, we need to keep it alive during the five year period it covers, and we still welcome views on its content, and how you may be able to help to deliver it.



Foreword from the Minister

Protected Landscapes are our most iconic and inspiring places.

They were created from 1949, with post-war Britain recognising everyone has a right to access the countryside – from Northumberland’s dark skies to the South Downs’ Seven Sisters. 75 years on, the needs are greater than ever, with nature underpinning our health, economy and climate. That’s why this government will empower Protected Landscapes to become greener, wilder and more accessible.

Covering 25% of England, but half of our priority habitats, Protected Landscapes are essential to nature’s recovery. This government understands that we will not achieve our Environment Act targets or commitment to protect 30% of nature by 2030 without Protected Landscapes.

Recovering this natural capital is essential to ensure sustainable economic growth. Protected Landscapes are fundamental to strengthening the nation's economic health by looking after the natural resources we depend on. Through nature’s recovery, Protected Landscapes protect communities from flooding, fight climate change, enable sustainable food production and create green jobs. They also have a vital role in connecting diverse communities with nature - underpinning the nation’s mental and physical health and reducing the strain on our NHS.

This incredible potential is beginning to be set out in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. However, it will only become reality through the work of Protected Landscapes teams in collaboration with local communities, land managers, public bodies and other partners.

Protected Landscape Management Plans provide the focal point for all partners to agree a local ambition and a pathway to deliver it, shaping the future of our most special places, and therefore the country. It is vital that all partners work together to develop and implement Management Plans. To support this collaboration, we have issued guidance on the Protected Landscapes duty which requires relevant authorities to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes.

In recognising their importance to the nation, this government has committed to reinvigorating Protected Landscapes with new legislation, resources and tools. I look forward to developing this with you and other partners because it is only together that we can protect and enhance these re-markable places for generations to come.

Mary Creagh, CBE MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Nature)



Foreword from the Partnership Chair

Welcome to 'Thriving in Balance with Nature' - the new Shropshire Hills National Landscape Management Plan.

We have worked collaboratively with Partnership members, the National Landscape Team, local communities and the wider public to set out a vision for the future of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape thriving in balance with nature.

This is the first management plan produced following the renaming of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) to National Landscapes. This change followed recommendations from the Landscapes Review and seeks to improve inclusivity and engagement with local communities and visitors to the area; these are fundamental tenets of the Management Plan.

Our core themes of nature, climate, water, land, people and place are intrinsically interconnected and interdependent, and the Plan clearly identifies the importance of these linkages. No one theme stands above another and the summary of proposed priorities provides a consolidated overview of both opportunities and challenges across these six areas.

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape is also increasingly exposed to complex external factors, notably - ongoing changes in national land use and agricultural policy, uncertainty in funding availability for protected landscapes and land managers, engaging with green finance, reform of the planning system and contributing to delivery of a range of national and international targets for nature recovery. Only through extensive partnership working will we be able to achieve and expand on the recommendations and aspirations identified in the Plan.

We have adopted the pioneering doughnut economics model to help understand where we are now and where we want to be. This approach recognises that global issues such as climate change, water management and food production are equally as important at the local level and highlights how action within the National Landscape is also important for positive national and international outcomes.

The Plan provides a broad framework to facilitate individuals, communities and organisations working together to develop and deliver innovative approaches; ensuring an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable future for the Shropshire Hills.

Alex Carson-Taylor
Chair, Shropshire Hills National Landscape Partnership

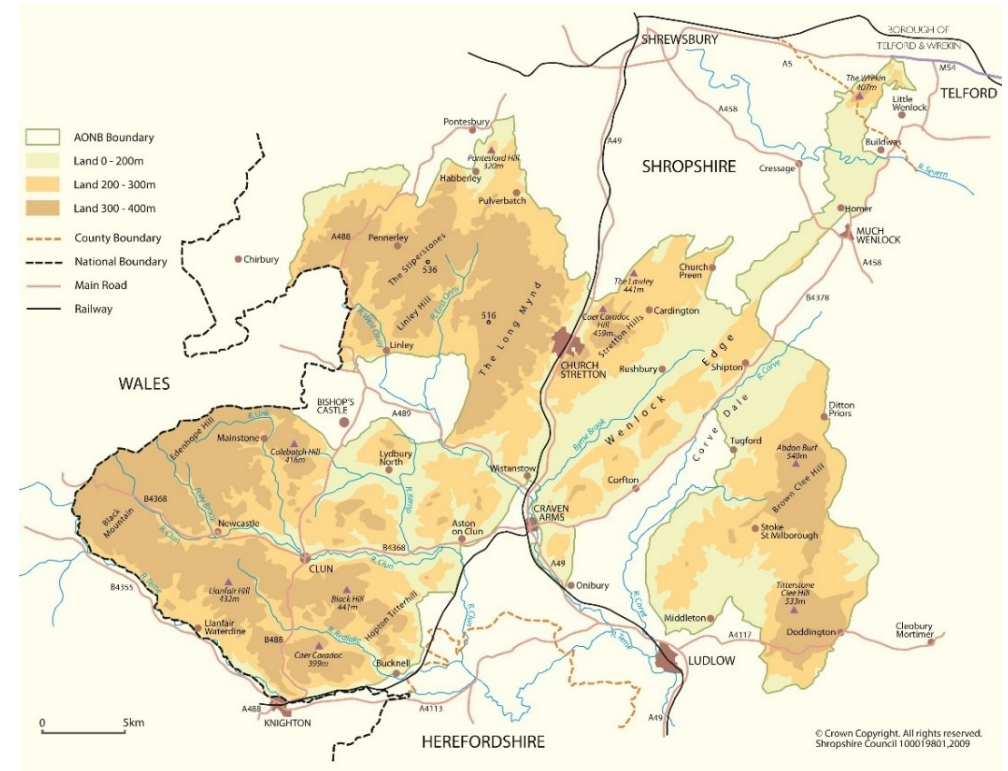


Background

About the Shropshire Hills

The Shropshire Hills are a beautiful rolling 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 National Landscape also includes the Clee 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 is one of 46 National Landscapes in the UK - living, working landscapes that are unique and irreplaceable national assets. Over two thirds of England's population live within half an hour's drive of a National Landscape.



Key statistics (for details see [State of the Shropshire Hills report](#))

Size: 802km² =80,200ha (covering 23% of Shropshire); designated 1958

2 unitary local authorities: Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council

Highest point: Abdon Burf, Brown Clee 540m (1,771 feet)

4,626 ha of Sites of Special Scientific Interest; 10,282ha priority habitats

Resident population: 19,900; average age 51

80% of area used for agriculture, of which 63% is permanent grass

887 registered farm holdings; 2,019 people employed in farming

232km river and several thousand km of brooks and streams

4,042km rights of way (2,520 miles); 9,289ha of open access land

175 scheduled monuments; 1,075 Listed Buildings

14% of land is wooded; 6,800km hedgerows

2022 net carbon emissions 227.3 ktCO₂e = 12.3 tCO₂e per capita

'Story of Place' for the Shropshire Hills

This set of roughly chronological notes is intended to stimulate thought and understanding on the historical context of the area, from both natural and human perspectives. It is not exhaustive but includes some of the more significant things that have shaped the area to be as it is now as a National Landscape, and which may influence its future.

Rocks from many different geological periods, back to the Precambrian.

Movement along fault lines create the SW-NE oriented topography.

Location just beyond the edge of the ice sheet in the last glacial maximum 27,000 years ago. Non-glaciated V-shaped valleys.

Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement - hillfort sites, barrows, stone circles, trade routes for axes. Early working of iron.

Edge of the Roman empire – Ancient Britons and Romans fought. Hillforts in the landscape and place names e.g. Caer Caradoc, Wrekin.

Wroxeter an important Roman military base and town. Watling Street Roman road. Roman mining activity.

Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia, on the England-Wales border. Offa's Dyke mostly built in 8th Century.

Norman castles, Marcher Lords, hunting forests.

Cattle trading, drovers' routes across the hills.

Wool trade, local sheep breeds – Clun Forest, Shropshire.

Growth of towns and villages - settlement, road and field patterns largely fixed from medieval times.

Plague (Black Death) 1348, a factor in desertion of medieval villages.

Dissolution of monasteries and land transfer to Crown. Skirmishes with Wales. England-Wales border fixed in 1536. English Civil War 1642-53.

Enclosure of common land. Reduction in woodland cover.

Importance of water transport, especially on the River Severn.

Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution at Ironbridge - iron smelting used charcoal from woodlands. Later coke made from coal (Abraham Darby).

Important place for development of geological science - Murchison and others. Rocks from Silurian and Ordovician periods were named here.

Darwin was born and grew up in Shrewsbury, the formative years for his interest in natural history.

Mining of barytes and coal, quarrying of dhustone (basalt) & limestone.

Railways around 1850s. Growth of Craven Arms as a sheep market.

Growth in visitors to the Shropshire Hills - Church Stretton known as 'Little Switzerland'. Forest Glen at the Wrekin a popular destination.

Post-war farming policies and grants focussed on increased production.

Modernisation of beef and dairy farms with continental breeds of cattle.

Development of stratified sheep production system.

Shropshire Hills designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty 1958.

Increase in road traffic, house building, telecommunications masts.

Long Mynd bought by National Trust 1965.

Creation of Telford new town, 1960s.

Growth of the poultry industry, especially from 1970s.

Robert Hart develops concept of 'Forest Gardening' near Wenlock Edge.

Some of first farm environment schemes 1980s. Clun Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA), later also Shropshire Hills ESA.

Ironbridge became a World Heritage Site 1986.

Ludlow's growing reputation as a food destination.

Unitary Telford & Wrekin Council split from Shropshire 1998.

BSE (mad cow disease) 1980s – 90s. Foot and Mouth epidemic 2001.

Shropshire local authorities become unitary Shropshire Council 2009.

More conservation activity - projects, land acquisition for nature.

Increasing outdoor recreation. Shropshire Hills secures EUROPARC Sustainable Tourism Charter.

LEADER rural development programmes. Lottery funded projects.

Improved provision of broadband and mobile phone service.

Closure of Ironbridge Power station 2015.

Polarisation over development e.g. large scale poultry units, housing.

Increasing focus on river catchments. Clun catchment nutrient issues.

More frequent flooding on River Severn and other rivers.

Widespread declaration of Climate and Ecological Emergency.

Covid-19 pandemic and recovery 2020-22.

National Landscape name. Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.

Interest in regenerative farming and formation of farmer groups.

Geographical context

Shropshire is England's largest inland county, and the Shropshire Hills forms part of headwaters of the Severn, the UK's longest river. The Shropshire Hills is one of the more sparsely populated areas of England, with a density of people 17 times less than the average for England.

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape makes up most of the uplands of Shropshire, covering 23% of the county but holding only around 6% of its population. There is a big contrast between the relatively remote western parts of the Shropshire Hills along the Welsh border, and the eastern edges which lie close to Wolverhampton and the West Midlands conurbation. The closest other protected landscapes are the Malvern Hills about 12 miles to the south-east of Cleehill, and Cannock Chase about 20 miles to the east of the Wrekin. The Shropshire Hills is the largest National Landscape in the Midlands area, and some distance from the nearest National Parks (Eryri and Bannau Brycheiniog). It is therefore very important as an accessible, high quality landscape for a wide catchment area including large urban populations.

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.

The Shropshire Hills is not an absolute unit of area which works for every purpose, but it is a coherent whole as a National Landscape, encompassing almost all of the upland area of Shropshire and associated land of high ecological value. Neither is it a self-contained or isolated unit, but it connects to and interacts with its surrounding areas, and forms a nested part of wider units of different kinds, which extend in different directions, especially:

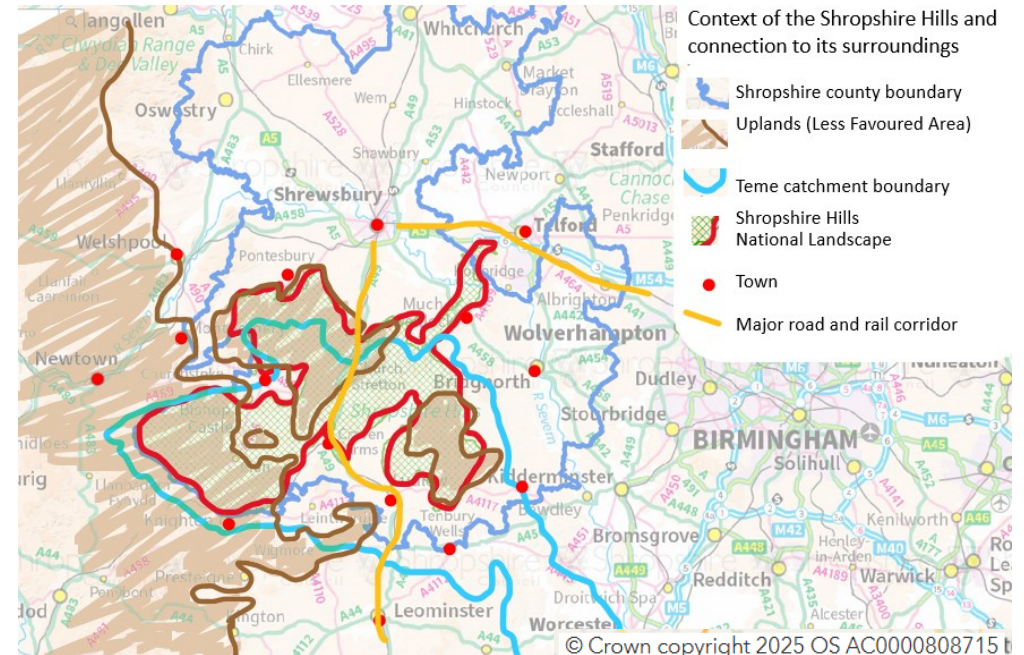
- The administrative unit of Shropshire – extending mainly to the north and east
- The River Teme catchment – extending to the south-east towards Worcester
- As an outlier of the uplands of mid Wales and the Marches – extending to the west

The Shropshire Hills is surrounded closely by a ring of modest sized towns – Craven Arms, Ludlow, Cleobury Mortimer, Much Wenlock,

Wellington, Pontesbury, Minsterley, Montgomery, Bishop's Castle and Knighton. And slightly further away by larger settlements – Shrewsbury, Telford, Bridgnorth, Newtown and Welshpool. The Shropshire Hills has links with all of these towns, economically and culturally.

The major road and rail corridors north-south along the A49 and east-west along the M54/A5 are significant connections for the area. Other linear features crossing in and out of the area include Offa's Dyke in the west, as well as brooks and streams flowing north into the mid Severn catchment from the northern part of the area.

While the population within the designated area is around 19,900, the population within the designated area plus a 5km radius of it is substantially higher, at 205,246.



All of these connections need to be taken into account when considering the Shropshire Hills as a place connected with its surroundings, and its future potential as a special landscape.

Summary on the legal basis and context, with links to appendices for more detail

Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework

A new framework of targets and outcomes for National Landscapes and National Parks was defined by government in 2024. These are targets for the areas and not for any particular organisation. They are a key focus of this Plan. The targets cover the topics of managing, restoring, and creating habitats; greenhouse gas emissions; nature friendly farming; peat, woodland and trees; accessibility and engagement; and heritage assets.

To read more on this see Targets & Outcomes Framework section.

The Landscapes Review

An independent review commissioned by government of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty reported in 2019. It made recommendations including to strengthen AONBs. The government have implemented some of these.

To read more on this see Appendix 1.

Rebranding as National Landscapes

AONBs were rebranded in November 2023 as National Landscapes. The legal designation remains as area of outstanding natural beauty.

To read more on this see Appendix 2.

Legal framework including strengthened duty on public bodies

The single statutory purpose of the designation is '*to conserve and enhance natural beauty*', unchanged since 1949. In 2000 the Management Plan became a statutory document. In 2023, the statutory duty on 'relevant authorities' from was strengthened from 'have regard' to the purpose of designation to 'seek to further' the purpose. This includes all public bodies and statutory undertakers.

To read more on this see Appendix 3.

30 by 30 and Environmental Improvement Plan targets

The UK government has signed up to an international commitment to protect 30% of land by 2030 (a target known as 30 by 30). Other key government environmental targets are set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan.

To read more on this see Appendix 4.

International context

National Landscapes are classified in the international system of protected areas as cultural landscapes (IUCN Category V) - where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced a character that is valued.

To read more on this see Appendix 5.

Shropshire Hills National Landscape structures – the Team, the Trust, advisory oversight and partnership

There is no single 'organisation' responsible for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape. Certain legal duties rest with the Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. Shropshire Council employs a National Landscape staff team of currently 12 people, which convenes various partner groups. New National Landscape structures of an Advisory Committee, Forum and Key Delivery Partner group are being put in place from 2026 with the approval of this Plan.

The Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust charity also raises funds and gives small grants in support of the National Landscape purpose.

To read more on this see Appendix 6.

National Landscapes Association and wider networks

There are 46 National Landscapes in the UK, represented by a National Association which advocates, communicates and supports the network to be as effective as possible. The Shropshire Hills team is also active in international networks through the EUROPARC Federation.

To read more on this see Appendix 7.

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 aim of this section is to capture what is distinctive and significant, to help determine how best to look after these qualities within the remit of the National Landscape and how the area can evolve positively. 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 bounded by hedges results from generations of farming. Pasture grazed by livestock is the largest land use, but arable cultivation is also significant, mainly on lower ground. Hedgerow and field trees, including many veteran trees, give the landscape a mature character. Remnants of valuable grassland and hay meadow habitats survive.



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 in a national context relatively clean and natural in form, and of high importance. 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 National Landscape. 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 Shropshire Hills makes

up the majority of the headwaters of the Teme catchment, and a short stretch of the River Severn within the National Landscape 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 Shropshire Hills are 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 from the Cambrian period.



Wildlife

The valuable habitats of the Shropshire Hills, especially heathland, grassland, ffridd, woodland and rivers are linked to a long history of relatively sympathetic land management. The Shropshire Hills have an unusual mix of both upland and lowland wildlife, such as red grouse and dormouse. The National Landscape is very significant in the region for upland species such as snipe, whinchat, dipper, emperor moth, small pearl-bordered fritillary and grayling butterflies and holds some nationally threatened species such as curlew and wood white butterfly. It is also significant for species of western oakwoods such as pied flycatcher, wood warbler, redstart and tree pipit, and a stronghold for species formerly more widespread in England like skylark, black poplar and great-crested newt.



Heritage

Many ancient features survive in a landscape which has seen 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 with haphazard 'squatter' settlement.

Scenic and environmental quality

Panoramic views extend from, across and into the Shropshire Hills, 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.



The high quality of the built environment of towns, villages and rural settlement complements and blends with the countryside. Clean air and water are accompanied by other valuable ecological functions including food and fibre growing, and control of water run-off.

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 National Landscape such as Ludlow, Craven Arms and Much Wenlock, to some of the most sparsely populated areas 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 for walks and outdoor activities respecting the area's qualities. The National Landscape has some of the best rights of way networks in Shropshire, along with most of its open access land, plus a wide variety of sites, features and promoted routes.



Biocultural uniqueness of the Shropshire Hills

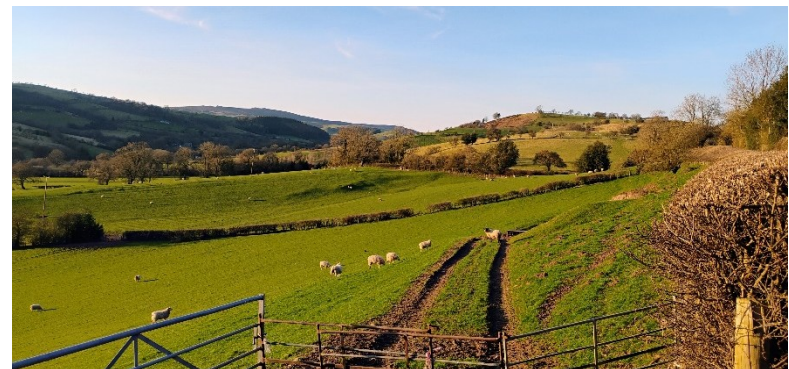
As an addition in this new Plan we have tried to define what is unique about the Shropshire Hills, resulting from the particular interaction of natural and human factors over time. These shape the future interaction and can guide our best actions.



Key issues identified and drivers of change

Building on work undertaken by the Partnership at the start of the review process the following issues and drivers of change have been identified to address in this plan:

- **Climate change mitigation and adaptation**, including integrating and developing content from the AONB Partnership's Climate Change Action Plan, and from local and national strategies and plans for Net Zero.
- **Need for nature recovery** – linking to the Colchester Declaration, the Shropshire Hills draft Nature Recovery Plan, the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and Biodiversity Net Gain. The evolving roles of small landowners, Town and Parish Councils and the aspirations of local communities in nature recovery.
- **Agriculture transition** – shift of subsidies to public money for public goods, and especially the implications for upland farmers. Implementation of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM) and support for those forms of farming most compatible with the National Landscape. Developing farmer groups and clusters and supporting their collaboration. Making the best use of land use tools and mapping, research and studies.
- **Resolving conflicts over planning** – especially providing sufficient affordable housing to sustain communities. Solutions are still needed in the Clun catchment to resolve nutrient issues to allow some controlled housing development. Review of the Shropshire Local Plan and Telford & Wrekin Local Plan. Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and development of the National Land Use Framework. Raising awareness of the National Landscape with planning officers and committees, improving information and guidance for applicants, linking with Neighbourhood Plans.
- **Meeting government priorities** including the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 and implementation of the Landscapes Review, and changes to duties and targets which result from this.
- Need for closer attention to **natural capital** assets and the **ecosystem services** they provide, along with emerging opportunities for **green finance**, and the limitations of carbon offsetting.
- **Pressures on the local authorities** - financial pressures and loss of capacity. Priorities in the Shropshire Plan. Government steer towards local authority amalgamation as part of devolution policy.
- **Need to broaden engagement** - The rebranding to National Landscapes and associated uplift in status and recognition. Communicating the value of the National Landscape more widely. Health and wellbeing, inclusion and participation. Engagement with young people, and following through from younger to teenage to post-school. Making the Plan accessible to a wide audience.
- **Achieving sustainable tourism** - Some concerns about dispersal affecting quieter areas, and pressure on areas of conservation importance. Ongoing high levels of car transport.
- **Risks to heritage assets** from climate change, along with underfunding in the public sector and loss of income affecting heritage charities due to the cost of living. Decline in heritage skills.



Highlights and challenges from the last Plan period 2019-2024

This section summarises selected highlights from the huge amount of activity by many people and organisations during the last five years. It is based on the three priority headings of the last Management Plan. Some short case studies are also included.

Land management supporting landscape and natural beauty

- The **Farming in Protected Landscapes programme** in the Shropshire Hills has supported over 180 projects over four years, distributing over £3 million in grants. The programme is now in a fifth year, and Defra are envisaging a long term role of land management advice for National Landscape teams.



- Habitat creation, farmer engagement and community activity through the **Stepping Stones project** led by the National Trust.
- **Our Upland Commons project** has achieved some good outcomes on Longmynd, Stiperstones and Clee Liberty commons, such as heritage and wildlife work, public engagement and support to commoners including securing a Higher Level Stewardship agreement for Clee Liberty.

- The **Ancient Woodlands project** has achieved practical restoration on a number of sites and given advice to more owners.
- Considerable progress with community and smallholder management of **meadows and verges**.



- **Tests & Trials** for Environmental Land Management Scheme.
- Increase in application of **Natural Flood Management** techniques.
- A number of important sites have been purchased by **Middle Marches Community Land Trust** – Cudwell Meadow, High Leasowes, part of Norbury Hill, Minsterley Meadows SSSI.
- Increase in knowledge on **Carbon in land and soil** through Cranfield University contract and extensive use of farm carbon toolkits.
- **Clun Unmuddying the Waters and Water Environment Grant projects** completed.
- **CPRE Hedgerows project** delivering new planting and engagement .
- **Development of farm clusters and farmer groups** – including Upper Onny Farmers Group, Clee View Farmers Group, Upper Teme and Apedale groups, and continuation of Upper Clun group (Land Life & Livelihoods).
- **Draft Shropshire Hills Nature Recovery Plan** published.
- **Opening the Ark project** on churchyards by Caring for God's Acre.
- **Offa's Dyke Conservation project**.



Delivery challenges:

- **Agricultural transition** and development of new ELM schemes not as far advanced as expected, significant concerns in farming community.
- **River Clun water quality and nutrient issues** remain fairly intractable despite a lot of effort and attention.
- **Low levels of new woodland and tree planting** (though very recently increased public sector activity).



Planning for a sustainable economy and communities

- The number of adverse major developments has reduced, including large housing developments and intensive poultry units.
- New specific National Landscape Local Plan policy drafted.
- Production of AONB Partnership Climate Action Plan, considerable activity by South Shropshire Climate Action and Zero Carbon Shropshire (now merged as Shropshire Climate Action).

Delivery Challenges:

- Impact of national reforms of planning and environmental legislation more in favour of development.
- The draft Shropshire Local Plan was withdrawn in July 2025 and the Council is starting to develop a new draft Local Plan with anticipated adoption in 2028. The number of houses Shropshire has been allocated by government to provide has been roughly doubled. A five year land supply of allocated sites is not currently in place, affecting decision making.
- Provision of adequate housing and rural services to meet local needs.
- Lack of resolution of water quality issues in River Clun preventing development, including of much needed local housing.
- Very limited capacity for input into planning casework by the National Landscape team and no new capacity to improve this.
- No progress by government on statutory consultee status for National Landscape bodies.
- No progress on new planning guidance related to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.

People enjoying and caring about the landscape

- Partner liaison to support management of visitors in post Covid lockdown peaks and new visitor trends apparent.
- Successful three year Young Rangers project now continuing through core team capacity.



- Diversity and Inclusion study completed with many useful recommendations and good partner engagement.
- New Engagement Ranger post conducting outreach work with under-served communities.
- New Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy and renewal of EUROPARC Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.
- Completion of 'Fix the Fort' repairs on Caer Caradoc hillfort.
- Continuation and consolidation of Shropshire Hills Shuttle bus.
- Shropshire Destination Management Plan completed and strong Shropshire Hills presence in 'Shropshire Welcomes' campaign.
- Local participation in Generation Green 2 national project, working with new audiences to help young people experience the area.
- 10 years of management of the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre under the social enterprise 'Grow Cook Learn', and gain of freehold.
- Creation of the Acton Scott Heritage Farm Trust and re-opening of the farm attraction.
- Growth of citizen science initiatives including wildlife monitoring, water quality and other aspects.
- Shropshire Love Nature Festivals and Shropshire Hills Hay Meadow Festivals.
- Continuation through the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust of the Conservation Fund, awarding grants to many community projects.
- Farm education visits completed through several programmes.
- Delivery of 'Access for All' Defra capital projects through partners.



Delivery Challenges

- Reduction in rights of way maintenance capacity and funding.
- Understanding of the National Landscape is still relatively low.
- Achieving better inclusion at scale is a real challenge.
- Diversity within National Landscape governance structures and workforce is low.

Overall highlights during period of 2019-2024 Plan

- **The Landscapes Review** of 2019 led by Julian Glover has resulted in changes which do amount to a step change for AONBs, even if not all the recommendations were implemented by government.
- **Rebranding** from AONBs to National Landscapes has helped to build recognition, engage new audiences, and strengthen the national family of these landscapes.
- **Strengthening of the legal duty** on public bodies, now to 'seek to further' the purpose of designation.

Delivery Challenges:

- The National Landscape team has had to pick up **new government initiatives at short notice**. Though the funding is welcome, the **timescales have made forward planning difficult**.
- Linked to the above, it has been especially difficult to **connect Management Plan actions to delivery** through this plan period.
- Capacity and connection to the National Landscape of some **key partner organisations** has been a challenge.
- The **geographical spread of delivery activity** around the Shropshire Hills is quite uneven, with generally more in the west.



New National Landscape logos – a coherent family identity

Selected case studies from 2019-2024 spanning multiple Plan priorities

(Other case studies are included in the Plan under specific headings)

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL)

In July 2021, Defra launched this grant programme for farmers and land managers in England's Protected Landscapes, to support one-off farming projects that provide benefits to climate, nature, people and place. The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team was allocated £1.9 million over the first three years, a further £1.3million for an extension year 4 and £1.1 million for a fifth year 2025-26. The team recruited a full-time Adviser (later two full time posts) to support applicants, and an Administrator. Other members of the team also assisted with advising applicants and developing applications. A Grant Awards Panel was set up involving local farmers and land managers, alongside representatives of organisations with relevant interests and experience.

The Shropshire Hills outputs from 2021-24 included (among others):

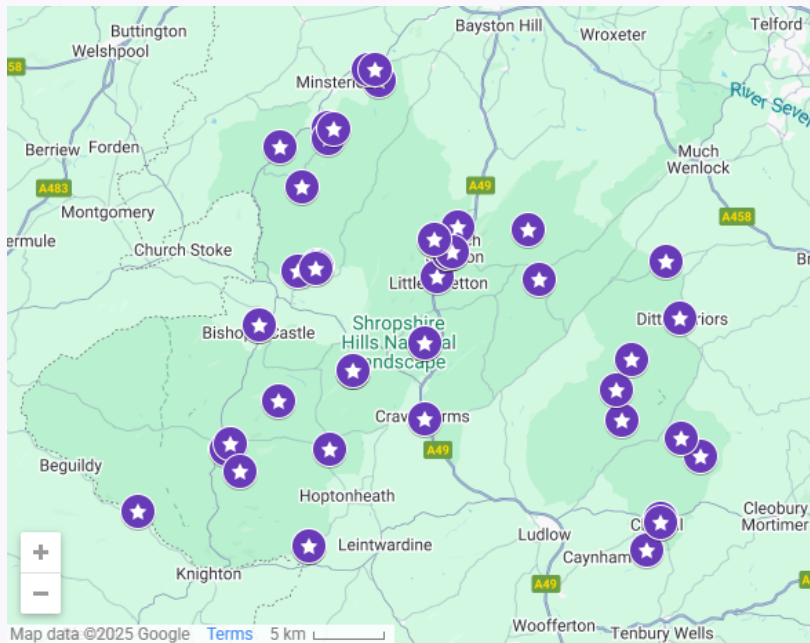
- 151 projects approved, across 19,864 ha of land
- 228 farmers participating in the programme (including some in collaborative groups and clusters)
- £3,165,769 distributed in grants to farmers and land managers
- 1,114 ha of land managed with regenerative farming techniques
- 12,537m of hedgerow planted, and 15,386m hedgerow managed
- 13,952 trees planted.



Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust and the Conservation Fund

The Trust continues to support local people to take action to care for the countryside around them. Around £15,000 a year is distributed to projects through the Conservation Fund.

From 2022-25 the Conservation Fund supported 35 Projects. Total funding distributed: £47,067 - providing an average of 49% of the financing to successful projects. Organisations funded include 8 charities, 15 community groups, 2 schools, and 3 groups focusing on young people. Projects included wildlife habitat creation, improvement and maintenance by local communities and special interest groups, nature-focused learning and adventures for young people, river surveys, contributing to saving curlews, and monitoring pine marten activity across the county.



Distribution of Conservation Fund projects over the last four years

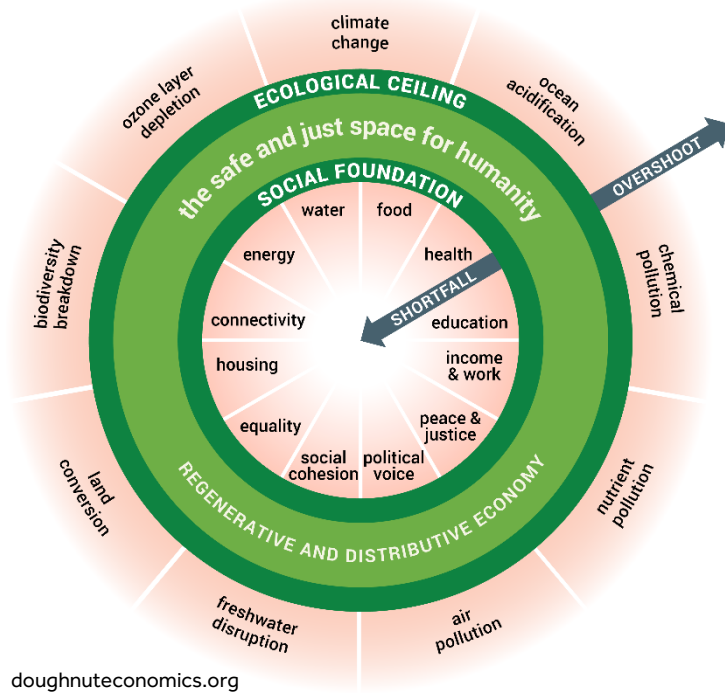
Stepping Stones – a partnership project led by the National Trust

The project area covers over 200km² within the Shropshire Hills, and includes two major sites of conservation importance: Long Mynd SSSI and the Stiperstones NNR. Stepping Stones takes an innovative, landscape-scale approach to nature conservation. The aim is ecological connectivity: connecting wildlife habitats by strengthening or creating 'stepping stones' and corridors of habitat between and around the two core sites of Long Mynd and the Stiperstones. In practice, this means creating areas of heathland, flower-rich grassland and broadleaved woodland and linking them by a network of hedgerows, road verges, hillsides and streamside wetlands. There have been three main strands to the programme: working with farmers, working with the wider local community and volunteers, and managing 'stepping stones' owned by the National Trust and partner organisations. The project has also been driving forward the implementation of 12 Species Action Plans for key local species.



The Doughnut Economics model as a framework

The Doughnut is a powerful visual model of how we can meet the needs of all people within the means of the living planet. It is gaining momentum as a tool for use at global and local levels and informs this Plan's Vision.

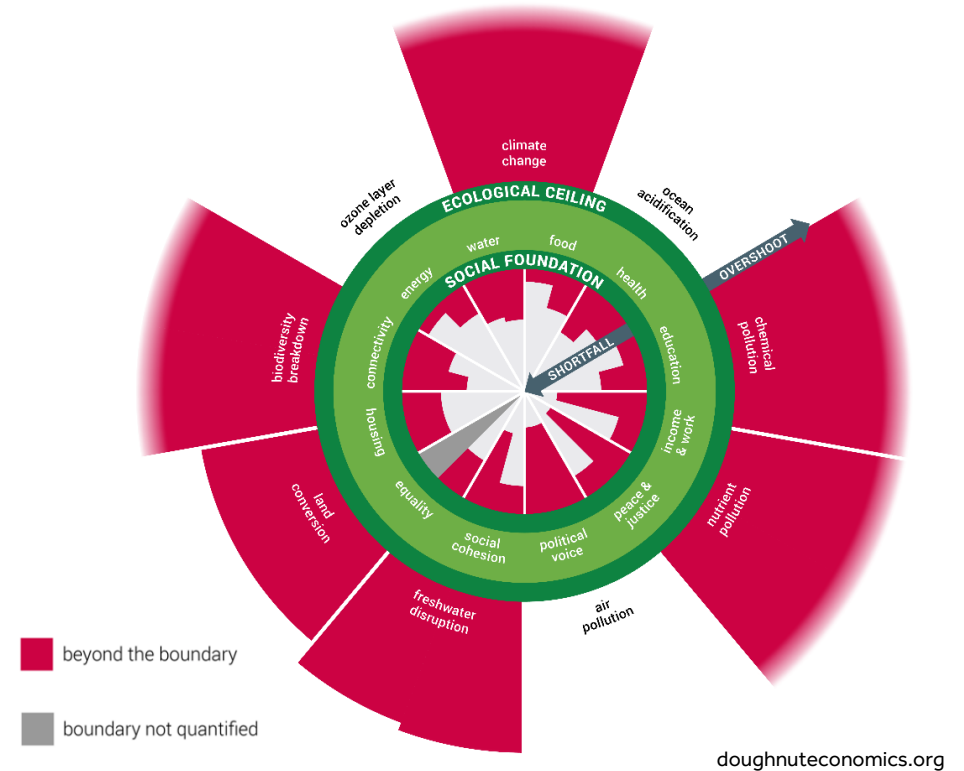


This image is the concept of the doughnut – the scale of humanity's use of resources radiates out from the centre. The 'social foundation' is about people having life's essentials, and the 'ecological ceiling' is the Earth's life-support systems.

Between these two sets of boundaries lies the doughnut-shaped space (in bright green) that is both ecologically safe and socially just - a space in which humanity can thrive.

The nine dimensions of the ecological ceiling are the planetary boundaries defined by Earth system scientists - processes which if disrupted risk the stability of the entire planet. The 12 dimensions of the social foundation are derived from the social priorities agreed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Doughnut model brings together these widely accepted measures and reminds us to see that our system is a complex interdependent whole. There is no single answer or single measure of progress - we need to see things 'in the round'.

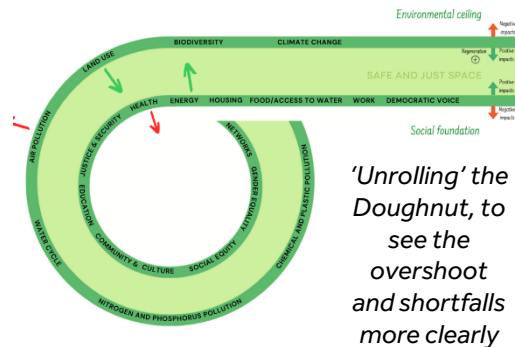
Using measurable indicators of the social and ecological dimensions, the image below shows a snapshot of where we are considered to be now globally (updated 2025, using 2022 data). The length of the red segments shows by how much people are falling short on life's essentials, and by how much we are overshooting the planetary boundaries.



This shows a world that is deeply out of balance - these are the 'red warning lights' on the earth's life support systems and on the opportunities for all people to have reasonable lives. The trends show some progress on bringing more people out of critical deprivation but a worsening of critical planetary degradation. To avoid the breakdown of life systems and further great suffering we need to make plans, strategies and decisions at all levels that help us to meet the needs of all people within planetary boundaries pursuing a narrow goal of economic growth at any cost. And to challenge and rethink plans and decisions which don't help us do that. For more on this see <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics>.

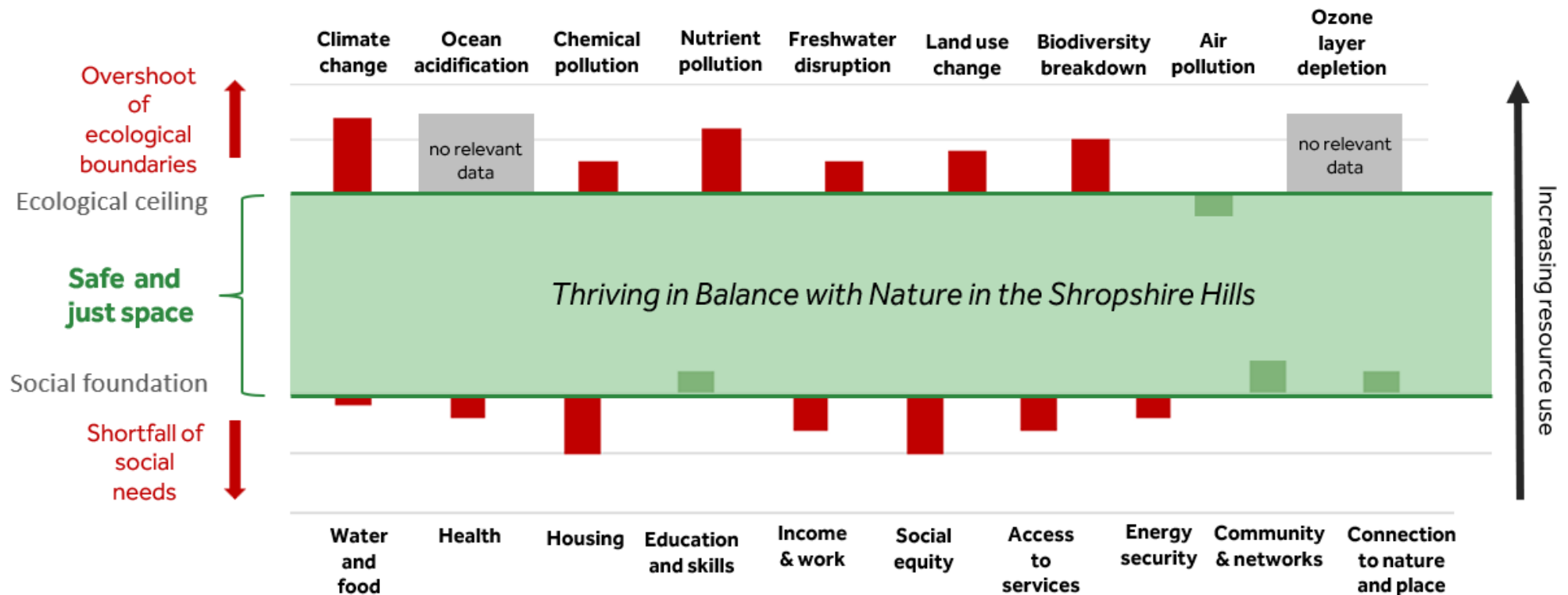
Summary of condition of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape and trends

We have used the Doughnut as a framework to understand and discuss issues facing the Shropshire Hills, and the diagram below is our 'doughnut unrolled' data portrait summary to help visualise where the Shropshire Hills is now. This isn't an exact process but is intended to engage people in the idea of balancing a complex of multiple ecological and social factors, and in conversations about where we think we are and what constitutes 'progress'.



The size of the red bars indicates the approximate scale of problem or imbalance, and the green bars the scale of positive, forming a useful 'dashboard'. This is based on scores given from a rounded assessment of available data on each heading. The headings used in the data portrait are based on the standard doughnut model, and further explanation of what the headings mean is available in the full data portrait document. Less data is available specific to the Shropshire Hills for the social factors, so the confidence level for these scores is lower.

The **top ecological challenges are climate, nutrients and the healthy functioning of nature (integrity of the biosphere)**. The **top social challenges are housing, social equity, income and work, and access to services**. Projects and interventions should be aiming to shrink the red bars by reducing overshoot of ecological boundaries and shortfall of social needs. The desired state is to have no red bars at all – this is 'thriving in balance', within the safe and just space.



Data portrait for the Shropshire Hills based on the Doughnut 'unrolled'

Protected Landscape Targets & Outcomes Framework

The government in January 2024 published a new [Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework](#) “to support Protected Landscapes in meeting their huge potential for nature, climate, people and place”.

These ten targets will promote the actions that are most needed to achieve positive changes and will set the ambition for how Protected Landscapes can help to achieve three outcomes from the Environmental Improvement Plan:

- Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife (targets 1-5)
- Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change (targets 6-8)
- Goal 10: Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment (targets 9 & 10)

Natural England are now generating data against these annually (though the source data may not be updated so often). The available figures from releases to date are shown below and provide a baseline and some indication of trends (positive trends are highlighted with green shading, though the speed of change may still be inadequate to meet the target).

| Targets | 2024 level Shropshire Hills | 2025 level Shropshire Hills |
|--|---|---|
| Target 1: Restore or create more than 250,000ha of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline). | No data yet | No data yet |
| Target 2: Bring 80% of Sites of special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042. | 58.5% of SSSI features in favourable condition | 59.3% of SSSI features in favourable condition |
| Target 3: For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having ‘actions on track’ to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028. | 14.4% of SSSI features have actions on track | 16.1% of SSSI features have actions on track |

| Targets | 2024 level Shropshire Hills | 2025 level Shropshire Hills |
|--|---|-----------------------------|
| Target 4: Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042. | No data yet | No data yet |
| Target 5: Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030. | No data yet | No data yet |
| Target 6: Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels. <i>(Note that data used excludes consumption based emissions).</i> | A 31.7% reduction in the total of measured greenhouse gas emissions linked to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape has been observed between 2005 and 2022 . | No data yet |
| Target 7: Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050. | 0 ha of peat committed for restoration | No change |
| Target 8: Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline). | Total area 11,352 ha (=14% of land area) | No data yet |
| Target 9: Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme. | No data yet | No data yet |
| Target 10: Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets ‘at risk’ in Protected Landscapes. | Listed Buildings 5.1% at risk Scheduled Monuments 7.4% at risk | No change |

Condition and trends statistics by theme heading (including key statistics from the State of the Shropshire Hills report)

Nature

- There is lots of conservation activity through protected sites and conservation organisations, and through agri-environment schemes (though coverage of these is reduced) and FiPL.
- Building a nature recovery network is however proving challenging, and achieving new habitat creation is difficult due the high value of most land for farming.
- Some quite intractable issues remain with condition of some SSSIs.
- Little information is available on condition of Local Wildlife Sites and priority habitats.
- There are some declines in biodiversity, especially outside designated conservation sites - e.g. key bird species, flowering plants and invertebrates, and also some mammals such as hedgehogs.
- Concerted work on certain priority bird species (e.g. curlew, lapwing) has helped to slow but not stabilise declines, and numbers of some species are still critically low.
- 36% of existing woodland is not in active management.
- There has been a recent increase in the levels of new woodland planting, in both the public and private sectors, and the type, scale and design of woodland planted remains crucial to whether this is environmentally beneficial overall.

Climate

- Greater focus on climate change has led to understanding that CO2 emissions from the area are higher per capita than the national average and are not declining rapidly enough to meet net zero targets.

- The land within the Shropshire Hills has however been shown to be an important carbon store, and this needs safeguarding in addition to looking for additional sequestration opportunities.
- There is an increase in net negative carbon flux for land (i.e. sequestration). Grassland is sequestering more now than 2012 to 2020.

Land

- 43% of farms are LFA livestock grazing. There has been a reduction in mixed holdings and an increase in arable.
- 41% of businesses in the area are in agriculture, forestry and fishing, forming the biggest category. Employment in farming has increased by 7% and accounts for 10% of the resident population.
- There has been an increase in agricultural holdings less than 5 ha, and a slight decline in 50-100ha farms. The total number of holdings is down from 917 in 2016 to 887 in 2021.
- Poultry numbers have doubled between 2010 and 2021 to 1.7 million.
- The transition to new farming support grants based on public money for public goods has not been as smooth as hoped and remains a big challenge. The recent freeze to the Sustainable Farming Incentive has knocked the confidence of farmers in the schemes.
- Uptake in the Shropshire Hills of agri-environment schemes overall appears to have declined significantly linked to these uncertainties, but the figures are not comparable to get an exact measure.
- There has been strong participation in the Shropshire Hills of Defra Tests & Trials for the Environmental Land Management scheme.
- There is also a rise in interest in regenerative farming practices and an increase in the number and development of active farmer clusters and groups.
- The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme has helped around a quarter of the area's farmers to be involved with projects, many trying out this new form of grant funding with support.

Water

- Of 232km of Water Framework Directive water bodies in the area, 0 km are of 'High' ecological status, 8.5km are 'Good', 188.1km are 'Moderate', and 35.4km are 'Poor'.
- The health of the water environment is of even more concern than five years ago, with a deterioration in the length 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.
- Siltation and raised nutrient levels in streams and rivers are a problem for some important species.
- The River Clun SAC remains in unfavourable condition for the freshwater pearl mussel population due to water quality issues.

People

- There are fewer young people, and the proportion of working age is down. 55-59 has become biggest age bracket. There is very low ethnic diversity.
- Health of the population is quite good and only a small proportion have bad or very bad health.
- Earnings are slightly below average. Housing affordability is slightly below the average for all National Landscapes, but above the average for rural England overall.
- There has been a 14% drop in registered employment.
- Working from home doubled 18% to 38% between 2011 and 2021, with travel to work falling correspondingly, though the Covid peak in home working has now passed.
- Recreational use of the countryside was subject to unprecedented peaks and new patterns in the post-Covid period. Patterns have stabilised but on a general trend of increase. 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.
- Tourism has not quite recovered to pre-Covid levels, and patterns of use are now different with a continued rise in small self-catering units of various kinds.

Place

- Development pressure on the Shropshire Hills has been somewhat lower over the last five years due to a slowing in house building and in new intensive poultry units. Recent national policy changes regarding housing targets and renewable energy are likely to increase pressure in the future.
- In the historic environment, the condition of scheduled monuments has improved with fewer classified as 'At Risk'.
- Lack of resources for maintaining heritage features is a concern, and some suffer from neglect for this reason, or through lack of skills or awareness of their value.
- Scheduled Monuments at risk have declined 111 to 59, 2012 to 2023.



Text summary of condition of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape and trends

This summary combines insights from our Shropshire Hills Doughnut data portrait, available data from the [Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework](#) and the detailed 'State of the Shropshire Hills' report, a supporting document to this Plan.

The quality of the Shropshire Hills landscape continues to be high in a national context but is under a range of pressures. Despite a lot of activity and positive efforts, condition of some of the special qualities of the National Landscape is declining, and progress in addressing the most urgent issues is inadequate. Gains in some aspects are offset by declines in others, and the potential of the area to deliver even greater public benefits is hampered by these trends.

- **Nature** Good quality habitats are fragmented, and not all valuable sites are in good condition, with limited progress to improve these. Ecosystem functions (e.g. hydrology, soils, pollinators) are reduced.
- **Climate** Greenhouse gas emissions are higher than the national average, and only reducing at half the speed necessary to reach net zero by 2050. Carbon storage within land and soils in the area is very significant, but some of this is being lost as emissions.
- **Water** The quality of water has declined in some sub-catchments. Levels of some nutrients in water are higher than needed to maintain important ecological features.
- **Land** The proportion of land in agri-environment schemes has fallen. There is some increase in agro-ecological farming and in woodland.
- **People** The area is fairly prosperous on average but there are pockets of deprivation and some people face real challenges, often across intersecting issues, e.g. income, health, access to services and nature.
- **Place** – Development pressures and increasing road transport are gradually eroding quality of place and tranquillity. The condition of heritage assets has improved. Community activity remains strong.

Implications for this Plan of current condition and trends observed

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape has been designated now for 66 years. The objectives of the designation are being partially met, but are being undermined to an extent by insufficient resourcing and activity, as well as by harmful forms of activity and economic development, often supported by government or local government policy. Harm to the National Landscape's special qualities is done not just by activities which are unlawful, but by some things which are regarded as normal practice. Until this changes, the purpose of the designation and the potential of the area to deliver the optimum public benefits will not be fully met. At both national and local level there is a need to change the policy incentives that are just extracting value and causing harm to the National Landscape. This is in common with other protected landscapes in the UK. Until we succeed in preventing further harm we are running to barely keep still.

There is a lot of positive activity by many people and organisations but it is not enough. This reinforces the approaches of the Plan to seek to upscale activity. However, even this is not likely to be adequate, and we need also to go beyond just 'doing more good', to also win hearts and minds and to seek change at a system level. This means adopting a guiding principle of sustaining and regenerating life in the area - of humans and of all living things.



Our vision for the Shropshire Hills...

Thriving in balance with nature

The National Landscape delivers against national priorities and is relevant to current issues..

as one of a family of protected landscapes which contribute to a global goal of meeting everybody's needs within planetary boundaries

Partners locally work together to agreed common aims

Communities, businesses and individuals all play their part in looking after what makes the area special



Shropshire Hills
National Landscape

Climate is stabilised through decarbonising, and we are resilient to change

Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to net zero in all areas - energy and buildings, transport, land use, etc

Nature-based solutions are deployed at scale

Adaptation is active for nature, infrastructure and the economy and society

Water is clean, and its flows and cycles support our lives, and all life

Streams and rivers are naturalised and healthy, from headwaters to flood plains

Water resources are managed carefully

Soils are healthy

Farming produces good food sustainably while supporting nature

Land is nurtured so it can sustain us



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

The working landscape supports livelihoods

Heritage assets are looked after

Cultural heritage is celebrated

The economy is regenerative and circular

The Shropshire Hills are valued and cared for as a special place

People are healthy and connected to nature – in vibrant communities and as welcome visitors

People have sufficient income, housing and services

All parts of society can enjoy natural beauty

Priority theme sections - introduction

The six headings are a way to organise concepts, and these topics overlap and inter-relate. They are not all equivalent topics one to another. Whenever we take apart the whole into these topics, we need both to keep in mind the links, and to put it all back together again.

The order does not imply priority, but it has a logical flow. One way to think of the headings is shown here:



Nature and Climate

The conditions for life we need,
and which are in danger



Land and Water

Where it all happens,
and what we need to nurture



People and Place

The bonds that connect us,
and motivate us to act



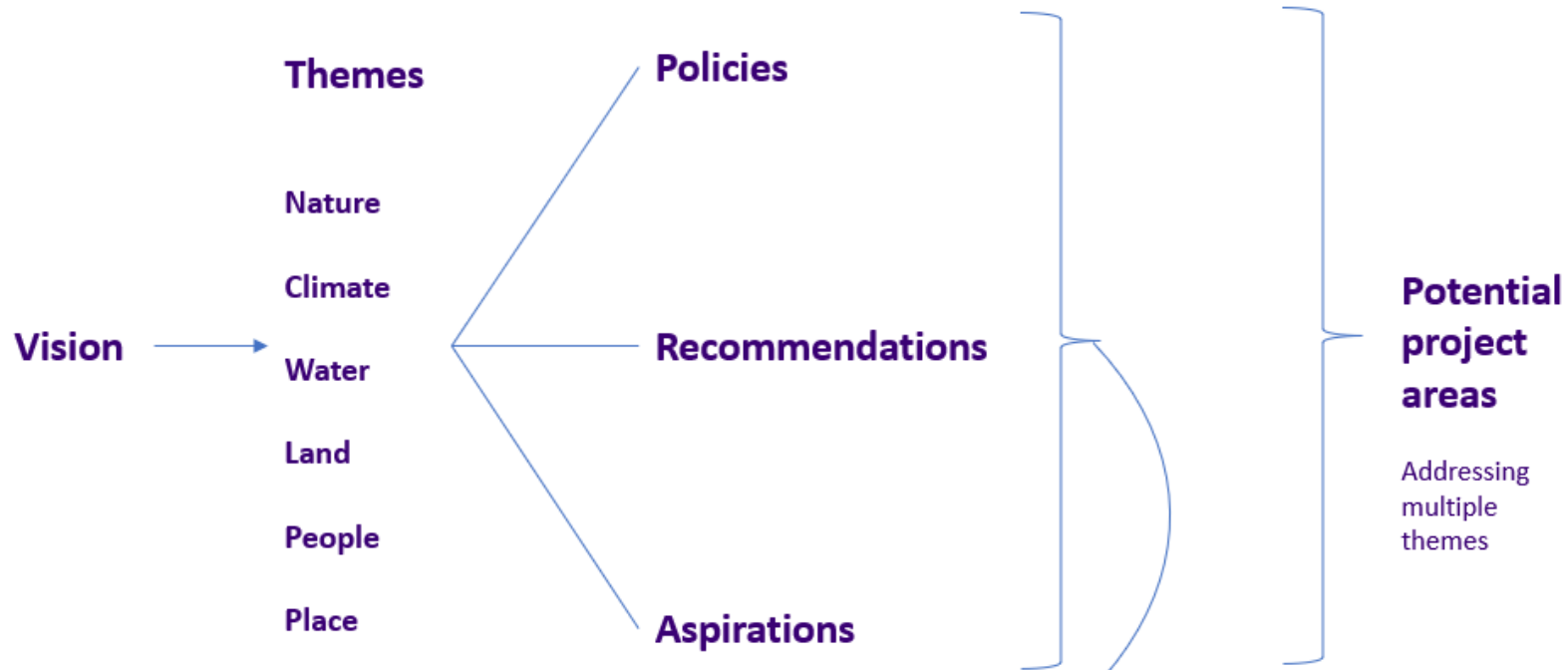
At the end of each section is a 'key link to other headings'. This reminds us that the headings are inter-connected and also provides an 'in between' place to put some topics which span theme headings and could otherwise be difficult to place. There are of course other inter-connections and links between themes as well.

Statutory requirements, Policies, Recommendations and Aspirations

Reflecting the role of the Plan as an influencing document, each topic section introduces a hierarchy of statements of what the Plan says should happen, starting with the strongest:

- **Summary of statutory requirements and duties** (with links) - these exist regardless of the Plan and are shown in summary as reminders.
- **Management Plan Policies** – are used where there is a particular need for clarity of position and to influence others. Now approved, they are policy of the relevant local authorities (as explicitly required by the CRoW Act 2000). Plan Policies related to land use planning topics aim to add local detail and nuance to existing national and local planning policies but as a material consideration only, they do not have the same status as formal planning policies. In some cases, since the Plan is aspirational, Plan Policies may encourage decision makers to 'go further' than current extant planning policies, to benefit the National Landscape. While the Plan has statutory status, it cannot require anyone to do anything which is not already mandated by other means. The Plan Policies are however a firm steer, and relate to things that need to happen for the Plan's vision to be realised. Where Plan Policies relate to topics on which the local authorities do not have decision-making powers, they are put forward to guide the decisions of others.
- **Recommendations** – are more informal, flexible, and advisory. They aim to provide guidance based on knowledge or experience, to influence decisions and actions of any relevant person or organisation.
- **Aspirations** – are actions which are desirable but which aren't guaranteed to happen. A broad range of good ideas are generated by partners during the Plan review process. Not all of these can necessarily be implemented, but retaining motivational ambitions in the Plan should help these ideas develop and come to fruition.

Diagram of the flow through the Plan



Summary of priorities

For quick understanding of main proposals of the Plan



Overall protection of the National Landscape

Planning and protection of the National Landscape

The planning system provides the principal protection for National Landscapes with regard to new development. Appropriate development for housing, employment etc is necessary for the economic and social wellbeing of those who work and live in the area, and a large majority of planning applications in the Shropshire Hills National Landscape are granted. However, National Landscapes enjoy the same levels of protection in government policy as National Parks, and some forms of development which may be appropriate elsewhere should be controlled within the National Landscape. Planning is not all about stopping things happening though, and national planning policy refers to both conserving and enhancing National Landscapes.

Responsibility for local planning policy and decisions affecting National Landscapes lies with the relevant local authority (in National Parks it lies with the National Park Authority). The statutory duties connected with this are summarised opposite. The National Landscapes Association have published [Guidance for Local Authorities](#) in applying the CRoW Act section 85 duty to 'seek to further the purpose' in National Landscapes.

'Natural beauty' is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features, and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries. It includes landscape and scenic quality, natural heritage (species, habitats, geology and physical geography), wildness, tranquillity and dark skies, and cultural heritage (including cultural traditions and the historic and other built environment that makes the area unique). The historic environment is also fundamental to the distinctive character, sense of place and natural beauty of each National Landscape.

Other regulatory functions

A variety of public sector bodies have regulatory functions relevant to the National Landscape remit, including the Environment Agency, Natural England and local authorities. Used proportionately, these functions have an important role in supporting the purposes of the designation.

Summary of statutory requirements and duties – Overall protection of the National Landscape (not exhaustive)

Paragraphs 189 and 190 of the latest December 2024 [National Planning Policy Framework](#) set out the main policies – that “*great weight should be given to **conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty**... (in these areas) which have **the highest status of protection** in relation to these issues.*” Further “*The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited...*” and “*the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations...*”. Footnote 7 to Policy 11, the presumption in favour of sustainable development, affords significant priority to National Landscapes as among “*areas or assets of particular importance*” providing “*a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area.*”

The National Landscape Management Plan, its Vision and Plan Policies are a ‘material consideration’ in the development of planning policy and in decision making in respect of planning applications affecting the National Landscape. This applies not only to the visual aspects of the National Landscape, but also to its natural beauty and all of its special qualities.

Decision makers who are public bodies must also fulfil their statutory duty to [seek to further the purpose of designation](#).



PLAN POLICY – CONSERVING & ENHANCING THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

1. Development

i) The National Landscape should be considered in planning decisions for the full scope of natural beauty and all of its special qualities, and not only in relation to landscape and visual aspects.

2. Regulating Organisations

i) Organisations which regulate designated sites and features, protected habitats and species, environmental quality, access, and recreation should ensure such aspects of the landscape are protected, maintained, and managed to the highest standards as appropriate to the National Landscape designation. An informative and educational approach should to regulation where possible, but appropriate enforcement powers used where necessary.



Plan Recommendations - Major development

(See the [explanation](#) of what the Recommendations are)

Within National Landscapes the definition of major development is at the discretion of the decision maker. In some cases, thresholds lower than the normal NPPF definitions may be appropriate, and the Plan defines here some criteria to guide judgements of whether a development affecting the National Landscape is major:

1. Where development is more than local in its character and significance, and has the potential to have long-term impacts on the landscape, wildlife or cultural heritage of the National Landscape;
2. Where the scale and location of development (either within the National Landscape or in its setting) is likely to erode the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape and/or features of the area where the development is proposed;
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 guiding principle of sustainable development.

Any proposal affecting the National Landscape deemed to be major development should be accompanied by a report identifying how the special qualities and other key characteristics of the National Landscape are fully respected, and integrated into the planning, design, implementation and management of the development. Any potential detrimental impacts should be identified (relating to the special qualities of the National Landscape 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 further the purpose to conserve and enhance the National Landscape,
- be compatible with the objectives of the Management Plan,
- be capable of realisation through robust planning conditions or obligation.

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

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

Biodiversity Net Gain

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

*"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



Nature recovery

The legal purpose of a National Landscape to 'conserve' has always been accompanied by 'enhance', and so 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 actively 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:

- Improve the **quality** of current sites by better habitat management
- Increase the **size** of current wildlife sites
- Enhance connections** between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones'
- Create new sites**
- Reduce the pressures** on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a statutory process at the county level and being prepared at the same time as this Plan. The Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been prepared at the same time as this Plan and is due to be adopted in 2026. Principles set out in the Shropshire Hills draft Nature Recovery Plan of 2021 have been incorporated into the LNRS, and so the structure of the LNRS is used here. Relevant LNRS current draft Priorities (in bold) and Actions (bulleted) are shown below (note that these may evolve further):

Enhance nature alongside food production

- Establish Farmer Groups
- Enhance soil health and nature on arable land
- Enhance soil health and nature on pastures
- Create, restore and manage nature-rich farmland mosaics



Restore, enhance, expand and appropriately manage the hedgerow network

- Restore and manage the existing hedgerow network
- Create more connectivity in the landscape by establishing new hedgerows

Re-naturalise rivers and stabilise flows

- Improve water quality
- Reduce both flood risk and low flows
- Remove physical barriers
- Restore streams and rivers to a more natural state
- Create, enhance and appropriately manage riparian buffers



Restore peatland and wetland mosaics

- Restore existing areas of high-quality peat, fen and bog habitat
- Restore, connect and expand areas of wetland mosaic habitat

- Restore ability of catchment headwaters to act as a sponge
- Target regularly flooded land for wetland creation and grazing marsh



Create, restore and manage ponds, glacial pools and meres

- Enhance existing ponds, pools and meres
- Create new ponds

Safeguard and enhance veteran trees

- Identify, appropriately manage and safeguard the future of veteran trees
- Secure continuity of veteran trees in the landscape

Restore and expand nature-rich woodlands

- Buffer and connect ancient semi-natural woodland
- Improve condition of deciduous, mixed and wet woodlands
- Restore plantation on ancient woodland sites
- Create new woodlands



Restore and expand nature-rich woody habitats

- Restore and expand wood pasture
- Restore parkland
- Plant and manage mosaics of scrub
- Establish new, and safeguard traditional, orchards
- Plant more trees in the farmed landscape

Restore, connect and expand species-rich grasslands across the county

- Set up infrastructure to support grassland restoration and creation
- Safeguard and enhance traditional hay meadows and other existing species-rich grasslands
- Create and restore species-rich grassland
- Restore grassland on roadside verges and alongside paths and tracks



Restore, connect and expand heathland sites

- Establish effective management regimes for heathland sites
- Restore heathland where geology allows to increase habitat connectivity



Increase the area of ffridd habitat

- Enhance areas of ffridd habitat
- Create new areas of ffridd habitat to benefit a wide range of species

Enhance the wildlife value of open mosaic habitats

- Create, enhance and appropriately manage close mosaics of open habitats on former coalmining and post-industrial sites
- Enhance open mosaic habitats on brownfield sites
- Retain the wildlife value of scree

Bring nature into towns, villages and amenity spaces

- Integrate nature recovery within new developments
- Create wildlife-friendly gardens at homes and businesses
- Enhance wildlife value of multifunctional green space
- Effective water management in the built environment
- Reduce the adverse impact of light pollution on wildlife
- Increase canopy cover in the built environment

Reduce invasive non-native species across whole catchments

- Prevent the spread of invasive non-native species
- Implement a targeted programme to reduce invasive non-native species



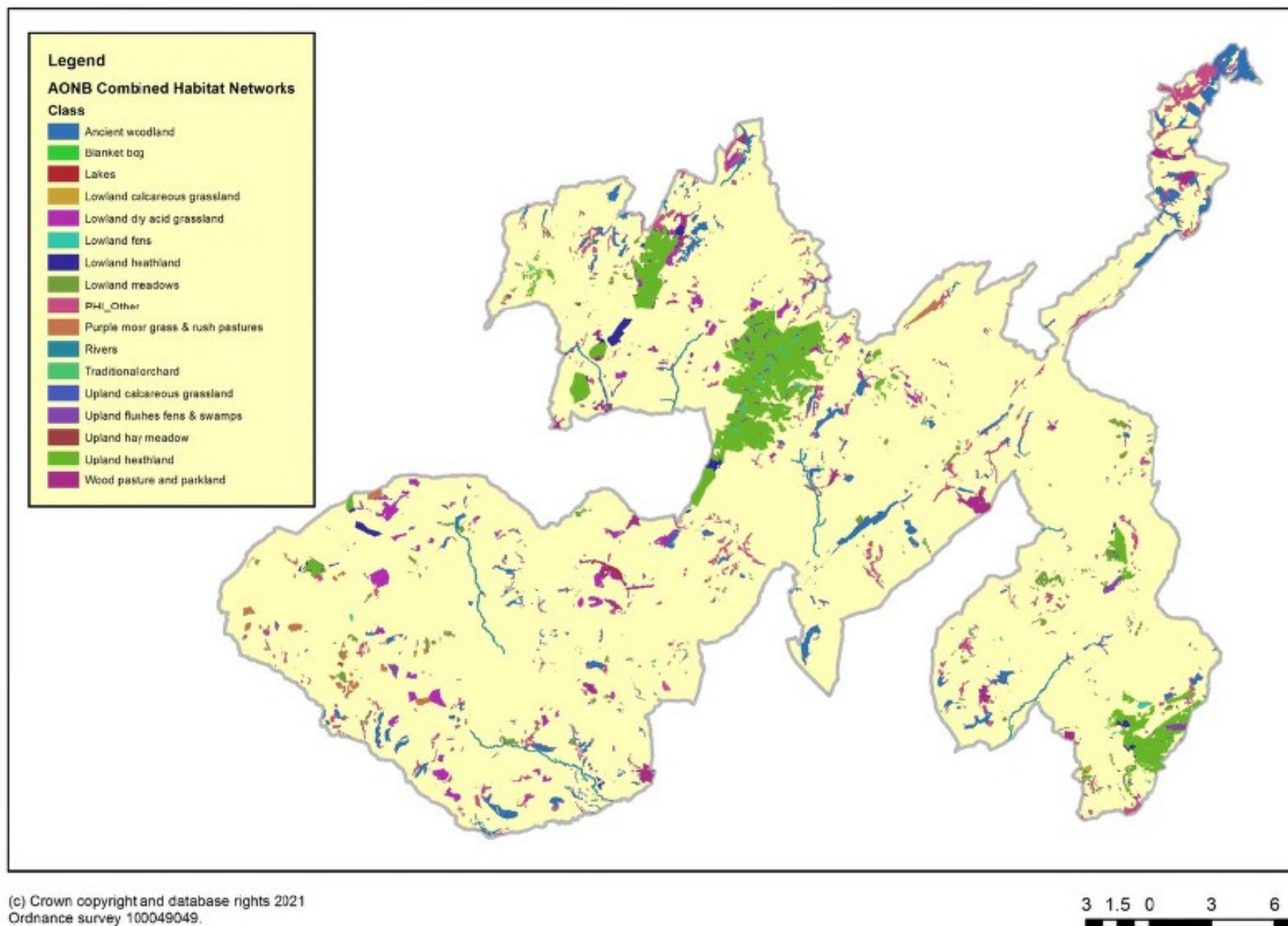
Enable more access to and connection with nature for health and wellbeing

- Enable access to nature-rich sites
- Create a more comprehensive network to enable active travel
- Enhance peoples' connection with nature

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.



Map of potential in Shropshire for creation of the Nature Recovery Network

(from [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#), Feb 2026)

