



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 26 February 2009	<u>Item</u> 2	<u>Paper</u> A
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SHROPSHIRE CORE STRATEGY: ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION

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Summary

This paper provides a background for discussion by members of the AONB Partnership's response to the Core Strategy: Issues & Options consultation.

Background

1. This is likely to be the most significant planning consultation for the AONB in the next few years. *"The Core Strategy will be the principal planning document in the Shropshire-wide Local Development Framework. It will set a spatial vision and objectives for the future of Shropshire over the next twenty years and will provide a strategic policy framework that will shape development to achieve this vision."*
2. There are a number of 'Choices' in the consultation on which the Partnership should comment. These are:
 - Choice 1 - the key strategic choice, addresses the overarching rationale and accompanying settlement strategy
 - Choice 2 Development in the countryside
 - Choice 11 Sustainable development and design principles
 - Choice 12 Environmental networks
 - Choice 15 Renewable energy schemes
3. The details of these Choices are not reproduced here, and members are referred to the Core Strategy Issues and Options, Executive Summary and Sustainability Appraisal documents (see background papers below for web link). These are also available at public libraries.
4. Members may wish to consider if their organisations should make their own responses to this significant consultation, and discuss the AONB perspective with colleagues working on this, if appropriate. Appendix 1 gives some observations on the relevant Choices from an AONB perspective.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to consider the issues raised in this paper and in the presentations and discussion, and to support an overall approach to the Partnership's response to the consultation.

List of Background Papers

Shropshire Core Strategy: Issues and Options, Executive Summary and Sustainability Appraisal documents available at
<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/planning.nsf/open/5ADFD31357B9398D80257545004C0888>

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Environmental Appraisal

The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.

Risk Management Appraisal

The issues are complex and there are many pros and cons of different options. It is important that a well thought out response is made to this consultation. Depending on the option supported, there is a possibility of some opposition to the AONB Partnership's stance.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

The content of this paper has been informed by discussion and previous work among members of the AONB Team and Partnership.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Considerations for an AONB Partnership response to the Core Strategy: Issues and Options Consultation.

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Overall comments

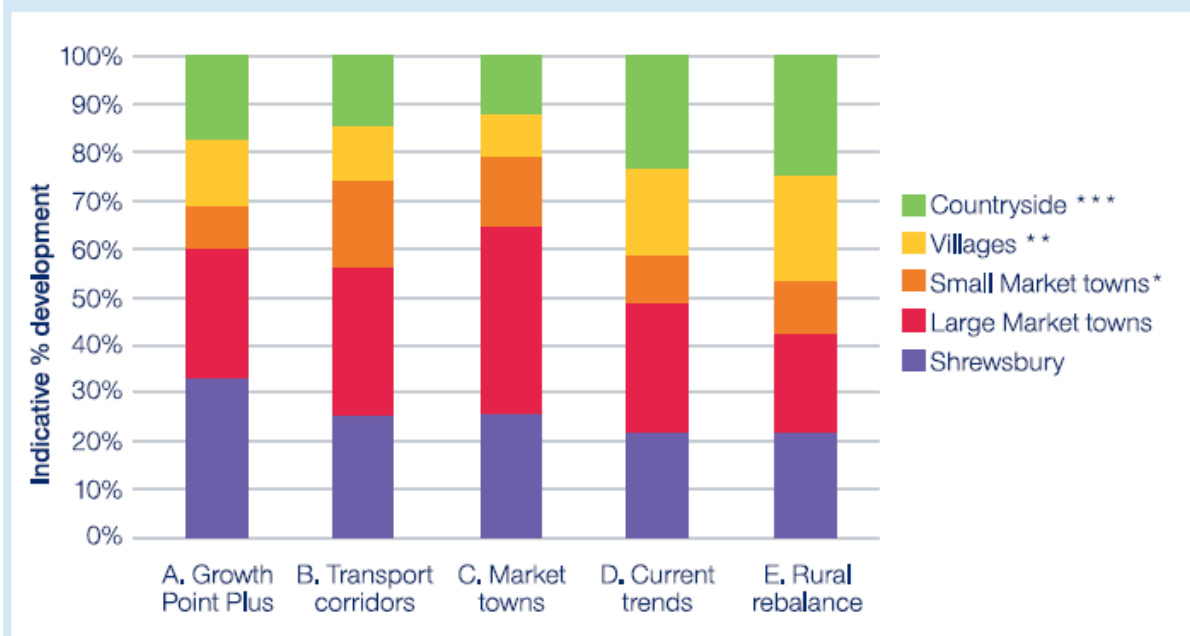
There is good recognition of the AONB in the documents, but we should make the case to strengthen this, and to push for **policies in the Core Strategy which recognise and differentiate the particular characteristics and needs of the AONB**. The 23% of Shropshire which is the AONB has only 6.25% of the county's population. 26% of the AONB's population is employed in agriculture, compared to 4.3% in the county as a whole. The high environmental value of the area is coupled with particular social and economic needs, which are not necessarily typical of the whole county.

The need to reduce carbon emissions is rightly a top priority of the LDF, and travel especially by car is a key factor in sustainability appraisal of different options. The planning system is however only one factor influencing people's travel patterns, and it is important that assumptions about travel behaviour arising from certain patterns of development are not too simplistic.

Choice 1 - the key strategic choice

Members should be aware that although the options are on a spectrum from more concentrated to more dispersed, there is in all options a spread of development between Shrewsbury, the market towns and more dispersed areas (see Fig 6.1 below). It should also be noted that Option C, while being in the middle of the spectrum in relation to development in Shrewsbury, is the option with least development in villages and the countryside.

Figure 6.1: Implications for towns and villages, by strategic option



* Small market towns as defined in the Development Trends Reports, namely Bishops Castle, Broseley, Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Ellesmere, Much Wenlock, Shifnal and Wem.

** "Villages" refers to development within settlement boundaries as defined in the relevant Local Plan.

*** "Countryside" is everywhere outside defined settlement boundaries.

The implications of the Strategic Options for the South area of the county (in which most of the AONB falls) are as follows:

Figure 6.3: Outcome of Strategic Option by Spatial Zone

Areas	Options				
	A Growth point plus	B Transport corridors	C Market towns	D Continuing current trends	E Rural rebalance
South	Similar growth as currently, or possibly less, in Ludlow, Craven Arms, Church Stretton, Bishops Castle, etc.	Development along the A49 road / rail corridor, namely Ludlow, Craven Arms and Church Stretton. Strict restraint elsewhere.	Development focused in the well linked towns, namely Ludlow, Craven Arms and Church Stretton, and in places with good links to the market towns.	Development in proportion to the services available, with the majority in Ludlow, Craven Arms, Church Stretton and Bishops Castle with proportionately less in villages.	Development predominantly in Ludlow and villages, but with more rural affordable housing and rural business development.

As discussed at the last meeting, the option which appears to fit best with things said in the AONB Management Plan about sustainability and vitality of the area is Option E Rural Rebalance. The consultation makes explicit that this approach is informed by the thinking of the 2008 Taylor Review on rural economy and affordable housing. For reference, the full report of this and a press release which summarises the findings is available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyimplementation/reformplanningsystem/matthewtaylorreview/>

Option E would however bring the highest levels of development to the AONB.

Factors we will need to consider are:

- i. To what extent and in what circumstances is new development in villages and the countryside harmful to the landscape? (The term “development” is used in the strategic options to refer to a balance of housing, employment and accompanying infrastructure).
- ii. Can tools such as Conservation Area designation for particular villages, Parish Plans, Village Design Statements, and Design Guidance support clear planning policies, specific to the AONB, to ensure that new development can be compatible?
- iii. If we support an approach of minimal development in the AONB, what are the long term implications both for natural beauty, for rural communities and for sustainability?
- iv. We must seek the right approach for the Shropshire Hills. This may differ both from other parts of the county and from other AONBs, where the social and economic context, and perhaps the relationship between settlement and the landscape, may be very different.
- v. Church Stretton is a unique case and deserves careful consideration. As the only town within the AONB, it is also the only town in the whole of Shropshire within a nationally protected landscape. There is very little physical space left for significant development in the town without expanding the settlement boundary.
- vi. Rather than simply support one option, we may wish to suggest combined elements of different options, or specify conditions or approaches which we feel are important to making a certain option appropriate for the AONB.
- vii. While recognising the broader interests members may have, the AONB Partnership's response must be made in relation to the purposes of AONB designation and the priorities of the Management Plan.

Choice 2 Development in the countryside

This choice gives options on the type of development which should be allowed in the countryside (note that the “countryside” includes isolated buildings, hamlets and smaller villages without a formal settlement boundary). This is strongly connected with the Strategic Choice 1 on the location of development. Across the options is a range of flexibility, but retaining a strong preference for conversions over new build, employment uses and affordable housing, through to live/work units and rural business premises in the more relaxed options.

Choice 11 Sustainable development and design principles

This choice raises an option of local variation in the standards applied. This fits well with the general approach we have suggested of differentiating the AONB and we should strongly support it. The AONB designation should provide the necessary justification for this approach, and our additional capacity e.g. to produce guidance, through the AONB Partnership should also be a contributory factor.

Choice 12 Environmental networks

There is the opportunity under this option for planning gain from developments to be applied away from where the development occurs, to support environmental benefits in a targeted way to actions and locations which are the highest priority in the county. This could benefit the AONB and should be supported. This section of the strategy should make more of ‘landscape’ as a holistic concept bringing together biodiversity, heritage, etc with aesthetic and perceptual qualities, and make clearer the links with climate change adaptation and ecosystem services.

Choice 15 Renewable energy schemes

The approach which fits best with the AONB Management Plan would appear to be Option D Twintrack: proactively supporting renewable energy in some locations or for certain types while being cautious towards others.