



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	<u>Item</u> 3	<u>Paper</u> B
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POSITION STATEMENT ON TRANSPORT

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Summary

This paper presents for discussion a draft position statement on transport.

Background

1. A grant was awarded in the current Financial Year by the Sustainable Development Fund to the Bulmer Foundation, in support of the placements for the Holme Lacy College MSc course in Sustainable Development Advocacy. In return for the grant, an MSc student, Rachel Harries, was placed with the AONB Team for four weeks in late 2007. We chose to focus Rachel's placement on transport issues, and though her activity was interrupted by a broken leg, one of the outputs was a draft position statement. The version in Appendix 1 results from Rachel's work in conjunction with members of the AONB Team, with some further minor editing.
2. As the Management Plan Review is now under way, the content of the position statement will be incorporated into the new draft Management Plan, inevitably with some re-working. Comments are therefore especially welcomed on the substantive issues and proposed policy approaches, more than the format and detailed presentation which will be adapted.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to comment on the position statement.

List of Background Papers

None

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

Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

The content of this paper has been informed by discussion among some members of the AONB Team.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Proposed Position Statement on Transport

Appendix 1 Proposed Shropshire Hills AONB Draft Position Statement on Transport

Background

This statement is one of a series, intended to complement the statutory AONB Management Plan, and outline in a more detailed or more up to date way the inter-relationship between a particular issue and the AONB's purposes (principally to conserve and enhance natural beauty).

There is growing concern over climate change, and while reductions are gradually being made in other areas, CO₂ emissions from road transport continue to grow, increasing 11% between 1990 and 2005¹. Emissions from domestic air travel have grown by 100%, while international aviation has shown growth of 123% since 1995². Movement of people and goods by road was responsible for 22% of the UK's CO₂ in 2005³, in Shropshire the proportion was 50%⁴.

Technological change and particularly better fuel efficiency are often feted as the answer to the current transport problems. However unless there is significant change in travel behaviour patterns, technology will not be able to keep up with impact of future growth in road transport. Changing travel behaviour, through reducing the need to travel and reliance on the car is also less likely to impact negatively on the qualities of the AONB.

Relation to AONB purpose

Increased CO₂ and consequent climate change has significant implications for the landscape of the AONB, affecting agriculture, forestry, historic features, the natural environment and social and economic activities. The growth in transport also impacts directly on the AONB through noise, pollution and visual intrusion. Road transport brings with it problems of severance, which can affect access and lead to traffic 'intimidation'. All of these impacts threaten to damage the landscape character, tranquillity and sense of isolation that are special qualities of the Shropshire Hills.

AONB policy on transport should not focus solely on the implications for the landscape, wildlife etc but should specifically take into account the role of transport in contributing to climate change and support measures to enable communities and industries within the AONB to reduce their need to travel and cut their CO₂ emissions.

Increasing road traffic is probably the most significant impact of tourism and recreation on the AONB. Many visitors are attracted to the area because of its quietness and rural isolation and take part in low impact activities such as walking,

¹ Defra e-digest environmental statistics (Defra 2007)

<<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/gagccukem.htm>>

² Transport and Climate Change (Commission for Integrated Transport (2007)

<<http://www.cfrit.gov.uk/docs/2007/climatechange/pdf/2007climatechange.pdf>>

³ Defra e-digest environmental statistics (Defra 2007)

<<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globalatmos/gagccukem.htm>>

⁴ Shropshire County Council Local Transport Plan 2006 -2011 (SCC 2006).

however the majority will arrive by car. It is necessary to make the link between how visitors access the Shropshire Hills, their experience of and their impact on the countryside. A sustainable approach to transport and tourism will have obvious benefits to the natural beauty and therefore amenity value of the AONB.

Links between the AONB and its surrounding area are particularly relevant to transport issues. The A49 trunk road that runs through the AONB is an important strategic north-south route, and has been identified as a corridor for development. People and goods flow in and out of the area for employment, services, leisure and markets. Technological advancements that enable home-working, more efficient and shorter supply chains, better public transport and location of new developments near existing settlements and services all play a role helping to reduce traffic in the AONB.

Transport trends in the AONB

The sparsely populated landscape of the AONB leads to high dependence on travel and particularly on the car. Car ownership is generally far higher than the national average, with 40% of households⁵ in South Shropshire owning two or more cars (up to 53% in the most isolated wards⁶) compared to 29% nationally⁷. Rather than being seen as a luxury or indicator of wealth, cars are regarded as a necessity for accessing essential services. Recent rises in fuel prices are unlikely to affect car-use behaviour in isolated rural areas, where people have little or no alternatives to the car.

Not surprisingly the car is the dominant mode of travel to work for people living within the Shropshire Hills, with nearly 6,000 people commuting by car⁸. People travel longer distances to work, with those in higher occupational groups travelling the furthest, often to workplaces outside the AONB. Interestingly the AONB does exhibit the highest levels of home-working found in the country (24% of economically active inhabitants, compared to 9% nationally⁹) and the proportion of home-workers increases in smaller settlements. This will certainly include people who have made life-style choices and as a result of expanding broadband access are now able to work from a home office. It may also include those able to negotiate more flexible working practices due to the long distances to their place of employment, and perhaps those working in land-based activities.

Public transport in the Shropshire Hills is reasonable along major routes although remoter areas are very poorly served. Improved core bus services and Demand Responsive Transport are currently being developed. Other community transport options in and around the AONB include the Buzzard bus which serves the Corvedale area, the Night Owl to Ludlow, Dial-a-Ride, Wheels to Work, and the Shropshire Hills Shuttles. The Shropshire Hills Shuttles serve the AONB west of the A49, from April to October, during weekends and Bank Holidays primarily for the tourist market. They have proved very popular with walkers, enabling them to access more remote areas as an alternative to the car, but have also provided an

⁵ Census 2001, (Office of National Statistics)

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Shropshire County Council Local Transport Plan 2006 -2011 (SCC 2006) www.

⁸ Census 2001, (Office of National Statistics)

⁹ *Ibid.*

important transport link for communities not served by other transport options. Rail transport along the Marches line provides an hourly north-south connection that runs through the AONB, with a reduced service on Sundays. The Heart of Wales Line provides a limited service from Shrewsbury via Church Stretton and Craven Arms to Swansea. Rail communication to the east is much more limited and there is no direct London connection.

Alternative fuels are not widely available in the AONB with only one supplier in Bishop's Castle which supplies biodiesel made from locally collected cooking oil. Rising interest in quality local food is helping to reduce food miles, although studies show that distribution must be efficiently run if carbon savings are to be made. The trend in mainstream haulage and transportation is towards larger vehicles. These are usually more efficient in terms of fuel per kg of cargo, but can be less so if not fully laden or if logistics dictate longer routes. Larger vehicles can also present problems on smaller roads as often found in the AONB. The Shropshire County Council Local Transport Plan reveals that HGV traffic on principal roads has actually reduced by 18%, although there is a perceived increase, probably due to larger vehicles¹⁰.

Main Strategic Documents

Transport 2010 – Ten year Plan for Transport (DfT, 2000)

The Future of Transport - Transport White Paper (DfT, 2004)

Regional Transport Strategy – encompassed within the Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands RPG11 (2004)

Shropshire Community Strategy 2006-2010, Local Strategic Partnership

Local Transport Plan for Shropshire 2006 – 2011

Rural Transport Strategy 2007

Principles/policies for transport in relation to the Shropshire Hills AONB

Road and traffic management

1. Strategies for road upgrading and improvements should not be solely informed by a 'predict and provide' model of increasing capacity to deal with increased traffic flow. Managing demand, changing behaviour and promoting transport efficiency are also necessary and especially relevant in relation to the AONB.
2. Road safety issues in the AONB should be addressed wherever possible through speed management schemes rather than road upgrades. Reducing traffic speed also provides benefits through reducing emissions and noise pollution. 'A' roads within the AONB, including the A49, should not be upgraded to dual carriageway.
3. Road management and improvement schemes in the AONB should take into account its natural beauty, including landscape character, biodiversity and heritage. Development and improvements should avoid urbanisation of rural roads through sensitive and appropriate design and use of materials. The AONB Partnership should be consulted on more significant road improvement schemes.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

4. Road improvement schemes should also consider the broader impact of increased traffic. Transport is a major impact on tranquillity and other aspects of natural beauty. The economic value of these assets needs to be borne in mind against expected economic benefits from upgrading transport links.
5. Regional research on rural communities shows that relying on mobility as the main means to meet people's needs is not sustainable. Strengthening communities and targeted measures to improve accessibility of services, employment, etc have important roles in making rural communities sustainable.

Planning and development

6. The AONB supports planning policies that reduce the need to travel. This includes generally locating new developments near to existing settlements and transport interchanges. Appropriate and sustainable development of dispersed settlements that provide local employment for the local population should be actively supported. Farm diversifications should be sensitive to the impact of increasing business-related traffic to and from the property. Those that are likely to generate more traffic, such as farm shops or visitor-led attractions should be located near existing settlements or close to transport interchanges.

Transport of goods

7. Efficiency should be promoted as a key priority of local distribution networks, particularly those involved in the food chain to enable local producers and shops to compete on an environmental, social and economic level with large retailers.

Public transport

8. Continued commitment is necessary to provide and improve targeted, efficient and appropriate public transport. It is important to ensure that the needs of tourism are integrated into transport planning and promotion.
9. The AONB actively supports calls for a

Tourism

10. Promotion of the area for tourism should aim to minimise travel and encourage alternatives to the car. Towns and location best served by public transport should receive the main promotion as 'gateways' to the Shropshire Hills, in preference to locations where access is only possible by car. The proposed direct rail link between Shrewsbury and London offers opportunities for sustainable tourism in the Shropshire Hills, and is supported.
11. Existing public transport networks such as rail and bus should be utilised to publicise the AONB, for example posters on buses and trains which may attract commuters to visit attractions using a mode of transport that they are already familiar with. The benefit to the local economy of visitors using public transport networks should be emphasised. For example, visitors to Carding Mill Valley arriving by train have to walk the short distance from the station through Church Stretton town and are more likely to support local businesses than those arriving by car.

12. An approach of minimising travel while staying in the Shropshire Hills is likely to result in a more direct and enhanced experience of the countryside, reduced environmental impacts and more benefit to local businesses. Accommodation providers should be supported to encourage visitors to explore locally. This approach may be worked into a project for 'Offa's Dyke Country', to encourage visitors to appreciate and protect the unique qualities of this area.
13. The availability of public transport should be a decisive factor when organising and scheduling events within the AONB. Public transport should always be promoted as the preferred mode for accessing an event, e.g. by offering incentives such as discounts on entry to users of public transport. Existing events that use sustainable transport such as the Clun Valley Beer Festival and Bishop's Castle Walking Festival should be publicised as examples of good practice.

Actions

- All places of work within the AONB, and residents who travel to work outside its limits should be encouraged to implement green travel plans, or utilise alternative options such as car-pooling, lift-sharing and home-working.
- Continuation of the Shropshire Hills Shuttles is vital, and opportunities should be sought to expand sustainable transport options.
- Collaboration and cooperation between local farmers and food producers should be supported to enable them to create more efficient local supply chains. A demand for alternative food distribution networks and hubs has been identified and this needs to be taken forward.
- Research is needed into transport needs of small businesses to inform further policy.
- Tourism providers should be supported in promoting sustainable transport to visitors to the AONB, for example providing information on bus and train timetables, walking and cycling routes and other low impact activities such as horse-riding. This should form an element of the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme.
- Transport network features such as bus shelters enhanced and developed as a feature of the landscape to increase the attraction of public transport. Themes could be developed along certain scenic routes using creative design by local artists with local resources. As important interchanges, they can also work as community information points.