**Hills Ford Stages Rally – representation to Shropshire Council Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee from Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team and Advisory Committee, 4th November 2026**

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team made a written representation in February 2026 against the holding of the Hills Ford Stages Rally on 19th - 20th September 2026. The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Advisory Committee is a formal joint advisory committee to both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council, with a purpose to advise the Councils in relation to matters affecting the Shropshire Hills National Landscape. The position of the Team and the Advisory Committee is opposed to any repeat of the rally, on account of a number of factors:

- Contrary to the purpose of a National Landscape and the Council's legal duty
- Contrary to approved National Landscape Management Plan policies
- Contrary to the qualities and direction set out in tourism strategies for Shropshire
- Loss of tranquillity and damage to visitor experience
- Negative effects on local communities
- Racing on rural roads may encourage an aggressive driving culture
- Increased carbon emissions
- Potential economic downsides
- Impacts on wildlife
- Increased nitrogen emissions

Further detail on these reasons is set out below:

**Contrary to the purpose of a National Landscape and the Council's legal duty**

National Landscapes (legally known as areas of outstanding natural beauty) are designated with a purpose 'to conserve and enhance natural beauty'. The natural beauty criterion for designating includes landscape quality, scenic quality, relative wildness and tranquillity, natural and cultural heritage. A competitive motor rally is fundamentally at odds with this purpose.

The Council has a legal duty as a public body 'to seek to further' the statutory purpose of the designation to 'conserve and enhance natural beauty'. The government guidance on this duty is set out here https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-protected-landscapes-duty/guidance-for-relevant-authorities-on-seeking-to-further-the-purposes-of-protected-landscapes. The guidance is explicit that the duty applies to licensing and permitting. It also states that the duty is intended to be active rather than passive, that authorities should take reasonable and proportionate steps to identify opportunities to further the statutory purpose, should use and align with the area's Management Plan, and demonstrate and document how they have considered and applied the duty.

The published papers of the Cabinet decision on the rally in June show that environmental and community impacts and proposed mitigation were considered; however it isn't clear how the Council considered and discharged its duty to 'seek to further' the purpose of the National Landscape, or how the content of the Management Plan informed the decision. This seems an important issue for the Scrutiny Committee to examine.

**Contrary to approved National Landscape Management Plan policies**

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Management Plan is a statutory plan and was approved by Shropshire Council's Cabinet in January 2026. The legal requirement is for the Management Plan to set out policies of the local authorities regarding the National Landscape. The policies within the Plan are therefore Shropshire Council's own policies and not merely those of any structure or group existing for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.

Management Plan Policy 25 Access and recreation states:

> *i) The access network (including public footpaths, bridleways and roads, and open access areas) should be valued, protected and maintained as the bedrock of recreation, economic value and nature connection.*
>
> *ii) Responsible access and sustainable recreation activities should be promoted, with a focus on quiet enjoyment and a strong ethic of care for visitors and providers. All recreation facilities, activities and events should be planned and promoted to ensure no significant impacts upon the local community, landscape, nature, heritage, natural beauty, and tranquillity.*

Management Plan Policy 10 iii) Climate Change Mitigation states *"Developments, activities and trends which increase greenhouse gas emissions should be resisted."*

We do not consider that holding the rally is in alignment with these policies.

**Contrary to the qualities and direction set out in tourism strategies for Shropshire**

The Shropshire Destination Management Plan 2026-2029 and the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2024-29 both contain clear principles and objectives that favour tourism compatible with landscape quality, tranquillity, nature recovery and sustainable visitor experiences.

The county's destination plan states that tourism growth should occur *"...while protecting what makes the county special – its landscapes, heritage, market towns and communities."*

The plan repeatedly promotes regenerative tourism and states: *"Tourism must deliver a net gain for communities and the environment if it is to be resilient and successful in the longer term"* and refers to *"developing new products and experiences that deliver net benefit to the environment, economy and society..."* An economic benefit alone is not therefore sufficient – a net benefit must also be shown to the environment and society and we do not consider that the rally can demonstrate this.

Further, the Destination Management Plan aims to *"grow the value of the visitor economy without compromising its uncrowded spaces."* The county's tourism strengths are identified as including *"a crowd free destination, space for freedom and escape"* and *"Shropshire boasts 23% of its area designated as a National Landscape, providing a tranquil escape from urban life."*

One of the five strategic themes of the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy is: *"Improving provision of sustainable tourism services which draw on the area's special qualities."* The strategy refers to *"Panoramic views ... wide open spaces and intimate corners. Off the beaten track and remote in the context of this part of England, the Shropshire Hills are a relative haven of tranquillity."* It states *"There is high support from the community and businesses for a form of tourism that doesn't harm the special qualities of the National Landscape."*

We consider that the rally is not compatible with the aims of these tourism strategies.

**Loss of tranquillity and damage to visitor experience**

The noise of racing motor vehicles can be heard over considerable distances in otherwise peaceful rural areas. Tranquillity is one of the defined special qualities of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape and is greatly valued by both visitors and residents. It is also valued in Shropshire's countryside more widely. Visitors expecting a quiet rural landscape will have had their experience diminished.

**Negative effects on local communities**

The road closures and traffic management arrangements disrupted everyday life for residents, businesses and farmers. Noise and disturbance reduced residents' enjoyment of their homes and the local environment. Local communities have borne many of the disadvantages of the event while any benefits may be unevenly distributed.

Pulverbatch Parish Council identified a range of concerns with the rally, including poor consultation with residents, inadequate communication from organisers and the Council, noise disturbance, road closures causing significant travel disruption, parking that blocked gateways and rights of way, insufficient signage and marshalling, damage to verges, roads and hedges, litter, safety concerns at one farm, and a perception that local objections were disregarded throughout the decision-making process.

Several residents in the Linley area also raised similar concerns. One resident chose to spend the weekend away rather than suffer 150 cars passing his home at speed through most of the day. A resident of Worthen cited poor communication and consultation, inadequate information about road and footpath closures, disruption to local businesses, churches and residents, and shortcomings in public safety and visitor management. A resident of Longden raised concerns about inadequate signage and communication of road closures, unsafe interactions between rally traffic and other road users, and what was perceived as a dismissive and unhelpful attitude from marshals, resulting in inconvenience and risks to cyclist safety.

Shropshire Churches Tourism Group, who have 120 member churches and run an annual open day event at the end of September stated that they were not consulted, and neither were the Diocese or local churches. Thankfully the rally didn't clash with their event, but it easily could have. Community feedback has stated that some church events (e.g. christenings etc) were either cancelled or rearranged at short notice, and that some churches or wedding venues may have been unable to host weddings. Given the need to pre-book these events well in advance, because of demand, the notice period was too short for this important community function and valuable local economic activity.

Residents expressed confusion about what information was available, when and where to find it, e.g. a residents handbook was only distributed to residents on closed road sections and not available more widely. Maps of the closed routes were only made publicly available shortly before the event and these are no longer available. Significant discontent has been voiced about information relating to the roads that were closed, the roads immediately adjacent to the closed roads and the roads used between the closed sections. Specifically, the inadequacy of the CausewayOne web link and lack of information it provided, single login set-up, and inaccessibility of it to residents. The taking down of online event information so soon after the event has added to a feeling (voiced by many) that information was deliberately withheld, not shared, or shared in inaccessible ways, or with a very narrow focus. That lack of information about the event after it had happened has also made it hard to gather feedback on the impact. The amount of additional work that the rally has caused officers within the National Landscape Team should also not be overlooked. It has diverted them from other priority work.

**Racing on rural roads may encourage an aggressive driving culture**

An event such as this makes a virtue of fast and aggressive driving on narrow rural roads. This sits uneasily alongside efforts to promote road safety, considerate driving and shared use of country lanes. Some of the roads used in the rally are designated and signed by the Council as 'Quiet Lanes' and are often used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

**Increased carbon emissions**

Motorsport involves the deliberate burning of large amounts of fuel for recreational purposes, and additional emissions arise from competitors, support vehicles, spectators and event infrastructure. Consumables used during the races such as car tyres are also derived from oil.

This kind of activity, wherever held, conflicts with commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid climate breakdown and to secure a liveable future for the planet.

> *"We need to do everything in our power to limit the amount by which we exceed 1.5°C - which requires a radical acceleration of action towards zero emissions". Prof Tim Lenton*
>
> *"We are hurtling toward climate chaos. The planet's vital signs are flashing red. The consequences of human-driven alterations of the climate are no longer future threats but are here now. Rising levels of greenhouse gases remain the driving force behind this escalation. These recent developments emphasize the extreme insufficiency of global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions." 2025 State of the Climate Report: A Planet on the Brink, Stockholm Resilience Centre*

Shropshire Council has declared a Climate Emergency, and in these changing and challenging times there is a need to step up our efforts for the environment, for the benefit of all.

**Potential economic downsides**

While the rally may bring some expenditure, it will also have deterred visitors seeking tranquillity, nature and outdoor recreation. Businesses that depend on these visitors may have experienced loss of trade. Although the race stages were well attended and this may have provided a direct income to the local farm, many local residents have voiced strong objections to the rally.

**Impacts on wildlife**

The rally will have resulted in ecological impacts through areas important for their value to wildlife and the natural environment. Noise pollution during the stages of the rally will have disturbed bird and animal species, many of whom in the autumn are busy gathering resources for winter. Prolonged noise and disturbance can have significant effects on behaviour and safety of wildlife. Bird species who rely so much on their calls will have faced significant disturbance in their communication within the area. Disturbance continues for some time afterwards, as species will have been extra cautious of additional noise, chosen new resting places and potentially been more vulnerable to predators as a result of additional stress.

**Increased nitrogen emissions**

An increase in the volume of NOx gases being released into the atmosphere within the National Landscape will have resulted from the event. With implications for human, animal and ecosystem health, this will also compound the ongoing nutrient issues already present within the area. Many habitats found throughout the area are known to be very sensitive to increased nitrogen pollution e.g. heathland, wetlands and ancient woodlands.