

II COMMUNITY

II.1 Aims

To promote awareness of and pride in the designation of the Malvern Hills as an AONB.

II.2 Background

The Rural White Paper, *Our Countryside the Future* (DETR 2000), aimed to encourage people to become involved in their community, look after its special features and engage in the decisions that effect them. One of the main vehicles to address these aspirations are Community Strategies. These policy documents are taken into consideration in the subsequent Local Plans.

Some factors which contribute to the quality of life of residents and the workforce, for example access, work and skill learning opportunities, knowledge and awareness of the special qualities of the area, do have a direct impact on the landscape, biodiversity and historic environment of the AONB. The impact of people living in, working in and visiting the AONB, on air and water quality, noise and light pollution, and resource use, are also basic considerations for quality of life in the AONB.



The blessing of the village green at Mathon's rogation service

The environmental quality and tranquillity of rural areas contribute in an often subtle and inconspicuous way to the enjoyment of living, working and visiting the AONB. An AONB community that is aware and appreciative of the impact it has on the AONB (and vice versa) is vital to the wellbeing of the AONB, particularly in terms of maintaining its unique identity and distinctiveness and sustaining sympathetic management.

The natural beauty of the Malvern Hills contributes to its attractiveness as a place to live, but also to work. The area has attracted a skilled workforce which has established a tradition of high technology industry around the AONB, and it is also a major influence on the tourism and recreation economies.

Skills to maintain elements of the agricultural and woodland practices which are core to the landscape character, e.g. fencing, coppicing, hedge laying and orchard management are in decline (Statistical Digest). This represents a threat to the condition of features which are crucial to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape character and biodiversity of the AONB.



People gather for the Jubilee Beacon



West Malvern fete

Consultation preceding this draft found that the local community is reasonably content with its environment and identity. The framework of Community Plans that have been drawn up by constituent Local Authorities guide many aspects of community life within the AONB and reference should be made to them in the first instance. In light of this, it may be important to maximise opportunities to involve the community (both within the AONB and immediately adjacent to it) in the local community and planning process, and in community-based initiatives such as Village Design Statements, to maintain and enhance this feeling.

11.3 Special Features

A reasonably content and cohesive community identity;

Skills in traditional landscape management such as hedge laying, coppicing and fencing;

An attractive environment for low impact industries and a skilled workforce, and potentially a relatively high proportion of home workers. Some communities within the AONB have been engaged in influencing their environment through Village Design Statements and Parish Plans.

11.4 Key Issues

11.4.1 Awareness of the AONB

Awareness of the AONB, its purpose, special qualities and extent is not as widespread or comprehensive enough as is warranted by this unique and nationally important landscape. Greater appreciation within the community, especially of the AONB's special qualities and the community's impact on it, would enhance involvement by the community in design issues, conservation projects and generally improve the welfare of the AONB merely by becoming more important to those who live in it, and consequently those who visit it. Awareness can be raised through a variety of means, such as information and interpretation, but should be consistent in its coverage of the AONB, and the message it portrays. Awareness can also be engendered by engaging the community in participatory projects like Village Design Statements, where they are involved in a process of identifying what is important to them and to the AONB, and actively helping to conserve these features.

11.4.2 Decline in the agricultural and woodland skills

These skills (e.g. coppicing, hedge laying, orchard management) are vital to conserving and enhancing the AONB's characteristic landscape features, and give rise to a particular educational need. The decline in these features partly explains the decline in the need for these skills. There is scope for seeking financial support for apprenticeships in these skills on the grounds of conserving the AONB's special qualities.



BT Lorries in the bluebells

11.4.3 Lack of adequate telecommunications infrastructure

In order to promote further home working within the AONB, additional and improved information technology infrastructure is

required, i.e. Broadband. Home working is promoted for the principal reason of reducing commuting to work, and sustaining rural economic regeneration of the area.

11.5 Strategic Objectives

11.5.1 Strengthen the community relationship with the AONB in terms of their impact on and importance to local distinctiveness, landscape character, biodiversity and the historic environment of the AONB, in particular through promoted use of community projects such as Village Design Statements and Parish Plans;

11.5.2 Foster opportunities for training and retraining in conservation, landscape and traditional building skills to meet the need to conserve and enhance the AONB's special qualities;

11.5.3 Encourage the consistent provision of high quality information and interpretation throughout the AONB, to raise the awareness of the AONB, its purpose, special qualities and main threats and issues.

12 DEVELOPMENT

12.1 Aims

To minimise the adverse impact that development proposals and implementation have on the AONB's landscape character, biodiversity and historic environment.

To ensure that new and redevelopment contributes to, rather than detracts from, the sense of place, local distinctiveness and landscape character of the Malvern Hills.

12.2 Background

Some development is inevitable and necessary in the AONB, and it is vital for the wellbeing of the AONB and its communities that there is a framework in place to manage this change effectively and sympathetically. National and regional policy and local development plans form a major part of this framework, providing for the protection and management of many aspects of the special qualities and activities undertaken in the AONB. This includes

managing the demand for housing and transport. The Management Plan provides an opportunity to provide both broad and specific support for these policies through its management objectives and actions, and sets out common guidelines and standards for specific AONB issues.

In general, policies and development control decisions affecting the AONB should favour conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape. In all cases, the environmental effects of new proposals will be a major consideration, although it will also be appropriate to have regard to the economic and social wellbeing of the area. Major development proposals in AONBs should be assessed in the same way as proposals for major development in national parks. Development such as wind turbines, telecommunications masts and other conspicuous structures will on the whole be inappropriate in the AONB under present planning policies, unless impact on skylines and ridgelines can be minimised.

The Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee has a role in ensuring the significance of the AONB is fully recognized in community planning at the local authority level, through community strategies, and in topic strategies dealing with tourism, recreation, biodiversity, etc. It may also assist communities at a more local level with the preparation of Parish Plans and Village Design Statements, although the





adoption of these documents as supplementary planning guidance will remain with the local authorities and depend upon consistency with the development plan or local development framework.

There are some aspects of land use activities and land management such as in agriculture which are beyond the remit of development plans, the development control process and other legal protection, for example the rise of plastic crop protection (i.e. polytunnels) in market gardening. It should be the aim of the Management Plan to try to influence the location and management of these activities to the overall benefit of the AONB.

12.3 Special Features

Protection offered by the AONB designation and planning law is considerable;

Rural character and scale of settlements in the AONB adds to the sense of tranquillity;

High quality environment characterized by numerous features such as garden layout, boundary walls, colour of buildings, distance of buildings from the highways, and planting traditions, in addition to those covered in Conservation Areas, etc;

Views from and of the Hills are a particular issue in this AONB and developments should respect this;

Community planning initiatives do exist in the AONB.

12.4 Key Issues

12.4.1 Impact of development

New development and the restoration or conversion of old buildings such as farm sheds and barns can have a detrimental impact on the landscape character, biodiversity, historic environment and tranquillity within the AONB.



One of several Voysey designed buildings in the AONB

Inappropriate design, location, higher densities, layout and material, lack of adequate open space and loss of features (such as specimen trees), may cause harm to the special qualities of the AONB, and diminish the overall distinctiveness of its built environment. Change in land use to equestrian activities, whilst providing some benefits to the rural economy, can be detrimental to grassland from overgrazing by horses and ponies.

Views from, into and within the AONB are also vulnerable and sensitive to unsympathetic development in and beyond the AONB. Sensitivity analysis of landscape character types will progressively aid in guiding most development to those settlements and landscapes which will be least damaged by new development. Guidance is also needed to promote the highest standards of construction design to prevent development eroding the quality of the AONB's water, land, air and tranquillity, for example by maximizing energy efficiency, encouraging the use of sustainable drainage

Sewage filtration in a reed bed, West Malvern



systems, and sustainable and efficient waste water treatment (see chapter 13).

12.4.2 Lack of source of local stone and materials

Mineral extraction is largely non-existent in the AONB as it is effectively prohibited by mineral plan policies other than in exceptional circumstances. However there may be a case for extracting, in small quantities, local stone for restoring characteristic walls and buildings and meeting locally distinctive design standards in new developments.

12.4.3 Lack of analysis into the character of the built landscape

A similar process to that used for the rural Landscape Character Assessment, for characterizing types within the built environment (as opposed to the Historic Landscape Character Assessment) would enable adoption of supplementary planning guidance for development within the built environment to conserve its special qualities.

The loss of specimen trees and other features contributing to the character and local distinctiveness in the built landscape cannot be adequately measured, controlled or rectified without such an analysis. Equally the contribution of other features to the dilution or loss of character cannot be controlled on this basis.



12.4.4 Consistency of guidance for development proposals in the AONB

With county, unitary and local development plans providing a range of guidance on location, design and environmental management, there is a need to influence

this guidance at the formulation stage across the three counties to ensure its consistent application to the AONB.

12.5 Strategic Objectives

12.5.1 Ensure that development is guided to the least vulnerable areas of the AONB, and respects the landscape character and special qualities of the AONB;

12.5.2 Seek consistent guidance for the AONB in development plan policies on location and design of development, and the environmental management of resources;

12.5.3 Promote guidelines for restoration and new development ensuring that design, location, layout, density, materials and distinctive features respect the vernacular and local distinctiveness and landscape character, and that the highest standards of environmental design, sustainable drainage and energy efficiency are sought;

12.5.4 Investigate the possibility of sourcing local materials such as Malvern stone within the AONB, taking into regard current mineral extraction policies;

12.5.5 Develop a programme of identifying important and strategic views from the Malvern Hills, and incorporating these views as key landscape features;

12.5.6 Promote opportunities for Section 106 agreements for developer contributions to contribute to schemes that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB.

13 SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

13.1 Aims

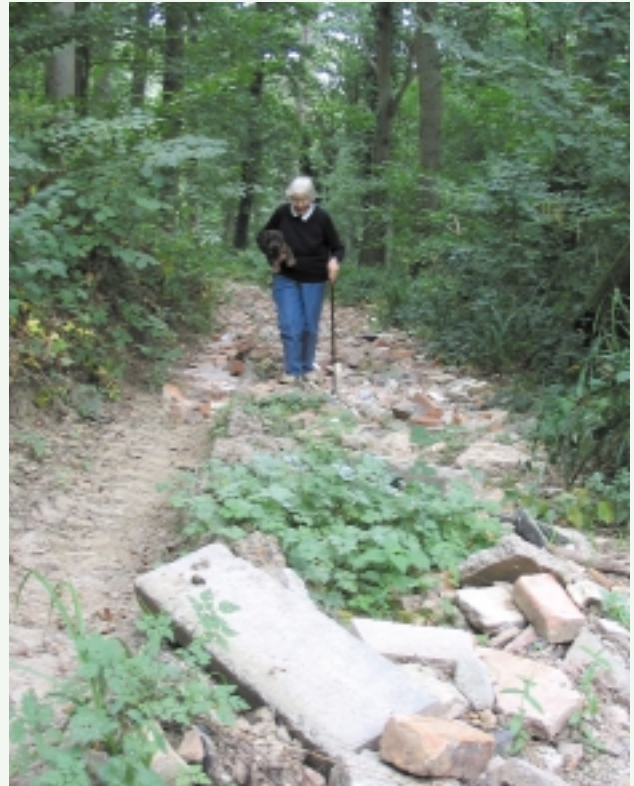
To ensure the sustainable and efficient use of the AONB's resources, such as land, air and water.

To maintain a clean and tranquil AONB.

13.2 Background

The overall quality of the environment within the AONB is integral to its many special qualities, but also to the community who live there. Air and water pollution, litter, fly-tipping, noise and light pollution can erode the quality of the environment whilst noise and light pollution can erode tranquillity. All these affect the quality and experience of the AONB for its residents, workforce and visitors, as well as impacting on its landscape character, biodiversity and historic environment. Many plans and strategies at the local, regional and national level are aimed at improving the quality of resources such as air and water, and maintaining areas of tranquillity and dark skies such as those valued in the AONB.

Collecting water at Hayslad spout



Alternative ways in which to accommodate development proposals, meet demand for energy and water, and sustain the rural economy without causing harm to the AONB's environment, by definition should be sustainable so as to protect the quality of the AONB today and for future generations. The landscape context of the AONB is a crucial element in determining which alternatives provide acceptable solutions. The promotion and exemplifying of best practice in the AONB will go a long way towards establishing better knowledge, and eventually more robust guidance as to what constitutes sustainable development and resource management both within and around the area. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and the treatment of waste water through reed bed systems are two examples of managing resources sustainably that could be championed in the AONB.

13.3 Special Features

World renowned spring water;

Relatively good air quality, contributed to by prevailing wind direction, relative lack of development, and settlements mostly rural in character;

Areas of tranquillity and dark night skies within AONB, and beyond to the west of the Hills.

13.4 Key Issues

13.4.1 Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

These have been identified in parts of the AONB and there is a need to support the work of FWAG in informing land owners of the legislation relating to the spreading of organic and inorganic fertilizers (e.g. manure and slurry) near watercourses in these zones. Nitrates pose a potential risk to human health and environmental imbalance in watercourses and soils.

13.4.2 Importance of hydrology on the Hills

The hydrology of the Hills is complex and this complexity could lead to potential pollution and drainage problems unless adequately investigated.

13.4.3 Litter and fly-tipping

Litter, fly-tipping and dumped cars are rated by the local residents as major detractors from the beauty of the landscape. With increasingly stringent waste disposal regulations combined with levying a charge on the disposer, the attraction of dumping waste without charge in the countryside, will

grow. Casual litter dropping, particularly of food packaging, will continue so long as the public remains dispassionate about the issue. The same pertains to dog fouling.

13.4.4 Light pollution

Inappropriate lighting of existing and new development within and beyond the AONB are causing a hazing over of the dark skies that contribute so much to the sense of tranquillity in the AONB. It is the combined effect of lighting in villages and towns and the lighting of large developments that are particularly intrusive.

13.4.5 Noise pollution

As stated in the Transport chapter, one impact of visitor pressure is car traffic, which causes noise disturbance to local communities, amongst other effects. Another source is the M50, affecting the southern most end of the AONB.





Photograph by G Elvins

13.5 Strategic Objectives

- 13.5.1 Promote best practice in resource management in the AONB, in line with current Local Development Plan and Waste Management Plan frameworks, and within the context of conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the AONB;
- 13.5.2 Encourage the conservation of dark skies in the AONB by supporting policies and initiatives to reduce the impact of lighting in existing and new developments;
- 13.5.3 Seek to expand the Quiet Lanes Programme across the AONB;
- 13.5.4 Encourage increased awareness of water pollution issues amongst landowners, in particular with regard to nitrates and fertilizers;
- 13.5.5 Increase the awareness of the adverse impacts of litter and fly-tipping on the AONB's special qualities and seek to provide opportunities for the safe and clean disposal of litter;
- 13.5.6 Seek to establish a programme of research with relevant bodies, into the hydrology of the AONB and potential pollution risks.