

The Wrekin Forest Plan 2015-2020

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On behalf of The Wrekin Forest Partnership 2015



With thanks to the Jean Jackson Trust

Foreword

The Wrekin Forest is an area of countryside to the immediate west of Telford dominated by The Wrekin Hill and its surrounding woodlands. It is a living landscape with several existing communities and settlements, an area of considerable ecological and geological value as well as a popular visitor attraction and area for leisure and recreation.

The area is the modern remnant of a medieval hunting Forest. The Wrekin Hill, The Ercall and other key sites form a 'Core area' of unique geological and biodiversity rich areas surrounded by a wider landscape of woodlands, fields and settlements which provide a setting to the Core area and a connection to the surrounding landscape and nearby urban areas (see maps at Section 2).

The Core area is protected by a variety of existing landscape and ecological and geological designations. The Wrekin Forest Plan not only embraces these formal designations but also encourages greater recognition and protection of the wider surrounding landscape. After much discussion, the wider area of the Wrekin Forest is not strictly defined, and no boundary is marked on the maps. (See however the addendum on the Telford & Wrekin Strategic Landscapes Study 2015).

The purpose of the Wrekin Forest Plan 2015-20 is to provide a framework for the protection, conservation and management of this landscape for the next five years. Its aim is to help protect and enhance the integrity of the landscape of the area by understanding its qualities, by providing direction regarding the way in which the area can balance and address key issues such as the protecting and enhancing biodiversity, meeting the demands of recreation and leisure, guidance on how to appropriately manage new development and by recommending a series of actions by which the plan can be achieved.

Contents

Foreword 2

Section 1 Context

- 1.1 Background 4
- 1.2 The Wrekin Forest Partnership 5
- 1.3 The purpose of the Wrekin Forest Plan 7
- 1.4 Vision and aims 8
- 1.5 Planning 9
- 1.6 National Policy 11
- 1.7 Local Policy 13

Section 2. A description of the area and key issues 19

- 2.1 The Wrekin Forest: An ancient landscape 21
- 2.2 Biodiversity 22
- 2.3 Farming 33
- 2.4 Geology 34
- 2.5 Archaeology 35
- 2.6 Recreation and leisure 36

Section 3 Objectives and actions 40

- 3.1 The Wrekin Forest Partnership 40
- 3.2 Planning 41
- 3.3 Biodiversity 42
- 3.7 Recreation and leisure

Closing comment 45

Section 4 Appendix

- Appendix 1 Wrekin Forest Partnership 46
- Appendix 2 Bibliography 46
- Appendix 3 National examples of landscape planning policy 47
- Appendix 4 National and international legislation 48

Section 1: Context

1.1 Background

In 2006 Shropshire Wildlife Trust secured Heritage Lottery Funding to support community consultation leading to the production of a landscape scale conservation plan for an area delineated as The Wrekin Forest. The Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Plan 2008 -2013 [WFLCP] was published at the end of 2007 and commenced with the formation of the Wrekin Forest Partnership [WFP]. The Partnership functions as an advisory forum to support the implementation of the Plan and aims to ‘focus individual and group efforts in the conservation of the wildlife, habitats and wilderness values of the Wrekin Forest’ [Source: WFLCP 2008-13]. The Partnership has a formal status as a Working Group of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership. The current chair is the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership manager.

The Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Plan 2008 -2013 set out its vision to ‘promote the natural, cultural and economic future of the Wrekin Forest’, underpinned by the concept of sustainability that is to live now ‘in ways which do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’.

The Plan set out 15 working principles relating to such themes as biodiversity, outdoor education, conservation volunteering, geo-diversity and rural heritage. Accompanying the principles were 21 practical initiatives which relate to the principles. Elements of the plan have proved more successful than others and major themes such as sustainable tourism, transport and access have seen considerable activity but remain a source of considerable concern and are perceived to lack any progression. Partially this is because they are immensely complex areas, land ownership is held in multiple hands making coherent management challenging and tentative engagement by the two unitary authorities has weakened potential outcomes. The plan expired at the end of 2013 and funding was then sought to prepare and publish a new Wrekin Forest Plan.

Thanks to the Jean Jackson Fund work began in mid-2014 on this plan which is the result of a period of public consultation, local discussion and inter-agency negotiation. Since the first Wrekin Forest Plan was published in 2008 nature conservation has gone further still in embracing the landscape scale approach. In 2010 Professor John Lawton was commissioned by central government to review nature conservation in England. The resulting report, ‘Making Space for Nature’ concluded ‘that a step change in nature conservation was required to establish ‘a coherent and resilient ecological network’ of benefit to wildlife and ourselves’ [M Jones 2014].

In 2014 the ‘State of Nature’ report published by a collaborative group of 25 UK nature conservation organisations, highlighted the worrying decline of 60% of species for which we have sufficient data. The earlier Lawton report advocates a landscape scale approach guided by three key principles, summarized as ‘bigger, better and connected’. The Wrekin Forest Plan 2015-2020 has adopted this approach and is driven by the fundamental concern that our natural world is in great difficulty. Ideally key sites would become bigger, valuable features such as woodlands become more widespread, degraded sites would recover and the network would be better connected.

1.2 The Wrekin Forest Partnership

The Wrekin Forest Plan 2015 -20 is the second cycle of landscape management planning targeted at the area of open countryside which includes The Wrekin Hill. The first plan, 'The Wrekin Forest Landscape Management Plan 2008 -13' saw the creation of a voluntary forum to support improved communications between stakeholders and help steer the delivery of the first five year plan. The forum was named the Wrekin Forest Partnership and was formally constituted as a Working Group of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, the body responsible for co-ordinating management of the AONB.

The Wrekin Forest Partnership is unincorporated and does not stand as a legal entity. The Wrekin Forest Partnership reports to the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership management. As the first plan expired the Wrekin Forest Partnership commissioned the preparation of The Wrekin Forest Plan 2015-20 which will be formally integrated into the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan. The new plan will be used to support any depositions to the local planning framework and be utilised as the key document to help steer partnership activity over the coming five year period.

The Wrekin Forest Partnership aims to bring together relevant partners to work together for the sustainable natural, cultural and economic future of the 'Wrekin Forest'. The purpose of the Wrekin Forest Partnership is to support the development of collaborative projects, provide a forum for discussion of issues and to promote co-ordination of activity. For current membership grouping see appendix 2.

The Wrekin Forest Partnership does not hold or expend funds itself, but its work is supported through key partners including Shropshire Wildlife Trust, the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and Local government authorities. The Partnership will also, as part of its remit to promote positive management of the landscape, examine possible structures or delivery mechanisms for the best long-term benefit of the area, such as a free-standing charitable trust.

1.2.1 The Wrekin Forest Partnership: Terms of reference

The Wrekin Forest Partnership utilises the following fourteen terms of reference which help define the scope and parameters of activities that the group should be concerned with in relation to the management of the Wrekin Forest landscape. The Wrekin Forest Partnership seeks to.....

1. Support voluntary initiatives aimed at working together that contribute to the landscape conservation of the Wrekin Forest.
2. Be a representative group with a strong advisory role offering a consensus building function for the future landscape conservation of the Wrekin Forest.
3. Support the continued protection of the designated landscape elements, to enhance and extend where possible and promote complimentary research and monitoring throughout the Wrekin Forest.
4. Support the recommendations of the Wrekin Hills Geodiversity Plan, facilitate future review and monitoring of geological conservation, seek opportunities to enhance the management arrangements for the geological resource and promote wider understanding of the geodiversity of the Wrekin Forest.
5. Support the positive management of wildlife throughout the Wrekin Forest.

6. Work to support the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan in regard to protecting threatened habitats, seeking opportunities to restore or create wildlife habitats, support appropriate management and promote public understanding.
7. Support and promote environmentally sustainable agriculture through the development of beneficial collaborations, information sharing, advice and public education.
8. Support the active conservation of the archaeological and industrial heritage of the Wrekin Forest.
9. Promote, support and enhance relationships between the Wrekin Forest and the surrounding urban communities of Wellington and Telford and seek to support the development of a wider green space planning strategy which includes the Wrekin Forest.
10. Support the development of an integrated high quality multi user network of trails that supports positive exploration and enjoyment of the Wrekin Forest.
11. support community-wide initiatives to promote a cleaner, safer natural environment, seek to develop projects that contribute to raising public awareness of environmental issues, and provide a forum for Wrekin Forest-wide debate
12. Promote public understanding and appreciation of the natural, cultural and historical resources of the Wrekin Forest through supporting new research, literature and educational initiatives.
13. Promote the positive use of the Wrekin Forest for the purposes of health, leisure and recreation.
14. Promote and support opportunities to positively engage and involve the general public in the conservation of the Wrekin Forest.

1.2.2 Consultation

The process of writing The Wrekin Forest Plan 2015 – 20 commenced with the drafting of an agreed briefing document. This document was used to secure generous funding from the Jean Jackson Trust and in June 2014 plan preparation commenced. Regular sessions of the Wrekin Forest Partnership have reviewed and debated various elements of the Plan and the partnership has commented on two drafts.

Further consultation has been conducted with various stakeholders and in the late autumn 2014 Shropshire Wildlife Trust ran a public opinion survey. Local radio and newspapers helped raise awareness of the survey and a total of 267 respondents replied on-line or in hard copy form.

The Wrekin Forest Plan public opinion survey 2014 revealed that 65% of respondents considered inappropriate development as the 'greatest threat' to the future of the Wrekin Forest. Over 70% of the same group strongly agreed that they would like to see 'increased protection and recognition of the Wrekin Forest in planning policy. Many conceded that small scale developments might be acceptable and enhancements to improve countryside access and visitor infrastructure would be welcome.

1.3 The purpose of the Wrekin Forest Plan

The purpose of the Wrekin Forest Plan 2015-20 is to support and provide a framework for the protection, conservation and management of this special landscape for the next five years and beyond. The Plan has two elements, firstly as a statement to go forward and be considered in the current Shaping Places consultation and secondly it includes a series of options and activities that are considered by The Wrekin Forest Partnership as making a potentially positive impact on the future of The Wrekin Forest.

Landscape scale conservation can be defined as the careful management of change. It is about sharing and revealing the significance of places and ensuring their special qualities are protected, enhanced, understood and enjoyed by present and future generations. The Wrekin Forest Plan will help stakeholders in the future of the area work in collaborative ways to achieve consensus and support positive action to sustain and enhance the landscape and its unique natural and historic environmental values.

The Wrekin Forest Plan is not only a framework for positive landscape scale management but also a statement to be used to influence local and regional planning policy. The Wrekin Forest area straddles the boundary of two Unitary Authorities and it is intended that each will acknowledge through their local planning frameworks the importance of the Wrekin Forest. Cross border cohesion in planning policy is in line with Local Government protocols relating to inter-council working. The Plan seeks to initiate enhanced policy driven development control to prevent deterioration of the values identified within the document. The Plan aims to support specific statements being made in local policy to support the recognition of the Wrekin Forest in long term development planning strategy.

1.4 Vision and aims

1.4.1 The vision

The vision for the Wrekin Forest is for those concerned with the future of the area to work collaboratively to ensure that future generations continue to be able to enjoy access to an area rich in natural, cultural and historic heritage. That the residents and businesses of the area thrive and the unique values of the landscape are not degraded by neglect, poor understanding, or inappropriate development and management. The Wrekin Forest of the future will be welcoming to visitors yet resilient to visitor pressure; safely accessible to all travellers; a pleasant place to live and work; a refuge for wild creatures and wild places; and its story easily heard. Its expanding woodlands will bear timber and harbour wildlife, the farms cultivate wisely and the Forest's springs will deliver clean water to the Severn.

1.4.2 Aims

The aim of the Wrekin Forest Plan is to

- secure the natural, cultural and economic future of the area
- sustain and enhance the existing quality of the landscape
- strengthen the protection and management of existing areas of high quality designated wildlife habitat and create additional habitats which may provide buffers against development.
- establish corridors and stepping stones of green space to link habitat islands to allow movement of wildlife across the wider landscape.

1.5 Planning

The Wrekin Forest lies partially within the Borough of Telford & Wrekin and also partially within the boundary of Shropshire Council and includes all or part of the parishes of Wellington, Little Wenlock, Buildwas, Wroxeter and Uppington, and Leighton and Eaton Constantine.

The area is subject to European legislation and national and local planning policy and includes several statutory and non-statutory designations.

1.5.1 Designations

Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty

The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty [AONB] was designated in 1958 under the National Parks and Countryside Act 1949 and covers an area of 802 km². Mostly in the southern part of Shropshire, the north eastern extremity of the AONB takes in the Wrekin Hill, The Ercall and neighbouring lands and woods.

The Shropshire Hills AONB was designated to conserve and enhance natural beauty, which 'is not just about 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. The legal duty for the Shropshire Hills AONB rests with Shropshire Council supported by formal ties to Telford and Wrekin Council in respect of the part of the SHAONB which lies within the TWC boundary.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Within the Wrekin Forest are 3 Sites of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI]. These sites are designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and offer statutory protection for land notable for its geology and biodiversity.

The SSSI's in the Wrekin Forest area are The Wrekin Hill and Ercall, Lydebrook Dingle and Chermes Dingle. The Wrekin and Ercall SSSI was notified in 1986 and extends over an area of 283.3 hectares. The designation recognises the geological importance of the area and the natural interest. The SSSI network is regulated by Natural England who work with landowners to establish sympathetic management regimes.

Local Nature Reserves

There are 2 Local Nature Reserves in The Wrekin Forest 'The Ercall and Lawrence Hill' and 'Limekiln Woods'. Local Nature Reserves are established by Local Authorities to recognise the combined conservation and educational value of a natural site. The LNR agreement includes the imposition of bye-laws to help protect the site.

Regionally Important Geological Sites

Geological sites valued for their educational role or as important examples of rock type or geological process, are designated as Regionally Important Geological Sites [RIGS]. Shropshire Geological Society identified and designated the Wrekin Hill RIGS: the Ercall Quarry, Forest Glen, Maddocks Hill and Lydebrook Dingle.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Notable archaeological sites are protected by being on the Scheduled Ancient Monuments [SAM] register, which is administered by English Heritage under legislation from the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. The Wrekin Hill Fort and land near New Works are all designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. These sites should all have management plans and be shown on local authority development plans. In some cases management plans have not yet been formulated or agreed.

Wildlife Sites

Wildlife Sites are a non-statutory designation given by County Wildlife Trusts to assist the wider conservation of habitats and landscape. Informal management arrangements are sought with the owners to support sympathetic care of the sites concerned. The Wrekin Forest includes a number of Wildlife Sites including areas outside the statutory designations - The Wrekin Hill, Devils Dingle, Smalley Hill, Moreton Coppice and Simpson's Pool and Marmers Covert.

1.5.2 Designation summary table

Designation	Site /Area	Management Arrangement	By Whom?
AONB		Shropshire Hills	AONB Partnership
SSSI	The Wrekin and Ercall Chermes Dingle Lydebrook Dingle	Management Agreement with Landowners	NE Local Landowners
LNR	The Ercall and Lawrence Hill Limekiln Woods	Joint Management Agreement	TWC SWT
RIGS	Wrekin Hill Ercall Quarry Forest Glen Maddocks Hill Lydebrook Dingle	Informal agreements with landowners	SGS Local landowners
SAMs	The Wrekin Hillfort New Works	Management agreement with landowners	EH Local landowners
Wildlife Sites	The Wrekin Hill [Non-SSSI] Devils Dingle Marmers Covert Moreton Coppice and Simpson's Pool Leasowes Farm [2 species rich grasslands]	Informal agreements with landowners	
Other sites of nature conservation interest	Smalley Hill	Management agreement with landowners	Veolia/SWT

1.6 National Planning Policy

National planning policy is provided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) supported by the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).

1.6.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF was adopted in 2012. This framework informs all issues which relate to planning.

All policies contained in the NPPF are potentially applicable to the Wrekin Forest. The following are of particular relevance to the Wrekin Forest:

- Achieving sustainable development
- Supporting a prosperous rural economy (section 3)
- Promoting sustainable transport (section 4)
- Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes (section 6)
- Requiring good design (section 7)
- Promoting health communities (section 8)
- Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change (section 10)
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment (section 11)
- Conserving and enhancing the historic environment (section 12)

The NPPF states that; the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
 - recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
 - minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
 - preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability;
- And
- remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.'

In relation to agricultural land 'Local planning authorities should take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality.'

The NPPF supports the aim of enhancing and protecting both the Core area and the Wider Forest in terms of its value as a setting and function as part of a fully connected landscape. The NPPF states 'Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites,²⁴ so that protection is

commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.’

The NPPF requires local planning authorities to ‘set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure’. The Framework states that ‘great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.’

The NPPF seeks to minimize the impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity by requiring that planning policies that should:

- plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries;
- identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation;
- promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan;
- aim to prevent harm to geological conservation interests; and
- where Nature Improvement Areas are identified in Local Plans, consider specifying the types of development that may be appropriate in these Areas.

The NPPF requires that when ‘determining planning applications, local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the following principles:

- if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
- proposed development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest likely to have an adverse effect on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (either individually or in combination with other developments) should not normally be permitted. Where an adverse effect on the site’s notified special interest features is likely, an exception should only be made where the benefits of the development, at this site, clearly outweigh both the impacts that it is likely to have on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- development proposals where the primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be permitted;
- opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments should be encouraged.
- planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss; and
- the following wildlife sites should be given the same protection as European sites:
 - potential Special Protection Areas and possible Special Areas of Conservation;
 - listed or proposed Ramsar sites;²⁶ and
 - Sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on European sites, potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation, and listed or proposed Ramsar sites.

The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where development requiring appropriate assessment under the Birds or Habitats Directives is being considered, planned or determined.

'To prevent unacceptable risks from pollution and land instability, planning policies and decisions should ensure that new development is appropriate for its location. The effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, the natural environment or general amenity, and the potential sensitivity of the area or proposed development to adverse effects from pollution, should be taken into account.

1.7 Local Planning Policy

Local Planning policy applicable to the Wrekin Forest is currently the saved policies of the Wrekin Local Plan and the Telford & Wrekin Local Development Framework Core Strategy. The Development Plan documents will be replaced by the new Shaping Places Local Plan in 2016, which will be known as the Telford and Wrekin Local Plan when complete. .

1.7.1 Core Strategy 2006 – 2016

The Telford and Wrekin Council Core Strategy 2006 – 2016 sets out the borough's 'spatial development strategy' (i.e. what development should take place and where) and contains planning policies to deliver this strategy. A key principle of the Core Strategy is to support the development of sustainable communities. Local development should therefore actively seek to enhance climate change resilience ; minimize pollution on land, in water and in the air; minimize waste and make more efficient use of natural resources; protect and improve bio-diversity ; promote sustainable lifestyles; and create cleaner, safer and greener neighbourhoods for all.

Key policies relating to the Wrekin Forest are:

CS1 Homes – housing development will seek to provide every household in the Borough with an affordable, decent and appropriate home. The spatial distribution of new homes across the borough will be consistent with the Spatial Development strategy, the overwhelming majority of new homes will be built in the strategic sites of Lightmoor, Lawley and East Ketley. The type, size and tenure of new and improved homes will meet local need, and be delivered in a way that creates locally inclusive sustainable communities.

CS 7 Rural Area - Development within the rural area will be limited to that necessary to meet the needs of the area. It will be focused on the settlements of High Ercall, Tibberton and Waters Upton. New housing development will be expected to deliver affordable housing to the level of 40% of all such development. Outside of these settlements development will be limited and within the open countryside will be strictly controlled.

CS8 Regeneration - Development associated with regeneration initiatives will be supported, where it improves the quality of existing housing; assists the creation of job opportunities; Addresses the priorities identified within Neighbourhood Improvement Plans; and demonstrably meets identified rural regeneration needs.

CS9 - Accessibility and Social Inclusion

The Local Development Framework (LDF) aims to improve social inclusion and accessibility by making sure that everyone is afforded reasonable opportunity to access homes, work, Schools, recreation and open space, sports facilities, healthcare, food shops and other key Services.

- Development will promote sustainable forms of transport, by providing public transport, cycling and pedestrian routes to improve accessibility;
- New development will be located in existing centres to minimise the distance people travel so that they are accessible by public transport, walking and cycling;
- Increase the safety of travel, by addressing crime and fear of crime through implementing Urban design policy;
- Include measures that minimise the negative environmental impacts of travel including Congestion, air pollution and noise;
- Promote the advancement of telecommunications, whilst minimising their social, economic And environmental impact.

CS10 Community Facilities - The loss of existing land or buildings used for the benefit of the community will be resisted.

- Only where a lack of need is demonstrated or where acceptable alternative provision exists or is proposed concurrently, will development for non-community uses be considered.
 - The provision of new community facilities or improvements to existing community facilities to Meet the needs of local residents will be supported.
 - New facilities: should be located in Town, District, Local Centres and key rural settlements;
 - Facilities outside the above locations, should have good accessibility by foot, cycle and public Transport;
- New facilities that demonstrate both environmental and social benefits to the local community may exceptionally develop on open space.

CS11- Open Space - This policy seeks to protect and enhance areas of open space, both formal and informal. Development on open space will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that there will be significant community and environmental benefits delivered by a proposal.

CS 12 - Natural Environment - The natural environment of the Borough will be protected and enhanced. The natural environment of The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and that of the Borough's Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Areas of Special Landscape Character, Local Nature Reserves, Wildlife Sites and Ancient Woodland sites will be protected from development that has the potential to adversely impact on its sustainability. Biodiversity, including habitats, and geodiversity will be protected from development. Where appropriate, development that delivers enhancement will be consistent with local biodiversity targets and objectives.

The Core Strategy includes recognition of the importance of the network of designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and upholds its legal obligation to protect these sites in collaboration with Government Agencies and other interested parties. In section 3 the Core Strategy lists the natural assets of the Borough and assesses in general terms their condition and role in the future spatial development of the area.

The Core Strategy incorporates the aims and objectives of The Shropshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan (incorporating Telford & Wrekin, April 2006] which identifies the issues relating to the diversity of local plant and animal life. Specific issues are addressed in its Habitat and Species Action Plans. .

CS13 - Environmental Resources

The environmental resources of the Borough will be used with prudence within environmental limits.

- The production of energy from renewable sources will be supported where this is consistent with the statements within this policy and others contained within the Development Plan and national guidance.
- Development that reduces the risks of contaminated land to the environment and human health will be supported. That which has detrimental impacts on the environment, including the quality of land, air or water, will be resisted if satisfactory mitigation cannot be achieved.
- Development will avoid increasing the risk of flooding. Where appropriate and consistent with the policies of the Development Plan and local strategies, development will integrate measures for sustainable water management.

CS 14 - Cultural, Historic and Built Environment

The Borough's cultural, historic and built environmental assets will help underpin the overall quality of life for the community and visitors alike. These assets help deliver wider economic, social, and environmental objectives and along with the natural environmental assets, they create the Borough's local character and distinctiveness. The aim of this policy is to protect and enhance the Borough's existing, unique built and cultural assets and to deliver new development to support a rich cultural fabric by: Protecting and enhancing the historic environment, cultural and built heritage within the Borough to maintain and improve quality of life; Conserving and enhancing the cultural and heritage assets of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site; Supporting the creation of a cultural quarter and night time economy in Telford Town Centre; Encouraging sustainable tourism related development in the Borough; Locating new cultural activities and facilities in accessible locations; Using public art to further enhance local distinctiveness.

CS15 - Urban Design

The design of development will assist in creating and sustaining safe places, strengthening local identity and projecting a positive local image. It will positively influence the appearance and use of the local environment.

1.7.2 Wrekin Local Plan (saved policies)

As with the NPPF, all saved policies in the Wrekin Local Plan have the potential to have an effect in the Wrekin Forest area.

Relevant sections (and policies) are as follows :

- Chapter 2 – Environment – Future development is understood within the framework established within this chapter. The principles of sustainable development, the use of natural resources, environmental health and urban design are all considered and give rise to policy statements.
- Chapter 4 – housing – the concept of sustainable development underpins the Council's approach to housing policy. The majority of new housing will be built in the urban centres with a small amount being constructed in rural areas. Rural developments must meet certain criteria for instance in terms of layout , reflection of local character, avoiding negative impingement on a

rural settlements wider landscape setting. The various policies will control development within the Wrekin Forest, though not prevent some development.

Chapter 8 – Countryside and open land – this chapter of the Wrekin Local Plan review the extent of the open land and countryside found within the Borough and sets out a series of policy statements. Resistance to loss of open countryside, infilling, harm to designated areas and losses to the setting of the urban areas are all made clear within the section. The following are some of the relevant policies from the plan in more detail:

OL2 Designated Areas.

This policy states that the Council will not permit development which is likely to adversely affect, either directly or indirectly, the following sites of national importance unless the development is of an overriding national or international interest and there are no alternative sites.

- The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest

The policy also states that development which is likely to adversely affect either directly or indirectly, the following sites of regional and local importance will not be permitted unless the applicant can demonstrate that the benefits of the proposal significantly outweigh the importance of the area:-

1. Areas of Special Landscape Character
2. Local Nature Reserves
3. Wildlife Sites
4. Ancient Woodland Sites as listed in the Shropshire Inventory of Ancient Woodland. Ancient woodlands are those which have been continuously wooded since at least 1600.

The policy states that 'The loss of any habitat must be fully compensated for by the creation or enhancement of other habitats of equal or greater value in the local area.'

AONB, SSSI, LNR all have a statutory basis. "Development control decisions will take full account of the specific factors which led to the designation of these areas and help to sustain or indeed further the purpose of the designation" [8.3.2 Wrekin Local Plan 1995-2006].

Saved policy OL6 Open Land states that throughout the District, the Council will protect from development locally important incidental open land within or adjacent to built-up areas where that land contributes to the character and amenity of the area, has value as a recreational space or importance as a natural habitat. Under this policy many areas of land of low biodiversity value can also be considered as locally valuable due to the range of other values.

Policy OL11 Woodland and trees

This policy states that the Council will seek to retain and enhance the contribution that trees and woodland, (especially areas of ancient woodland) make to the landscape character of the District. This will be promoted by:-

- a) Making Tree Preservation Orders, where appropriate, to protect trees and woodland areas of significant amenity value;
- b) Resisting development proposals that would result in the loss of trees which make a valuable contribution to the character of the landscape, a settlement or its setting or have a significant ecological value. ;

c) Supporting initiatives for woodland management, tree planting and creation of new hedgerows, where appropriate, through legal agreements.

Policy OL12 Open land and contributions from new development

In considering development proposals, the Council will seek the following in relation to landscaping and the provision of open land:-

1. an appropriate landscape setting in accordance with the location, nature and scale of the development;
2. protection and appropriate enhancement works to areas of Green Network which are clearly related to the development site in physical or visual terms;
3. footpath, bridleway and cycleway links, to replace those lost as a result of the development, or considered necessary as a result of the development;
4. protection and appropriate enhancement of important ecological or archaeological sites and wildlife habitats that may be adversely affected by the development;
5. protection of all legally protected species affected by the development;
6. Where a recreation or sports facility, or other feature is lost through development, a suitable replacement facility or feature of equal or enhanced quality and accessibility must be provided.

Telford and Wrekin Local Plan 2015 [previously known as Shaping Places]

The Telford and Wrekin Local Plan 2015 is the name of the new Development Plan for the Telford and Wrekin area and will replace the LDF Core Strategy and Wrekin Local Plan saved policies.

It will set out policies and priorities for development in relation to housing, employment, green space, retail, local centres, and transport and community facilities until 2031.

A key element of the Telford and Wrekin Local Plan will be the recognition and promotion of green infrastructure. The Wrekin Forest is recognised in the plan as a 'Strategic landscape' and given status in Policy NE4 and in text in paragraph 6.23.

1.7.3 Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure is the collective term for all green space and natural features and is a term which is both recognized by the NPPF and has been adopted by all new Local Plans in the UK. It includes all public and private green areas such as parks, sports pitches and private gardens as well as all urban and rural green features such as highway verges, street trees and planters, hedges, woods and fields.

As part of the Shaping Places process Telford and Wrekin Council have produced two key evidence base documents relating to Green Infrastructure:

Green Infrastructure Framework Evidence & Analysis document.

This document has been produced to provide a database of the current provision and performance of green infrastructure in Telford and Wrekin. The Evidence & Analysis document shows that over 90% of the borough is green infrastructure. Green infrastructure has been, and remains, a significant component in the planning of the borough. It is key to its image and identity, its economic prosperity and its social health and well-being as well as the borough's sustainability and resilience to climate change.

Local Green Infrastructure Needs Study

This study has assessed the existing provision of green infrastructure in the borough against local need. This study replaces the previous PPG 17 Open Space, Sports and Recreation Facilities Study.

<http://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20172/planningpolicyandstrategy/556/greeninfrastructure>

Both of these documents will provide the evidence for policies on green infrastructure in the Shaping Places Local Plan. They:

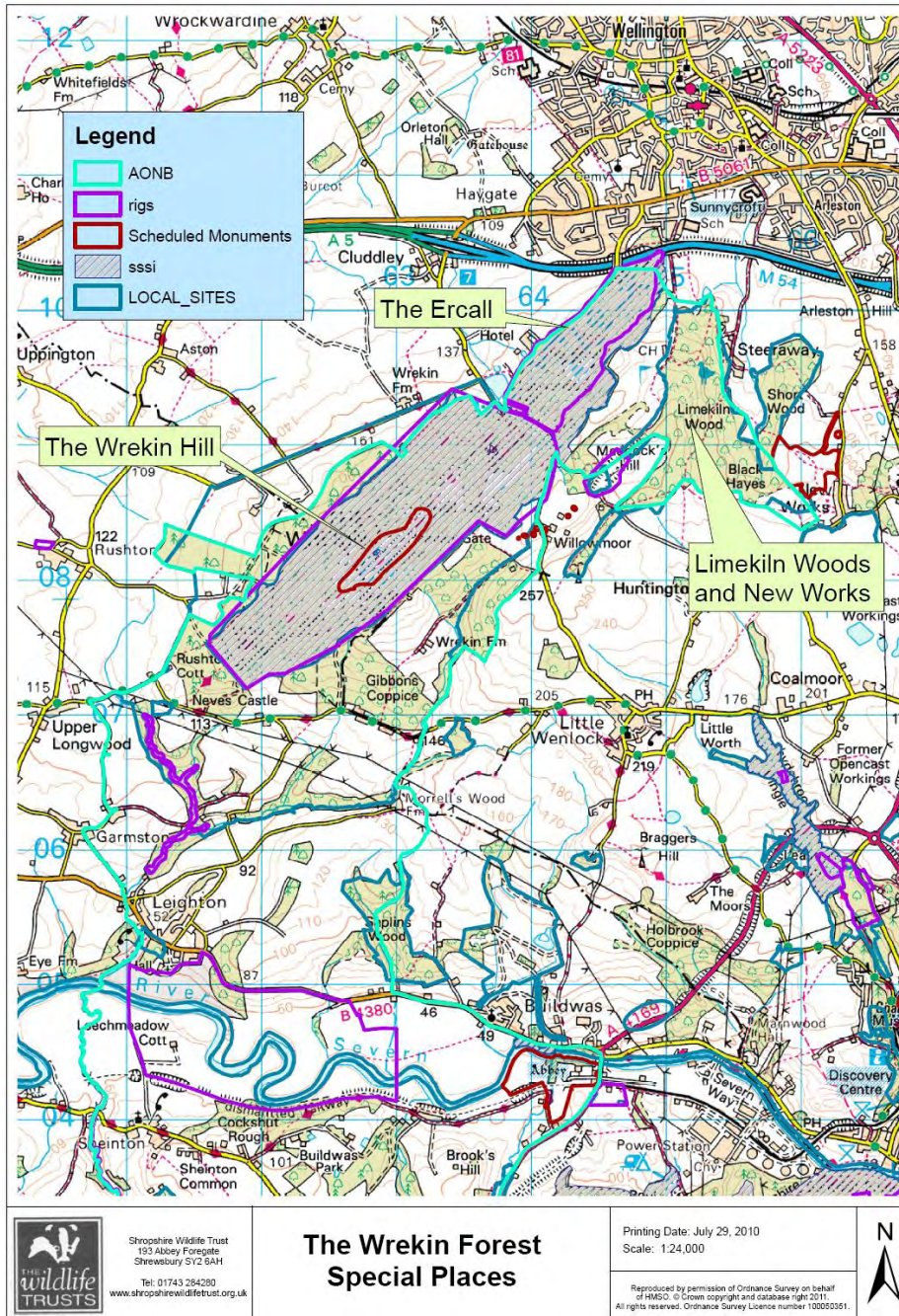
- Provide a greater understanding of the many types of green and natural resources that are in the borough and what they can do
- Provide more information (Evidence & Analysis) about the borough green and natural resources so that the council can make more informed and therefore better decisions about how to plan, design and manage the green and natural resources
- Help the council improve its planning policies on the planning and design of green infrastructure
- Help the council improve the planning, design and management of its green resources
- Provide local neighbourhoods and communities with the borough wide context about green and natural resources, consequently helping communities better understand how to plan, design and manage their green and natural resources in greater detail
- Assist in understanding the relationship to and contribution of green infrastructure to the economic, social and environmental life and planning of the borough

Both documents demonstrate that the Wrekin Forest contains a suite of high value sites which score highly against green infrastructure values with a range of benefits such as health and well-being, aesthetic value, water features, locally available open space, social value and biodiversity values.

Section 2: A description of the area and key issues

The Wrekin Forest is a rural landscape which includes the Wrekin and Ercall Hills (which are the northern extent of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and the rural area surrounding it extending north and east to the urban areas of Telford and Wellington, and south to the River Severn. Maps 1 and 2 below indicate the Wrekin Forest area in general, but this Plan does not define an exact area for the Wrekin Forest. Particular initiatives suggested by the Plan may work over different areas relevant to that activity.

Map 1: The Wrekin Forest Special Places



Map 2: The Wider Wrekin Forest



The Wrekin Forest lies within the County of Shropshire and overlaps the administrative boundaries of Shropshire Council, Telford and Wrekin Council and Wellington Town Council. The Parish Councils of Little Wenlock, Buildwas, Wroxeter and Uppington, and Leighton and Eaton Constantine also fall wholly or partially within the boundaries of the Wider Forest.

2.1 The Wrekin Forest: An ancient Landscape

At the heart of the Wrekin Forest is The Wrekin Hill [407m] an isolated whaleback of very old volcanic rock. Though never actually a volcano, it rears up powerfully and steeply nevertheless. It has a distinctive ridge-like profile and is part of a South-West to North-east trending series of hills. The Wrekin Hill is the best known hill in Shropshire and as such is a cultural icon. A popular saying refers to going 'all round the Wrekin' to imply a long indirect journey or rambling way of speaking and a local toast offers greetings 'Here's to all friends round The Wrekin'.

The Wrekin Hill is the subject of a number of local legends, the most involve giants. Long standing public interest and attachment has meant it has been, and is, the focus for major celebrations, cultural and sports events. In the past the Wrekin Wakes involved a battle between local farm labourers and colliers from the pits, this particular event was stopped by the local clergy because of its rowdiness! The recent millennium was marked by a lit beacon on the hill and there are annual Wrekin Fell races and a barrel race. The Wrekin Hill means many things to many people. For some a place of homecoming, remembrance, celebration or re-union, its human living dimension is not to be underestimated.

The Wrekin Forest has seen the impact of man for millennia, a 2500 year old hill-fort encircles the summit of the Hill, a Roman road skirts the northerly limits of the Forest and industrial scars from all ages mark the land. In medieval times The Wrekin Hill stood at the centre of a large area under Royal Forest Law, extending to Albrighton, nearly reaching Shrewsbury, down towards Bridgnorth and out just beyond Shifnal to the east and north up near Newport. Forest Laws had been imposed following the Norman invasion of 1066, and were operated through a system of local courts that set fines for damage to trees and game. By the 1300s the Royal Forests of Shropshire had been broken up into smaller estates, which remained the pattern of ownership right up to the modern era.

The hinterland of the Hill includes numerous pastures and arable fields broken to the south and east by a series of deep incised and wooded dingles, most of which take their respective watercourses to the River Severn. The Wrekin Hill, the Ercall and Lawrence Hills and the eastern Little Wenlock plateau are covered in mixed woodland and distinct open areas which are either small assarts of pasture [an assart is the medieval term for the clearing of woodland to create new farmland], quarrying traces or restored open cast coal mining areas. The tops of the hills carry small areas of lowland heath, the Wrekin Hill summit being open with grassy heath and bracken. Many of these habitats are of national, regional and local importance and have been accorded designated legal status and protected in law. The Wrekin Forest embraces the densest concentration of high quality natural environments within the Telford and Wrekin Council boundary. At a national level The Wrekin Forest forms the northern extremity of the Shropshire Hills AONB.

As well as the bare rock faces left behind by quarrying, natural outcrops occur on the Wrekin itself, these all have evocative names and associated legends. The Needle's Eye, for instance, is a cleft in one of the outcrops, partially blocked by a boulder dislodged by the Bishop's Castle earthquake. To pass through the Needle's Eye is part of the initiation to become a true Salopian. The geological story exposed either literally or through the shape of the land is considered one of the most complete in the UK.

The Wrekin Forest is an area of countryside constrained on two sides by urban development, on the third by the River Severn and bounded on the west by a mix of high quality agricultural land. Many opportunities exist to strengthen the natural features that together create the distinctive character of the area and support its ecological value. The Wrekin Forest offers numerous excellent viewpoints to

appreciate the regional context of this special iconic set of hills and woodlands, particularly looking south towards the Wenlock Edge and the rest of the Shropshire Hills.

It is easy to see and appreciate the visual appeal and scenic quality of the Wrekin Forest and recent developments in Landscape Character assessment have made it easier to measure their intrinsic aesthetic values. Research into the presence of rare features and elements is important to their future conservation. Natural England's Natural Landscape Character mapping has identified six landscape character elements that are found in the Wrekin Forest, these are Estate Farmlands, High Volcanic Hills and Slopes, Wooded hills and Farmlands, Wooded Estate Lands, Wooded River Gorge and Coalfields.

Over 2500 people are resident within the Wider Forest. Local businesses include farms, forestry, public houses and a hotel, waste management, power generation and small home-based enterprises. The local estates also support employment. The Wrekin Forest provides outdoor recreational opportunities for many thousands of local people. They visit to walk, cycle, and ride horses, to exercise, appreciate wildlife and enjoy the solitude or the company of others. One of the many functions of a beautiful landscape is to work as an antidote to modern living, providing peace and quiet, a slower pace, modest adventure and fresh air. Over 160,000 people live within 5 miles of the Wrekin Forest, a significant number will visit the Wrekin Forest each year [80,000 TWC Estimate 2006]. Visitor impacts can have negative or positive effects on the natural environment. The Wrekin Forest is highly valued as a natural asset for local people as confirmed in a recent public consultation [Wrekin Forest Plan survey 2014]

Key Issue

A key challenge to ensuring the protection and appropriate landscape scale management of The Wrekin Forest is the facilitation of communication between a multitude of parties, interests, users, residents, agencies and organisations. A healthy and functioning network of communications will promote better co-ordination of management, issue resolution and future planning whether related to transport, economic activity, leisure and recreation, appropriate development, biodiversity and geodiversity conservation, historic environment protection and education.

2.2 Biodiversity

The Wrekin Forest includes a mix of habitats such as ancient woodlands, wooded dingles, the early successional self-seeded grasslands of the quarry floors and a network of ponds and flushes. The varied underlying geology ranging from acidic igneous to calcareous limestone, impervious clay to well drained sandstone producing a multiplicity of soil types to match. The mixed countryside of the Wrekin Forest together forms a significant and considerable biodiversity resource. Continuing fragmentation and loss of habitat, development pressure, visitor intensity and other factors can lead to a decline in the ecological value of our countryside. In woodland for instance over-browsing by deer leads to setbacks in coppice regrowth, grazing of spring flora, deterioration in optimum conditions for invertebrates and loss of bird diversity. The removal or tidying of deadwood beyond safety considerations leads to the loss of habitat for invertebrate deadwood specialists, some of our rarest species, and eventually the decline of some of our best known woodland specialists such as the Great Spotted Woodpecker.

In this section we will look at the various habitat types found within The Wrekin Forest, review management approaches and suggest a range of activities that might make a positive contribution to the future landscape scale conservation of biodiversity interest in the Wrekin Forest. The conservation activities will be guided by the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and the principles of the Lawton Report – 'More, Better and Connected'.

2.2.1 The UK Biodiversity Action Plan [2002]

Nationally the goal of the UK BAP is 'to conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity through all appropriate mechanisms'. To meet this aim the following objectives have been agreed by a wide range of statutory and non-governmental partners that is to conserve and where practical enhance:

1. overall population and natural ranges of native species and the quality of wildlife habitats and ecosystems.
2. internationally important and threatened species, habitats and ecosystems
3. species,, habitats and natural and managed ecosystems that are characteristic of local areas
4. the biodiversity of natural and semi-natural habitats where this has been diminished over recent decades.

The UK BAP has now been devolved into county based BAPs and supported by legislation such as the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan 2002 lists key habitats and species of national and international importance found within the county of Shropshire which for nature conservation purposes includes Telford and Wrekin. The Plan established a set of action plans for each habitat and species found within the county boundary. The Wrekin Forest area includes the following BAP habitats and for the purposes of this plan the objectives listed under the local BAP will be adopted as the objectives of the Wrekin Forest Plan.

Key Issue

Despite colossal efforts in the UK to meet the aims of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, species and habitats are still declining in number and extent. The Wrekin Forest Plan must aim to halt and then reverse the national trend and in doing so create more, high quality habitats with effective connecting links between to restore population size and resilience in our most threatened species.

Biodiversity 2020 [2010]

Biodiversity 2020 is UK government strategy published in 2010 which focuses on delivering actions in four areas

- a more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea
- putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy
- reducing environmental pressures
- improving our knowledge

Conserving biodiversity in England has long depended on partnership, involving statutory, voluntary, academic and business sectors, and the public. To harness this collective effort, the strategy established a network of Local Nature Partnerships across England – supported by a £1m fund in 2011/12.

The independent review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network, chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton, concluded that England's collection of wildlife areas (both legally protected areas and others) does not currently represent a coherent and resilient ecological network capable of responding to the challenges of climate change and other pressures. The review concluded that establishing such a network would effectively conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services, delivering many benefits to people, while also making efficient use of scarce land and resources.

Effectively establishing coherent and resilient ecological networks on land and at sea requires a shift in emphasis, away from piecemeal conservation actions and towards a more effective, more integrated,

landscape scale approach. The strategy supported the creation of 12 Nature improvement Areas, set targets to increase the proportion of SSSI's in favourable condition and agreed a programme of action for the recovery of priority species.

The crucial role of people lies at the heart of the policy and is expressed by encouragements to getting more children outdoors, establishing a new green areas designation thereby empowering communities to protect local environments important to them and recognising the role of nature in the services it provides for us.

Biodiversity 2020 recognises the need to ensure biodiversity is taken into account by decision-makers within sectors which have the greatest direct influence on our biodiversity, and how important it is to reduce direct pressures on our biodiversity. The approach will vary from sector to sector, covering a variety of uses of land and sea:

- **Agriculture** – The government states that it will improve the delivery of environmental outcomes from agricultural land management practices, whilst increasing food production by, for example, reviewing how they use advice, incentives and agri-environment schemes
- **Forestry** – Forestry policy aims to bring a greater proportion of existing woodlands into sustainable management and expand the area of woodland in England.
- **Planning and Development** – Through reforms of the planning system, the government will take a strategic approach to planning for nature. They aim to retain the protection and improvement of the natural environment as core objectives of the planning system.
- **Water Management** – By utilising a river basin planning approach the UK government aim to protect water ecosystems, including habitats and species. They will also promote approaches to flood and erosion management which conserve the natural environment and improve biodiversity.

A good evidence base is an essential element of delivering the strategy effectively. It will help make sure the right things are in the right place, and using resources effectively, focus on action that will have the most impact. Biodiversity 2020 is the most recent national legislation consolidating and developing on the learning of the previous period of nature conservation. It most clearly supports large scale conservation of whole landscapes and helps to underpin the aspirations of The Wrekin Forest Plan.

In the following sections we will focus on specific habitat types found in The Wrekin Forest.

2.2.2 Woodlands

The Wrekin Forest is the largest area of woodland in east Shropshire. Past management in the Wrekin Forest has been characterised by harvesting for timber, coppicing for fuel, either for charcoal or as cord for firewood. The Wrekin Forest includes UK BAP woodland types – ‘Upland Oakwood’, ‘Wet woodland’ and ancient [pre-1600] and other areas of woodland of local and regional significance.

The woodlands of the Wrekin Forest are divided geographically into two groups:

1. The Dingle woods of the south and east
2. The Wrekin and Little Wenlock

Within the various woodlands are a wide range of woodland types, which can be distinguished using the National Vegetation Classification. The NVC system set up by the Joint Council For Nature Conservation is used to map these smaller variations. There is considerable scope to improve the woodland mapping across the Wrekin Forest and would be a valuable area for further work to aid woodland management. Structure varies from plantation groups of conifers and broadleaves, high forest, coppice and secondary woodland types.

The woodlands support a wide range of wildlife, including large numbers of fallow deer, all three species of British woodpecker and woodland specialists such as the Pied flycatcher. Deadwood is an under-rated resource within woodlands, it provides a considerable food supply and needs to be present not only as logs on the ground but also as aerial branches.

Woodland management aims vary, from timber production, shooting, public access, biodiversity and coppice crafts. The multiple aims of productivity, leisure and biodiversity are not incompatible and can work in very complementary ways.

Fallow and Muntjac deer are present in the Wrekin Forest in numbers unknown at present. Browsing evidence is found within the woodlands and other areas. Browsing pressure has reduced natural regeneration significantly in many woods. Recent public trials with deer fencing have demonstrated the need for deer management. In parts of the Wrekin Forest professional stalkers are employed to control deer population as part of plant protection measures. Deer are highly mobile and consequently control of numbers has to be carried out over areas which will be in multiple ownership. Public concern has been expressed over safety.

The Forestry Commission recommend the formation of a local Deer Management Group to record and monitor deer populations, co-ordinate control measures, encourage development of launds [deer grazing areas], and other co-operative actions to bring about a sustainable deer population within the Wrekin Forest area. The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust with a professional stalker have been actively developing a Deer Management Group centred in the woodlands in the Ironbridge Gorge. The group have held public consultation meetings and established a network of landowners who support an ongoing programme of deer control.

Not all landowners have agreed to join the group. Public concerns remain in regard to shooting in publicly accessible areas, Rights of Way are not closed during shooting periods and un-licensed ‘poaching’ activity has been reported. Public awareness and understanding of the reasons for deer management are varied and constant public education and engagement is required.

The Severn Gorge deer group have initiated discussions with landowners within the Wrekin Forest. In the long term they hope to extend co-ordinated deer management across both the Wrekin Forest, Ironbridge and Wenlock Edge. Other partners involved in the Deer Management Group include The Deer Initiative , National Trust , West Mercia Police, BASC [British Association of Shooting and Conservation] , Forestry Commission , Natural England and a number of private landowners. Shropshire Wildlife Trust also support the co-ordinated management of wild deer populations.

Tree health concerns in relation to diseases such as Phytophthora ramorum and Ash Dieback disease [Chalara] will see changes in the woodland composition though overall woodland cover should remain stable unless development is allowed to reduce woodland area.

Effective communication with the public has been patchy and has led to conflict and confusion. The Raby Estate in response to the need to improve communication with visitors to the Wrekin woodlands set up a website in 2014 - <http://www.rabyestateshropshire.co.uk>. The website provides background information about the management of the woods, and in the news section are details of the current management activities.

Key Issue

The woodlands of The Wrekin Forest dominate and characterise the landscape. The challenge of long term management is the adoption of a multi-functional approach, aiming to produce timber, enhance wildlife values, accommodate public access, protect water sources and maintain landscape aesthetics . Whole landscape collaboration is required to manage plant disease , deer browsing pressure and climate change.

2.2.3 Veteran trees

In 2008 SWT commissioned a survey to record the veteran trees within the Wrekin Forest project boundary. All records were uploaded to the Woodland Trust on-line mapping register. The survey identified 45 notable, veteran and ancient trees. Notable trees are those which have cultural associations, for instance named or planted as commemorations. Veterans have a significant girth [over 4m] , ancient trees exceed this size and may have characteristics of hollowing or spreading. The veteran trees of the Wrekin Forest are vulnerable to inappropriate management, root compaction and natural senescence.

Veteran trees are significant elements in the Shropshire landscape. They have great historical and cultural value and are particularly valuable ecologically when found in association with other habitats such as unimproved grassland and wetland areas. They support a wide range of species, including invertebrates, fungi, bats and birds that depend on them for all or part of their lifecycles. The Wrekin Forest has a number of unrecorded large Yew and Rowan trees. Some veteran trees have names, or feature in their own story.

It is very important that veteran trees are found, recorded, and action taken to conserve and protect them. Legislation allows for the protection of single trees, under a Tree Preservation Order issued by the Local Authority. Organisations such as the Ancient Tree Forum and the Tree Warden Scheme support the location, measurement and recording of veteran trees.

Key Issue

Un-recorded, mis-understood and subject to inappropriate management the oldest living organisms in the UK are lost at an alarming rate. The Wrekin Forest contains a high number of veteran and notable trees, sensitive management is required to conserve these unique natural survivors.

2.2.4 Hedgerows

Many Shropshire hedgerows are very valuable for wildlife, have considerable potential for enhancement, can assist with the management of soils and surface water flows and altogether have an important role in connecting otherwise fragmented habitats. The hedgerows of the Wrekin Forest record the historical division of the land, they mark ancient boundaries, periods of Enclosure and represent new wildlife opportunities.

Within the Wrekin Forest many of the hedgerows may have a long and unbroken timeline but many have been removed to remove the coal, limestone and other mineral resources from beneath the ground. In most cases the hedge-lines have been replanted, such as Swan Hill, Huntington Lane, Leasowes Farm and Steeraway Farm. Opportunities still remain for new planting to enhance connections and provide migration corridors for wildlife such as birds and small mammals to move across the landscape. On the open cast areas many of the original hedgerows were lost, since the restoration these lines have in numerous cases been re-planted, and notably at The Leasowes Farm, in the same location as before the coal extraction.

Hedgerows are linear features that can be rich in species. An integral part of the biodiversity value of hedgerows is the vegetation of adjacent banks, ditches, verges and field margins. In less intensively farmed areas, road verges, banks and hedges provide an important refuge for species associated with grassland and open woodland. Many birds rely on hedgerows and associated vegetation for nesting and feeding. Bats travel alongside hedges and several species roost in large hedgerow trees.

Mammals such as dormice use mature hedges as path ways for migration and dispersal. Shrubs and flowering plants of hedgerows attract a great variety of invertebrates. Hedgerow shrubs such as hawthorn, blackthorn and holly all carry blossom and berries which are vital food sources for birds and mammals. Hedges create shelter, affect the microclimate and can with or without appropriate fencing form an effective stock barrier.

The network of hedges contributes strongly to the landscape character of the Wrekin Forest. It is well worth conserving the existing network, supporting new planting and promoting good hedgerow management. The new agri-environment schemes support hedgerow plans and offer financial aid for hedge laying. The priorities for hedgerows include preventing any further loss, new planting, supporting good management, surveying, monitoring and education.

Key Issue

Though recognising the intrinsic value of hedgerows as boundaries and connecting features across the landscape they still require protection and sensitive management. Over time hedges need restoration, cyclical cutting or laying. New hedges enhance landscape values, help intercept surface water run-off and provide wildlife corridors for a range of wildlife species. Sections of hedge are lost and not replaced impoverishing the green linkages across the wider landscape provided by healthy hedgerow webs.

2.2.5 Species rich grassland

Grassland types include neutral and calcareous communities, many of which are the most threatened habitats in the UK and have faced declines of up to 97% since the mid 20th Century. Smalley Hill includes a large area of rough grassland and a network of micro habitats associated with the slumping of the capping material of this restored land fill site. The rough grassland makes good cover for small mammals.

Species rich grassland requires particular conditions to persist. Low intensity grazing, low or no inputs of fertilisers, scrub control and where possible cut and remove hay meadow regimes are all elements of the conservation of species rich grassland. Traditional management of wildflower meadows requires an annual cut of the vegetation, towards the end of the growing season i.e. during late August. This gives flowering plants sufficient time to set seed for the following year and allows invertebrates to utilise nectar sources.

Species-rich grasslands are one of the most threatened and rapidly disappearing habitats in Shropshire. Grasslands are most valuable when they have not been improved by re-seeding, ploughing or the application of artificial fertilisers and herbicides. They encompass traditionally managed hay meadows, old pastures and other undisturbed areas of grasslands such as churchyards, and roadside verges. Fine examples of traditionally managed wildflower grasslands still remain at Leasowes Farm. Semi-improved grassland is easily damaged by over-grazing, compaction and poaching of soils.

Species rich grasslands are found on both neutral and calcareous soils, all determined by underlying rock type. Unimproved neutral grassland typically contains a range of grasses such as crested dog's tail, sweet vernal grass and meadow foxtail, often with a colourful array of wildflowers such as yellow rattle, oxeye daisy and black knapweed.

Calcareous grassland occurs over limestone or other base-rich rocks, and the soils are typically thin and nutrient poor. Many plants have adapted to these conditions and calcareous grasslands can be extremely rich in species. The sward is composed of a wide range of grasses, including quaking grass, various sedges, many types of orchids, fairy flax, yellow-wort and rock-rose. Both types of grassland can be found in the Wrekin Forest and are threatened by inappropriate management, by under grazing or over grazing, enrichment by fertiliser or loss through damage or development.

A number of the species rich grasslands of the Wrekin Forest lie within protected sites such as the acid grasslands on the summit of the Wrekin Hill or the calcareous grasslands found in Limekiln Wood. The first is a Site of Special Scientific Interest [SSSI] and the second a Local Nature Reserve [LNR]. Acid grassland is a rare habitat in Shropshire and occurs in isolated fragments where steep slopes have prevented agricultural improvement.

Not all of the species-rich grasslands within the Wrekin Forest are recorded or monitored, and are vulnerable to neglect, loss or unsympathetic management. A single application of fertiliser can change soil conditions radically and lead to loss of diversity.

Key Issue

Wildflower rich grasslands are immensely vulnerable to loss. In the UK over 85% of our wildflower rich meadows have been lost since 1945. The small, fragmented species rich grasslands of The Wrekin Forest need recognition, protection and appropriate management to ensure their continued existence.

2.2.6 Heathland

The remaining heathland in Shropshire is particularly valuable and consists of small fragments of previously much larger areas, or larger blocks of heathland transitional between lowland heath and upland moorland.

Lowland heathland is characterised by dwarf shrubs such as heather, cross-leaved heath and bilberry, in association with gorse, broom and a number of grasses. It is typically found as part of a mosaic of habitats including scrub, woodland, grassland, bog, open water and bare ground. Lowland heathland tends to be

associated with nutrient –poor acidic soils and is generally found below 250 metres in altitude. This habitat is particularly important for a range of birds, reptiles particularly the common lizard and invertebrates, many not found on upland heaths.

Shropshire’s lowland heaths are generally small isolated fragments dispersed across the county. The Biodiversity Action Plan seeks to prevent any further loss of heathland , look for opportunities to create and extend existing heathland, encourage sympathetic management and promote understanding of the unique value of heathland for the wildlife of Shropshire . Heathland is a man-made habitat which without intervention or management will turn into woodland or is more usually lost to development in lowland areas.

The Wrekin Forest includes two areas of heathland, on top of the Wrekin Hill and in patches across the higher parts of the Ercall and Lawrence Hill. In 2012 Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the Wrekin Forest Volunteers surveyed over 35 heathland locations in Telford and Wrekin. Conservation works following on from this survey were undertaken at Lawrence Hill and the Ercall quarries. Heath ladybirds were recorded and Common lizards have been found, which favour the warm heathland habitat. The Wrekin Hill heathland is found mainly within the ramparts of the Hillfort, and It is much reduced in extent by the encroachment of bracken and trampling pressure.

Key Issue

Heathland without sensitive and appropriate management is prone to revert to woodland. The scattered heathlands of The Wrekin Forest all require gentle and targeted management to maintain the balance between open ground, heather/bilberry and occasional trees.

2.2.7 Standing open water, rivers and steams

A number of defunct drinking water reservoirs can be found in the Wrekin Forest and a new set of pools have been created in the Devils Dingle. Bodies of open water are important refuges for aquatic plants and invertebrates. Small pools may support populations of amphibians and harbour plants lost in other locations due to neglect, pollution or total loss. Reed bunting is known to breed at Smalley Hill favouring the marginal stands of common reed found around the edges of one of the pools.

To be of maximum value for invertebrates and amphibians, it is recommended that 50 – 60% of a pond area is maintained as open water i.e. the pond maintains a marginal fringe of vegetation but does not become choked with vegetation or completely over-shaded by tree canopy. Timing of maintenance operations is crucial, late autumn works will avoid harm to amphibian populations as by this time they will have left the water for terrestrial habitats till the breeding season comes around again.

The Wrekin Forest due to its hilly nature and prominence includes the source headwaters for the Lydebrook, Beanhill Brook, and a tributary of the Ketley Brook, Bell Brook, Chermes Brook, Limekiln Brook, Holbrook and Saplins Brook. The protection of water quality is paramount as ultimately all these watercourses reach the Severn, some quite directly but others via the Tern to the north. There is potential to work with natural processes and slow the flows in these watercourses to provide silt interception and mitigate extreme weather events. Rivers and streams are vital riparian links between fragmented habitats and across landscapes.

Wetlands are very diverse and valuable, for instance reed-bed is a UK Priority Habitat and one of the most important habitats for birds in the UK. The Wrekin Forest includes small areas of reed-bed, - at Orleton

reservoir, Smalley Hill and Devils Dingle for instance. Reed-beds like other wetland habitats have seen catastrophic declines globally, been drained or polluted so much so that they are subject to international protection like no other habitat type. Within The Wrekin Forest small areas of reed-bed require appropriate management and if possible expansion.

The TWC Green Infrastructure Strategy states that it consider some types of Green infrastructure as a 'natural flood defence and should be utilised as such. Flood plains and areas around rivers should be kept free from development so they can perform this function.' It is generally accepted and supported by research that woodlands and trees can also help prevent flooding by slowing the rate at which water reaches the ground through infiltration and interception. The Green Infrastructure Strategy also considers that In terms of sustaining a water supply green infrastructure provides a permeable surface which helps to sustain infiltration to aquifers, recharges groundwater and maintains base flow in rivers.'

A localised catchment based approach in The Wrekin Forest would bring an integrated response and positive land management to protect water quality, enhance ecological function and reduce flooding impacts in relation to the significant number of watersheds which dissect this landscape.

Key Issue

Without a catchment based approach to the care of the watercourses which spring from The Wrekin Hills it will be all too easy to let water quality degrade, miss opportunities to manage extreme peak flows and reduce the quantity of water available for crop production and drinking purposes.

2.2.8 Protected species

The Wrekin Forest includes a very wide range of habitat types and each has a distinctive plant and animal community. It is beyond the scope of this plan to list all those plants or attempt a detailed assessment of the status of these communities. Suffice to say that all wildflowers are protected in law from collection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and its following amendments. Many of the plants and animals which make up the natural heritage of the Wrekin Forest are protected from persecution and deliberate damage and loss. A number of species are protected under European law, such as the occasional breeding pairs of Peregrine falcon [*Falco falco*].

A superficial review of the European Protected Species records for The Wrekin Forest reveals the regular presence of a number of rare and endangered animals. Brown hare which has suffered a steady decline in numbers and distribution in Britain and throughout Europe has been seen on the fields close by Little Wenlock. Fragmentation of suitable habitat has led to the subsequent isolation of ever smaller territories.

A SWT survey in 2008 recorded Daubentons, Common and Soprano pipistrelle and Brown long-eared on the main track down The Wrekin and another bat recorder had noted a Brandt's bat in Limekiln Wood LNR. All bats are protected by EU and UK Law. Most bat species have seen massive declines of up to 60 to 70% over the last 50 years. The retention of roosting sites such as old veteran trees and potential breeding locations is important to the on-going survival of bat species. The Core area and the Wider Forest all carry the potential to support viable bat populations.

Farmland birds are a key sustainability indicator but have seen declining numbers over the last 50 years. 8 of this group of birds are Red or Amber listed as Birds of Conservation Concern, 5 of which are UK BAP Priority species. Recorded from time to time in The Wrekin Forest we have the lapwing, which is an Amber listed Bird of Conservation Concern. The lapwing is an inland wader and favours sites which offer a

range of suitable breeding and foraging characteristics. Changes in land management has have reduced the availability of suitable land types at key times of year. Lapwing has experienced at least a 60% decline since the mid-eighties. With luck it is possible to encounter Snipe; they require floodplain grassland and other wet marginal habitats to breed. Opportunities to restore these habitats are considered of high importance within Shropshire. The new Greening measures with the criteria on Ecological Focus Areas may help to support the creation of new wet grassland areas to encourage snipe occupation.

At various locations in The Wrekin Forest networks of ponds connected by suitable terrestrial habitat support colonies of Great crested newts. Great crested newts are fully protected by EU and UK law. The loss of ponds and the 'over-tidiness' of the natural environment has led to declines in the range and size of the Great crested newt population in the UK. Common toads breed in some of the larger pools such as the Orleton reservoir near the Forest Glen. Elsewhere in the Forest Common lizard, slow worm and Common Adder have found suitable habitat to breed and survive.

With such extensive woodlands of various species compositions and structure it is no surprise that certain highly habitat specific species find a niche in the Forest. For instance the small migrant Pied flycatcher favours the open oak-woods found on The Wrekin and The Ercall. Volunteers from SWT and Ricoh installed a considerable number of nest-boxes and dramatically improved breeding success.

Invertebrates as to be expected constitute a highly diverse sector of the wildlife of The Wrekin Forest. Some are very rare such as the crane fly Scarce yellow splinter found in the Lydebrook Dingle SSSI. This rare species is highly dependent on the woody debris found in-stream, mis-guided removal for flood alleviation reasons had led to species decline and an increase in flood levels. Within The Wrekin Forest are a number of recently abandoned industrial sites which support endangered butterflies such as the Dingy skipper. The Dingy Skipper and the Green Hairstreak are now UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority species, as is the Scarce yellow splinter.

The presence of such a wide range of significant species both within the Core area and across the Wider Forest has implications for land management practices to help meet Biodiversity Action Plan targets, set objectives to reach Countryside Stewardship criteria and in general to ensure that the whole landscape is managed to promote the widest benefit.

Key Issue

Inadequate recording and inadequate protection will lead to continuing losses of our rarest species. Proactive identification of key habitats, territories and timely reporting of issues will help to prevent accidental harm and promote fullest protection and active management of key sites.

2.2.9 Invasive Non-native species (INNS)

Non-native invasive plants are threatening our native flora, for instance Japanese knotweed is found in clumps across the Wrekin Forest. Japanese knotweed spreads very quickly and is very difficult to control, excluding native plants and damaging the ecological value of the landscape. Other exotic non-native plants that need control include Himalayan Balsam and Rhododendron. Small patches of Japanese knotweed have been identified within the Wrekin Forest [The Ercall and Little Wenlock]. Chemical treatment is the only effective remedy for Japanese knotweed to avoid future problems from this vigorous invader.

New Zealand Swamp Stonecrop [*Crassula helmsii*] is found at Smalley Hill. This INNS very quickly covers the surface of a pool, excluding light and is very difficult to remove. The presence of this INNS means that great care must be taken to not introduce it either accidentally or deliberately into any other water body. Strict bio-security measures would help to control the risks in working on measures to conserve the amphibian interest.

Key Issue

Accurate mapping and robust strategic responses to control are required to manage the damaging effects of alien invasive non-native species.

2.2.10 Biological recording

The Borough of Telford and Wrekin, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and groups such as Butterfly Conservation all carry out ecological surveys on sites throughout the Wrekin Forest. In 1977/9 a landscape scale Phase 1 habitat survey was carried out across the whole county. In 2005 volunteers from Little Wenlock completed an updated Phase 1 survey of the parish. Over the period 2006 to date groups such as the Wrekin Forest Volunteers have contributed 1000's of biological records to the Shropshire Ecological Data Network. This recording effort has led to the designation of new Wildlife Sites such as Devils Dingle and the enhancement of management on many other locations. Biological recording has to be an ongoing process and needs a long term commitment.

Key Issue

Poor recording levels will lead to knowledge gaps and un-responsive management. Active biological recording assists in species protection and enhances site management. Volunteer and professional recording effort requires resourcing; the challenge is to acquire long term support for biological data collecting.

2.3 Farming

The production of food is a key part of our local and national economy. Annual cultivations face considerable challenges in regard to soil, fertility, water availability, weather, climate and economics. Farming is a dynamic industry, innovating and responding to varying conditions, sometimes daily. The farmed environment not only provides food but is a critical part of the water cycle, rainfall running off the surface to drain to our rivers, infiltrate to top up ground water supplies or be captured in winter storage for irrigation.

Field margins have a crucial role to play in supporting invertebrate populations, ground nesting birds and foraging birds, small mammals, birds of prey and a range of plants. A 6m buffer around arable fields assists with soil management, reduces surface water run-off and helps meet pesticide application guidelines. Hedgerows, field corners, ponds, copses and old farm buildings all provide habitats and niches for a very wide range of wildlife.

Economic success for the farming sector means local jobs and support for ancillary services. Agri-environment schemes such as the recent Countryside Stewardship support husbandry systems that are able to offer wider benefit for wildlife and water protection, and specific initiatives to respond to the need to support pollinators are also encouraged.

Key Issue

The creation of field margins is one of many ways modern farming is modifying to meet the challenges of soil conservation, water protection and crop production. For the farms of The Wrekin Forest the successful integration of multiple functions alongside economic viability is by far the greatest challenge faced by farming for decades.

2.4 Geology

The Wrekin ridge provides the best and most varied exposures of Uriconian rocks [within the Pre-Cambrian] in England amongst our very oldest exposed rocks. There are three Regionally Important Geological Sites [RIGS] in the Wrekin Forest and the SSSI sites also contain geological features of note. The education potential of the rock exposures is great. Conservation rock faces are maintained at a number of sites to meet the learning needs of the geologists of tomorrow. University groups, schools and colleges are regular visitors. Shropshire Wildlife Trust offers regular guided walks for the general public. In 2004 the Shropshire Geological Society published *The Wrekin Hills: The Ercall Quarries, Forest Glen, Maddocks Hill – Geodiversity Management Plan 2004 -2009*. The plan draws attention to the geo-conservation needs of the rock resource in the Wrekin Forest. It gives useful information and makes helpful suggestions for future action and is the basis for geo-conservation projects. Shropshire Geological Society has published a pocket Geotrail guide to the Wrekin Forest.

Rock exposures can be readily viewed at The Forest Glen where a significant section of the different types of volcanic rock are clearly seen dipping northwards and cut vertically by narrow dolerite dykes. A visit to The Ercall will let you view its splendid Cambrian Unconformity, illuminating a slice of time measured in millions of years. Structural features also include fault planes with slickensides (scratch marks in the direction of movement) and good soil sections above the solid rock. In Maddocks Hill Quarry another intrusion of camptonite has been extensively excavated up to its vertical margin with fossiliferous Ordovician shales with graptolite fossils. Other features of note include basalt intrusions, the carboniferous limestone cliffs of Limekiln woods and small streamside exposures of the deep incised dingles running down to the Severn.

Shropshire Geological Society have recently launched a major project , ‘Rock around the Wrekin’ , based on the thesis that the area defined by the OS National Grid Square SJ60 is the geologically most diverse 100 sq. km in the world in terms of the time periods represented by rocks from Pre-Cambrian to Triassic (600-210 million years ago); by the different types of rock formation in each of the geological periods; by the extent to which these rocks form identifiable features within the present landscape, including their effects on soils and hence vegetation; and by the use of those rocks for construction of early buildings, in the coal mining and iron making industry which led to the “birth of the industrial revolution” and other industrial uses from brick making to tobacco pipes. The Wrekin Forest is wholly included within SJ60.

Key Issue

Poor understanding of the geological range of rock types to be found within The Wrekin Forest can lead to inappropriate management, damage through neglect and degradation, and deterioration of the value of the geo-diversity of the area. The use of virtual platforms such as phone Apps may assist with promoting understanding, ensuring safe accessibility and promoting public appreciation of geo-conservation.

2.5 Archaeology

The Wrekin Forest is home to a number of important archaeological sites. The area is very close to the important Roman town of Wroxeter and there have been numerous individual finds made locally. The Wrekin Forest has considerable industrial and social heritage.

Ancient visible remains include the Willowmoor barrows which date from the Bronze Age and the Iron Age hilltop fort on The Wrekin. The largest and most significant ancient feature is also the highest, the Wrekin Hillfort pre-dating the better known Iron Bridge by over 1,800 years. The Hillfort is over 2,000 years old and is one of the largest in Shropshire. It is considered the tribal capital of the Cornovii, the original Celtic group who lived in this area before the Roman invasion.

English Heritage is the government agency responsible for the conservation and preservation of man-made structures of historical and archaeological importance. Special sites are listed and receive protection as Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Buildwas Abbey, New Works Wood, Willowmoor Barrows and The Wrekin Hill fort are all Scheduled Ancient Monuments and are legally protected from damage, inappropriate development and management.

Industrial heritage has a strong presence in the current shape and character of The Wrekin Forest. Stone has been mined and quarried for various end uses leaving visible scars in the Ercall, Lawrence Hill, Maddocks Hill, and Limekiln Woods. Pottery, bricks and iron were also produced on a small scale locally. The land which forms the Little Wenlock Plateau is underlain by the shallowest coal seams of the East Shropshire Coalfield and has been subject to extraction up until very recently. Tracks, tramways and lanes in many cases owe their existence to past industry.

Key Issue

Low levels of awareness of the value and abundance of archaeological and industrial heritage of The Wrekin Forest can and will lead to loss of artefacts through degradation, neglect and mis-understanding. Easily and widely accessible information on the historic environments of the area is required to support sensitive maintenance of the physical remains of the activities of the past.

2.6 Recreation and leisure

The Wrekin Hill and the surrounding countryside have been attracting visitors for over 2,500 years. The majority of visitors come only a short distance from their homes in the immediate surrounding area and according to a 2006 survey the majority, over 90% travel in by car. The Wrekin Forest is not a national tourist attraction though has potential when looking at its geological interest, but it is a very important regional visitor location. Most visits are repeats.

The Wrekin Forest is a vital part of the open green space network for the local communities of Wellington and Telford. As is noted in the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2004-9 'Tourism and recreation are vital aspects of the rural economy'. The Wrekin Forest is a large area and with understanding and careful planning could accommodate more sustainably the many needs of residents and visitors. The pattern of multiple ownerships makes collaborative working essential to achieve even simple resolutions to visitor impacts and provision.

Our survey revealed that visitor pressure was a great concern to many respondents. Litter, fly-tipping, and dog waste and dog behaviour topped the list of concerns and must be priorities to address. An interesting comment was made that there was a perceived lack of 'obvious management'. Concern was also expressed about conflict between various users, occasional anti-social behaviour, inappropriate wild camping, graffiti and noise.

Litter is an unfortunate daily impact that requires a collaborative approach. Litter bins are provided by Telford and Wrekin Council at key points around the Wrekin Forest; these are emptied by their term contractor Telford and Wrekin Services. In an area with a mix of public and privately owned land it has been at times a source of confusion as to who is to empty or clear rubbish when dumped. The Wrekin Forest Partnership has played a positive role here in improving cross party communication lead by members such as Little Wenlock PC and Wellington LA21. Wellington LA21 have offered to initiate regular volunteer litter picking and have suggested also that additional support could be found from the 'Green Brigade' and 'Junior Rangers'. The Green Brigade has been established for 16-18 year olds not in work or training and the Junior Rangers is a voluntary organisation for youths operating every Saturday. Recently Shropshire Wildlife Trust have been in promising discussions with the Probation Service in relation to regular work parties to help care for the Forest Glen car park which is owned by the Trust.

A strategic and collaborative approach to visitor management is required. We are adopting a two pronged approach to, on the one hand, diffuse visitor pressure and, secondly, improve the quality and function of the main visitor entrepot at The Forest Glen. A strategic utilisation and development of access points across the whole landscape will reduce the pressure at the current hotspots. Enhancement of the visitor facilities in the vicinity of the Forest Glen which provide the most popular access routes to the Ercall and Wrekin will improve the visitor experience of the many local visitors who arrive daily to enjoy the landscape.

The Wrekin Forest has two public houses the Kynnersley Arms at Leighton, The Huntsman in Little Wenlock, plus a hotel and conference centre, the Buckatree Hall Hotel on Ercall Lane. A small café under new ownership, The Halfway House, operates on the main track to the summit of The Wrekin Hill. The Buckatree Hotel has expressed interest in expanding its offer to include walkers. These hospitality venues all bear potential to support the provision of information and interpretation material relating to the landscape adjacent.

A recent figure estimated that at least 80,000 [2006] visits per year are made to the Wrekin Hill. Walkers, cyclists, horse riders, runners and para-gliders are among visitors. Health benefits came high on the list of values recognised by users of the area - 'outdoor gym' was one comment and a 'wonderful recreation asset for 100,000 people' was another.

Key Issue

The popularity of the area creates challenges in itself, compatibility between users is sometimes uneven, retaining informality to preserve the feeling of wildness is difficult in the absence of a visitor management mechanism, all exacerbated by low levels of co-ordination between land managers and other agencies.

2.6.1 Access

Each day the Wrekin Forest welcomes numerous walkers, runners, cyclists and riders, and it is still possible to enjoy long periods of solitude, or relish the family bustle of the busy hill top on a sunny day. The Wrekin Forest is however carrying greater number of visitors on its roads and trails and this daily influx is certain to increase as the surrounding urban areas continue to grow. Visitor pressure overall is high and there exists tension between different users.

The Shropshire Way passes through the Forest connecting the Severn Gorge with the Wrekin summit. Access routes need constant maintenance and improvement, this work being undertaken by private landowners, Telford and Wrekin Council, and Shropshire Council Countryside Access Team. Permissive paths have been added to the network by local landowners to help improve the access network. Good examples of this are at the southern end of The Wrekin Hill where permissive paths kindly created by the Raby Estate allow a legitimate round trip to be made of the Hill. Care has to be taken in certain respects as 'improvements' can lead to unanticipated issues, such as loss of geological exposures or creation of erosive desire lines.

Over the last few years Wellington, due to considerable local activity has been designated a Walkers are Welcome town. Each autumn the Wellington Walkers are Welcome committee organise a week long walking festival which is popular and growing in status. Groups such as Shropshire Geological Society, Myth Stories Group, Walkabout Wrekin and Wrekin Orienteers participate in the festival. Walking is a popular activity and is a good way to promote health and wellbeing.

In our survey over 71% of respondents felt that the network of paths and rights of way was adequate for the needs of the Wrekin Forest visitor. On reviewing the comments it was clear that though the network quantity was sufficient the quality of the routes, surfacing and furniture required attention. Concerns were expressed in regard to poor drainage, outstanding repairs to items such as kissing gates and a desire to have a coherent signage system across the whole landscape. An array of different designs and conflicting signage layouts gives the impression of lack of co-ordination across the landscape; this is not good for assured coherent and effective visitor management.

It would be useful to look at measures to reduce car use, increase the use of the outdoors for health, and promote understanding and appreciation of the local distinctiveness of the Wrekin Forest landscape. Local initiatives to encourage healthier lifestyles are based on good evidence, for instance people recover faster from illness and surgery in a hospital when they have a view of open green space rather than block walls. [TWC Green Infrastructure Strategy framework 2015] Green infrastructure can be used to promote healthier ways of travelling such as walking and cycling. High levels of obesity for all ages of the population have been noted in the borough and in particularly in children. Accessible green space can improve and increase physical activity, addressing one of the prime causes of obesity, sedentary patterns of occupation.

Almost half of all adults will experience at least one episode of depression during their lifetime. 1 in 4 people will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year. In 2005, 27.7 million antidepressant prescriptions were written in England. A Mind report found that 71% of respondents in a study reported decreased levels of depression following a walk in green space. The more often a person visits urban open green spaces, the less often he or she will report stress-related illnesses.

The benefits are not confined to adults a study of 96 children suffering from attention deficit disorder (ADD) found that the children experienced fewer problems if they had access to green space for play, and the „greener“ the setting, the less severe the ADD symptoms. NICE guidance highlights the mental health benefits to older people of led walks in the natural environment. Public green infrastructure can improve community cohesion through local friends of groups and volunteer working parties.

Key Issue

The health and wellbeing benefits of the area are un-measured but clear to see. Patterns of access can be influenced to increase the value of the landscape, slowing traffic flows, making route finding easier for the new visitor, diffusing visitor impact and providing higher quality infrastructure may all help.

2.6.2 Car parking

There is a need for adequate car parking. Opportunities to expand provision are limited and no viable business propositions have come forward to support the development of locations such as The Donkey Field or the Rifle range along the Wrekin Course. A high degree of concern has been expressed in regard to inconsiderate and dangerous parking so the issue remains un-resolved. Some positive work has taken place, collaboration between the local highway authorities, Parish Council and landowners lead in 2014 to improvements to the road junction at the base of the Wrekin, which included yellow lines to restrict parking.

The Forest Glen site is owned by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and was revamped in early 2006 to offer parking for about 50 cars. On a busy sunny Sunday this car park is still insufficient for the number of visitors. A nearby lay-by accommodating some 25 cars is used and other informal pull-ins are taken up with vehicles. The Forest Glen is the gateway site for the Wrekin Forest. The facilities are minimal considering the daily numbers of visitors to the area.

65% of respondents to our survey would pay for parking and many others commented that a small parking fee would be acceptable if combined with a scheme that offered reduced or free parking to regular visitors, such as a season ticket. A parking fee was also viewed sympathetically if seen as a voluntary donation.

A number of respondents expressed interest in a bus service for peak times, possibly linking to the other tourist landmarks of the area. Wellington LA21 has campaigned for years for the introduction of a shuttle bus service linking Wellington, The Wrekin Forest and Ironbridge. A trial would be considered a worthwhile test of the feasibility of this potentially seasonal boost to the local visitor economy. Tied to local train timetables and effectively marketed and utilising facilities such as the new 'Gorge Connect' site at Smalley Hill a shuttle bus service could be an effective way of creating a step change in the tourism package for the area.

Key Issue

The key challenge for the management of car parking is to identify and provide flexible, high quality, sympathetically laid out parking areas. Trials of certain approaches may prove promising and the critical issue of revenue generation to fund maintenance of any facility has to be overcome.

2.6.3 Quiet Lanes

Little Wenlock Parish Council have made considerable efforts to establish a Quiet Lanes scheme on the network of lanes in the vicinity of the village and by the main access roads to the centre of the Wrekin Forest. 'Quiet Lanes' schemes are local initiatives to reduce speed and increase road safety. In our survey 85.5% of respondents supported the establishment of a Quiet Lanes scheme in the Wrekin Forest. Concern was expressed in regard to HGV traffic, 'rat-runs' and heavy agricultural and forestry machinery. The installations of fixed traffic calming measures were un-popular. The Shropshire Hills AONB commissioned research into the feasibility of a Quiet Scheme but despite this interest little progress has been made to date.

Telford & Wrekin has lower than the national and regional average household car ownership. Despite this reliance on the car as the primary form of transport is high. The local bus service is considered to be limited, consequently 'The Local Transport Plan TWC' identifies a need for more sustainable forms of transport. Appropriately managed Green infrastructure can provide an attractive setting for sustainable travel such as cycling and walking. The Wrekin Forest would benefit from a strategic response that helped to change the local transport map. Quiet Lanes can help by influencing driver behaviour and with support from other infrastructure innovations reduce car use in accessing The Wrekin Forest landscape.

Key Issue

The introduction of a Quiet Lanes scheme is recognised as a priority by both Telford and Wrekin Council and Little Wenlock PC. A Quiet Lanes scheme would improve road safety and amenity for users other than those in cars. Legal process and resource issues have to be resolved before the process can move ahead.

2.6.4 Volunteering

Over recent years the activities of volunteers have helped highlight many of the issues of landscape conservation, and have been well supported by people pleased to make a positive contribution to the landscape they cherish. Benefits include health gains through physical activity, social interaction and positive involvement in the natural environment.

Conservation volunteering opportunities are offered by Shropshire Wildlife Trust and other organisations in the area including groups such as the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust and the Greenwood Centre at Coalbrookdale. Each group is well attended and performs useful small scale tasks across the Wrekin Forest.

Key Issue

There are many roles, activities and functions that are and could be effectively carried out by volunteers of all ages and abilities. The key issue is how to provide guidance, support and resources to recruit, train and retain volunteers. Who is to do this and what kind of activities would be of value?

2.6.5 Getting to know the Wrekin Forest

It is clear from even a brief visit to the top of The Wrekin Hill as you take in the tremendous view that you are confronted with a million questions, where, how, when, what and who? Popular local authors such as George Evans and Allan Frost have painstakingly produced a series of enlightening and engrossing books relating to the history, legend and cultural significance of The Wrekin Hill and the surrounding countryside which makes up the Wrekin Forest. In 2007 Allan Frost published an excellently illustrated book 'The Wrekin Hill'. The Shropshire Star, BBC Radio Shropshire and Radio 4 regularly carry Wrekin stories.

It is important to note that for all those familiar with the Wrekin Forest story there are many, even amongst its daily visitors who remain unaware of the fascinating detail of the landscape they obviously cherish. Wellington LA21 have produced a number of popular cycling and walking booklets focussing on the Wrekin Forest, the latest 'Walk around the Wrekin' [2014] is an excellently researched guide to the wildlife and landscape of the Wrekin Forest. Earlier booklets include 'The Wild Wrekin Trail' and 'the Five Towns Wrekin Trail'. Wellington LA21 responding to the first Wrekin Forest landscape conservation plan 2008 – 2013 established their 'Explore the Wrekin' programme and created a 'Wrekin Portal' within their website <http://www.wellingtonla21.org.uk/discover/index.html>.

Despite the high quality of the publications over 76% of survey respondents felt that there was insufficient information regarding threats to the heritage. We suspect that this relates to poor distribution infrastructure for any material and inadequate access via modern platforms at the locations most used by visitors such as the Forest Glen. A good number of respondents to the Plan survey were supportive of the idea of an information point or small visitor centre in the area of the Forest Glen which could help address the problem of information sharing.

Telling the story of the Wrekin Forest can be done in many ways, a book, walking leaflets, fixed panels or mobile audio trails, the Toposcope, a regular column in the local newspaper, guided walks, a walking festival or one off events such as historical re-enactment. Schools, and higher education institutions, such as Harper Adams University College at Newport regularly bring their students to The Wrekin Forest to study amongst other subjects, geology, landscape and countryside management and outdoor pursuits. Shropshire Wildlife Trust provide support for students at undergraduate and graduate level.

Key Issue

In a landscape so rich in stories and teeming with interest it is very difficult for the casual first time visitor to gain access to information and interpretation easily and immediately on arrival in The Wrekin Forest. Poor access to quality information is impairing public appreciation and reduces positive engagement in the landscape and its conservation.

Section 3. Objectives and actions

The Wrekin Forest Plan provides a framework in which to understand the key issues which require consideration and management in order to achieve the shared vision of a landscape in which those concerned with the future of the area to work collaboratively to ensure that future generations continue to be able to enjoy access to an area rich in natural, cultural and historic heritage. That the residents and businesses of the area thrive and the unique values of the landscape are not degraded by neglect, poor understanding, or inappropriate development and management. The Wrekin Forest of the future will be welcoming to visitors yet resilient to visitor pressure; safely accessible to all travellers; a pleasant place to live and work; a refuge for wild creatures and wild places; and its story easily heard. Its expanding woodlands will bear timber and harbour wildlife, the farms cultivate wisely and the Forest's springs will deliver clean water to the Severn.

The Wrekin Forest Partnership which commissioned this plan to help shape its activities over the next five years has undertaken to continue to promote the broadest interests of the landscape as a whole. Members represent a wide range of organisations, concerns and points of view. Below are listed a series of statements, focus areas, project ideas and complementary activities that the partnership have identified as supporting the vision of The Wrekin Forest Plan. The listing is not an action plan as the Wrekin Forest Partnership is not a delivery agency but will help those interested in the landscape understand the issues and be in a better position to gain support for their projects from the partnership.

3.1 Wrekin Forest Partnership

The Wrekin Forest Plan will guide the partnerships activities over the next five years, the development of the partnership has always been carefully considered and the following topics have been suggested for the general attention of the membership.

- Review governance and strengthen Wrekin Forest Partnership [WFP]
- Consider development of WFP as Statutory Consultee on local planning issues.
- Seek broader membership and seek to ensure significant landowner representation
- Review and strengthen lines of communication
- Explore connections with Severn Gorge Countryside Trust
- Explore role of Telford and Wrekin Council - secretariat
- Explore role of WFP in disseminating information
- Web based communication platforms – should WFP have its own and how would this be managed and financed?
- Employ part-time officer as WFP Co-ordinator – consider use of interns/apprenticeships, joint funding proposal involving local partners or as consequence of externally funded project.
- Planning gain to deliver elements of Wrekin Forest Plan.
- Project development and funding strategy required.
- Corporate engagement – sponsorship
- Consider long term development of a constituted structure for the WFP.

3.2 Planning

The Wrekin Forest Partnership has in the course of this plan identified existing and potential planning policy which it feels will support its aspirations for a planned future for the area. The following statements consolidate the partnerships view that The Wrekin Forest is a special landscape and deserves robust protection and recognition in local planning policy.

The Wrekin Forest Partnership:

- requests that Shaping Places makes especial recognition of The Wrekin Forest and statements are made in regard to its enhanced status in planning policy.
- support the recognition of The Wrekin Forest as a material consideration in any future development proposal
- request the recognition of The Wrekin Forest in local Green Infrastructure Strategies.
- Cross boundary agreements are put in place between the two local authorities to support a collaborative whole landscape approach.
- Recommend that the two Local Authorities carry out a Landscape Sensitivity study.
- Support planning policy which aims to prevent development which would have a significant visual impact on views in or out of The Wrekin Forest
- Want local planning policy to prevent loss of tranquility through the introduction or increase of lighting, noise, or traffic movement or other environmental impact like dust, vibration, spatial associations and historic relationships
- Resist the introduction of abrupt changes of landscape character, loss of heritage assets, and change of use which harms landscape character.
- Support policies which prevent loss of biodiversity, particularly of habitats or species of importance to The Wrekin Forest
- Support planning policy which curbs development individually or cumulatively giving rise to significantly increased traffic flows to and from The Wrekin Forest, resulting in loss of tranquility and erosion of the character of rural roads and lanes.
- Request that any development must consider impact on the setting of the Core area and the setting of the Wider Forest , including where required Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments
- Request that any developments must show care over orientation, site layout, height and scale of structures and buildings, careful use of colours, materials and non-reflective surfaces;
- Ask that consideration to given not just of the site but also the landscape, land uses and heritage assets around and beyond it
- Support restraint and care over the installation and use of street lighting, floodlighting and other External lighting to prevent harm to the dark night skies of The Wrekin Forest
- ask that care is to be taken when considering the grouping of new structures and buildings close to existing structures and buildings to avoid new expanses of development that are visible and out of context.
- Require that detailed mitigation measures, for example including native landscaping (where possible contributing to BAP targets), and noise reduction.

Issue	Response
Individual designated elements such as Shropshire Hills AONB, SSSI and Local Nature Reserves receive statutory protection under planning policy. Of issue is the fact that The Wrekin Forest as a whole special landscape is poorly recognised within local planning policy in Telford and Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council.	The Wrekin Forest Plan makes it clear that the whole landscape should be considered as requiring special protection and consideration in local planning policy. Any new policy should help to shape the future development of the area recognising and preserving the unique values of The Wrekin Forest . The final Plan will be presented to Telford and Wrekin Council and Shropshire Council for consideration in their local planning frameworks.

3.3 Biodiversity

The Wrekin Forest encloses a very wide range of habitat types and consequently supports an incredible range of species. In order to conserve this biodiversity requires regular monitoring and a variety of management measures. The Wrekin Forest Partnership has identified the following activities, approaches and possible projects as having the potential to make a positive contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the habitats and species that characterise The Wrekin Forest.

Issue	Response
Previous landscape planning for The Wrekin Forest insufficiently tied into national Biodiversity strategy.	The Wrekin Forest Plan incorporates the strategic aims of the Shropshire Biodiversity and the recent Biodiversity 2020 [A strategy for wildlife and ecosystem policy for England 2015 – 2020] as published by UK Gov. 2011.
Loss of wilderness character and extent due to loss, degradation and reduction in habitat,	To seek opportunities to restore, replant and create new habitat in the Wrekin Forest to conserve the wilderness character element of the Wrekin Forest landscape. Support opportunity mapping to identify new habitat creation opportunities
Designated sites facing decline in condition due to range of pressures including visitor impact, fragmented management and low levels of monitoring.	Effective and enforceable protection of the network of Statutory and non-statutory Designated sites across the Wrekin Forest
Biological records incomplete, species groups poorly recorded and coverage patchy.	Aim to record and monitor biodiversity in the Wrekin Forest to support conservation management planning and to secure good baseline information as a tool to monitor change
Individuals and landowners nature conservation efforts can go un-recognised and lack support.	Support interested individuals and landowners
Conservation activity can be difficult to fund and various schemes are available but can be difficult to understand and access.	Identify and promote potential funding to support new planting, landscape restoration and wildlife projects – i.e. Countryside Stewardship/ English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS)
Poor public understanding of the need for conservation management due to inadequate information sharing	Provide better information to the public in regard to conservation management in relation to data, conservation activities and involvement.
Water quality and quantity under threat as watershed protection poorly co-ordinated.	Take a Catchment based approach to the water courses in the Wrekin Forest.
Certain types of development can be detrimental to overall landscape values, early awareness of potential threats is useful.	Be alert to inappropriate development that threatens biodiversity within the Wrekin Forest.

3.3.1 Woodland

The Wrekin Forest is dominated by a large area of broad-leaved woodland, the woodland is in multiple ownerships and is managed for and in a variety of ways. The Wrekin Forest Partnership suggest that the following activities would make a positive contribution to woodland management in The Wrekin Forest.

Issue	Response
Broadleaved woodland brings multiple values not all of these are well understood.	Promote woodland management for multiple uses – biodiversity, timber production and recreation.
Opportunities for mutual benefit can be lost due to low levels of interaction and awareness between woodland owning landowners.	Promote co-operation between neighbouring landowners complimented by the setting up of voluntary initiatives aimed at working together.
Despite wide availability of timber local markets are fragmentary and dependant on firewood sales.	The development of local markets for Wrekin Forest timber products
Poor understanding of woodland management approaches, timings and operations has led to conflict between land managers, local residents and the visiting public.	Promotion of public understanding of woodland management and woodland conservation. Promotion of measures to ensure public safety and understanding
Deer browsing pressure will affect the ability of woodlands to naturally regenerate, to manage this requires whole landscape co-ordination.	Promote the setting up of a Deer Management Group to co-ordinate deer management across the Wrekin Forest linking with other local initiatives
Given national declines in the extent of native broad-leaved woodland due to development it is important to seek opportunities to create new woodland.	New woodland opportunity mapping to identify areas for new tree planting or natural succession to woodland.

3.3.2 Veteran trees

The Wrekin Forest is an area rich in specimen veteran trees. Many of these trees are of great age and part of a unique natural resource of European significance. Veteran trees support rare and unusual invertebrates, lichens and bryophytes. Under-recorded and easily damaged the number and quality of these outstanding natural survivors is of great importance.

Issue	Response
Poor understanding of the value of veteran trees can lead to accidental damage, inadvertent loss and low levels of public and landowner appreciation.	Awareness raising initiative to prevent further loss of veteran trees promote understanding of their irreplaceable value
Engaging people in the care of veteran trees can lead to enhanced protection.	Support projects that care for existing ancient trees
Recording has taken place of the veteran trees in The Wrekin Forest, not all trees may have been recorded.	Support research and monitoring and survey activity.

3.3.3 Hedgerows

Hedgerows are multi-function linear features that can help characterise a whole landscape, many are very old, they help connect habitat and support wildlife movement across an area. Hedges can be lost through development, degrade without appropriate management and become impoverished through disease, salt and root damage. Hedges can assist with soil management, support natural pest control and manage surface water flows. New hedges carefully sited can support landscape heritage restoration, assist with land management and support species resilience.

Issue	Response
Hedgerows are lost to development constantly, annual losses UK wide are catastrophic. Hedgerow protection legislation is very complex.	Promote schemes to reverse hedgerow loss
Opportunities for new hedgerows are available, mixed species selections can help conserve wildlife, maintain landscape heritage and assist land management.	Promote the planting of new hedgerows
Over-frequent and heavy flailing of hedges leads to loss of condition, gapping and poor function.	Promote the management of hedges using sustainable methods such as hedge-laying or rotational cutting.
Many hedges are of considerable age and support a very wide range of plant and animal species. Poor recording can lead to poor understanding of value and potential damage or loss to hedgerow assets.	Survey and record hedgerows

3.3.4 Species rich grassland

Small pockets of species rich grassland are scattered across The Wrekin Forest. The underlying geology influences soil types and consequently the variety of plant communities that form are highly varied. The grasslands are very vulnerable to loss through lack of management, poor understanding and inappropriate use.

Issue	Response
Inadequate understanding and monitoring of the species rich grassland network has led to decline of condition and extent. For instance scrub growth on many grassland areas is un-controlled leading to reduced quality and quantity.	Promote initiatives prevent further loss of species rich grassland sites. The promotion of frequent survey and recording of species rich grassland communities will help sustain awareness of the location and awareness.
The species rich grasslands of The Wrekin Forest tend to be scattered	Promote enhanced connections between sites.
Many of the sites are small and awkward to manage. Landowners require support in the form of advice and funding to undertake appropriate management.	Promote sympathetic management on all sites
Lack of public understanding of the variety and fragility of wild flower rich grasslands leads to poor levels of appreciation and protection.	Raise public awareness and general understanding of the fragility of the species rich grasslands in the Wrekin Forest.

3.3.5 Heathland

Heathlands are a product of acid soils conditions and human management. Without sensitive management heath condition declines and with increasing tree cover will in time be lost. The heaths are small and scattered over the whole landscape. They are vulnerable to inappropriate management, neglect and visitor pressure.

Issue	Response
Poor co-ordination of sensitive management across the whole landscape has led to declines in heathland condition. The open nature of heathlands supports species such as Common lizard and specialised invertebrates. Visitor pressure can lead to damage.	Promote projects that will support measures which protect and enhance the small fragments of heathland which remain within the Wrekin Forest.
Heathland is a man-made habitat, on-going management is low key	Encourage adoption of management plans to conserve and enhance heathland areas
Landowner liaison infrequent and makes heathland management disjointed across the whole landscape.	Support positive management of the heathland that is found within designated sites.
Low levels of public awareness have contributed to poor appreciation of the habitat type and affects efforts to conserve the wildlife associated with heath.	Promote greater public awareness.

3.4. Closing comment

The Wrekin Forest Plan has been carefully and thoughtfully developed by the members of The Wrekin Forest Partnership. It lays out the values which make The Wrekin Forest a regionally significant landscape and worthy of enhance protection in local planning policy. As the final text corrections were being applied to the Wrekin Forest Plan we learnt that the Wrekin Forest had already been included in the new Telford and Wrekin Local Plan, a clear recognition that Partnership efforts and commitment and local voices had not been unheard.

There are many challenges in attempting to realise a joint vision for a whole landscape given its ownership is spread across so many hands and many are those who claim a stake in its future. The Plan attempts to identify issues and highlight responses that may resolve conflict, promote improved communication and support initiatives and projects that will have a positive effect on the core natural assets of The Wrekin Forest.

The Plan will help shape the work of the partnership and help introduce those new to the area to the key issues faced by this much loved corner of Shropshire and make a positive contribution to a bright future.

Appendix 1

Wrekin Forest Partnership membership 2015

The Wrekin Forest Partnership membership group currently comprises representatives of the following:
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Telford and Wrekin Council
Shropshire Council
Wellington Town Council
Little Wenlock Parish Council and other Parish Councils in the wider Wrekin Forest
Forestry Commission
Wellington Civic Society
Wellington LA21
Wrekin Museum Partnership
Wellington Walkers are Welcome
Individual land owners
Individual community members.

Appendix 2

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Appendix 3. National examples of landscape planning policy

The South Oxfordshire Core Strategy 2012 states that 'high priority will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the Chilterns and North Wessex Downs AONB and' crucially 'planning decisions will have regard to their setting'. The same planning authority also remarks in its policies in regard to the River Thames that the 'setting and heritage of the river' are to be considered by virtue of its 'overall amenity and recreation use.'

Mid Devon DC consider that under section DM29 of their 2013 Plan that the in the case of AONB's that the 'a. Cultural heritage and the character, appearance, setting and other special qualities of the landscape will be conserved or, where possible, enhanced; and

b) Biodiversity will be conserved and enhanced where possible through improved linking of habitats, appropriate landscaping and habitat creation.

c. Major developments within or adjoining the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Dartmoor or Exmoor National Parks will only be permitted in exceptional cases.'

Further support for the recognition of the setting of the core area can be found in the Sevenoaks Core Strategy 2011 which states that 'the distinctive character of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their settings, will be conserved and enhanced.'

In the Wiltshire County Council Core strategy they attempt to define further what might be considered the 'setting' as that which is considered to be all of the surroundings from which a designated landscape can be experienced, or which can be experienced from the designated landscape. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the landscape and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the natural beauty of a landscape, and may affect the ability to appreciate it. The Wiltshire document goes on to state that 'Proposals for development outside of an AONB that is sufficiently prominent (in terms of its siting or scale) to have an impact on the area's special qualities (as set out in the relevant management plan), must also demonstrate that it would not adversely affect its setting.' Under Core policy 51 usefully the strategy identifies further features of development control by looking for proposals that consider the following:

- the locally distinctive pattern and species composition of natural features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and waterbodies
- the locally distinctive character of settlements and their landscape settings
- the separate identity of settlements and the transition between man-made and natural landscapes at the urban fringe
- Visually sensitive skylines, soils, geological and topographical features v. landscape features of cultural, historic and heritage value VI. important views and visual amenity
- tranquility and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion and
- Landscape functions including places to live, work, relax and recreate.
- special qualities of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the New Forest National Park, where great weight will be afforded to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty.

Proposals for development within or affecting the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), New Forest National Park (NFNP), or Stonehenge and Avebury Heritage Site (WHS) shall demonstrate that they have taken account of the objectives, policies, and actions set out in the relevant Management Plans for these areas.

Appendix 4 National and International legislation relevant to The Wrekin Forest Plan

Plan	Key Messages
Convention on biological Diversity [1992]	Set the target to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss.
The Habitats Directive [92/43/EEC] [National Policy UK – Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010]	Requires the protection of species and habitats of EU nature conservation designation. The Directive requires that development can only be allowed where it does not impact on important sites that protect habitats otherwise compensation measures have to be put in place.
Birds Directive 2009/147/EC [codified version of 79/409/EEC]]	Provides for the protection of all naturally occurring wild bird species and their habitats, with particular protection of rare species. The Directive requires that measures are taken to preserve, maintain or re-establish a diversity of habitats for all birds listed in Article 1.
The European Landscape Convention 2000 [ratified 2006]	Promotes various actions at the landscape scale ranging from strict conservation through protection, management and improvement to actual creation.
The Water Framework Directive [2000/60/EC]	Promotes an integral and co-ordinated approach to water management at a river basin scale. Also encourages protection of soil and biodiversity.
EU Thematic Strategy for soil [2006]	Promotes the protection and sustainable use of soil
The European Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage [The Valetta Convention]	The Convention makes the conservation and enhancement of archaeological heritage one of the goals of urban and regional planning policies. It is concerned with arrangements made for co-operation among archaeologists and town and regional planners in order to ensure optimum conservation of archaeological heritage.
The Wildlife and Countryside Act [UK 1981] as amended	Principal instrument for the protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and endangered wildlife within the UK
Countryside and Rights of Way Act [CRoW] [2000]	The CRoW Act aims for increased public access to the countryside and strengthens protection for wildlife.
UK Biodiversity Action Plan [1994]	The strategy aims to ensure that : Construction, planning, development and regeneration have minimal adverse impacts on biodiversity and enhance it where possible.
Biodiversity 2020: a strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services [2002]	Ensures biodiversity considerations become embedded in all the main sectors of economic activity, public and private. It sets out the strategic direction for biodiversity policy for the next decade on land [including rivers and lakes] and at sea.
Heritage protection for the 21 st century [2007] UK Govt. White Paper	Aims to put the historic environment at the heart of the planning system
Safeguarding our soils : a strategy for England [2009]	Improve the quality of England's soils. The vision is that by 2030, all England's soils will be managed sustainably and degradation threats tackled successfully.
Securing the Future: UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy [2005]	Aims to enable people to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life for future generations.
Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act [2006] [NERC]	Promote and enhance biodiversity. The Act stresses that biodiversity conservation should not be viewed solely as an environmental issue, but a core component of sustainable development.
National Planning Policy Framework [2012]	Sets out how planning should contribute to sustainable development.
Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands [2008]	Includes regional strategies for biodiversity and land use.
Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan [2002] on-going amendments [SBAP]	Detailed work programme necessary for the conservation of 34 species [6 of which are found in The Wrekin Forest] and 15 Habitats [10 of which are found in The Wrekin Forest]
Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan [2009 – 2014]	The AONB Management Plan is a statutory document which local authorities are required to produce jointly and aims to influence and guide organisations and individuals on a wide range of topics. Its vision is that 'the natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills is conserved, enhanced and helped to adapt by sympathetic land management, by co-ordinated action and by sustainable communities; and is valued for its richness of geology, wildlife and heritage, and its contribution to prosperity and wellbeing.'
A Cultural strategy for Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin 2009 - 2014	Evolution, Revolution and Innovation is the Cultural Strategy for Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin.

Addendum, Telford & Wrekin Strategic Landscapes Study 2015

In December 2015, after the Wrekin Forest Plan was finalised, Telford & Wrekin Council published a 'Strategic Landscapes Study' produced by consultants, see http://www.telford.gov.uk/downloads/file/3787/strategic_landscapes_study_2015. This identifies three areas within the Borough, one being the Wrekin Forest, which are defined as 'Strategic Landscapes' and the emerging Telford & Wrekin Local Plan gives these areas of landscape some protection.

The area defined as the Wrekin Forest by the Strategic Landscapes study is shown below. The Wrekin Forest Partnership on 21 January 2016 decided not to adopt this new boundary retrospectively for the Wrekin Forest Plan. It was felt that the issue of landscape protection through the planning system was an important consideration for the Wrekin Forest Plan, but not the only one. The Partnership had aspirations to achieve better landscape protection and management for an area extending further east than the Strategic Landscapes boundary, and did not wish to relinquish these based on the boundary defined by the Study for a narrower purpose.

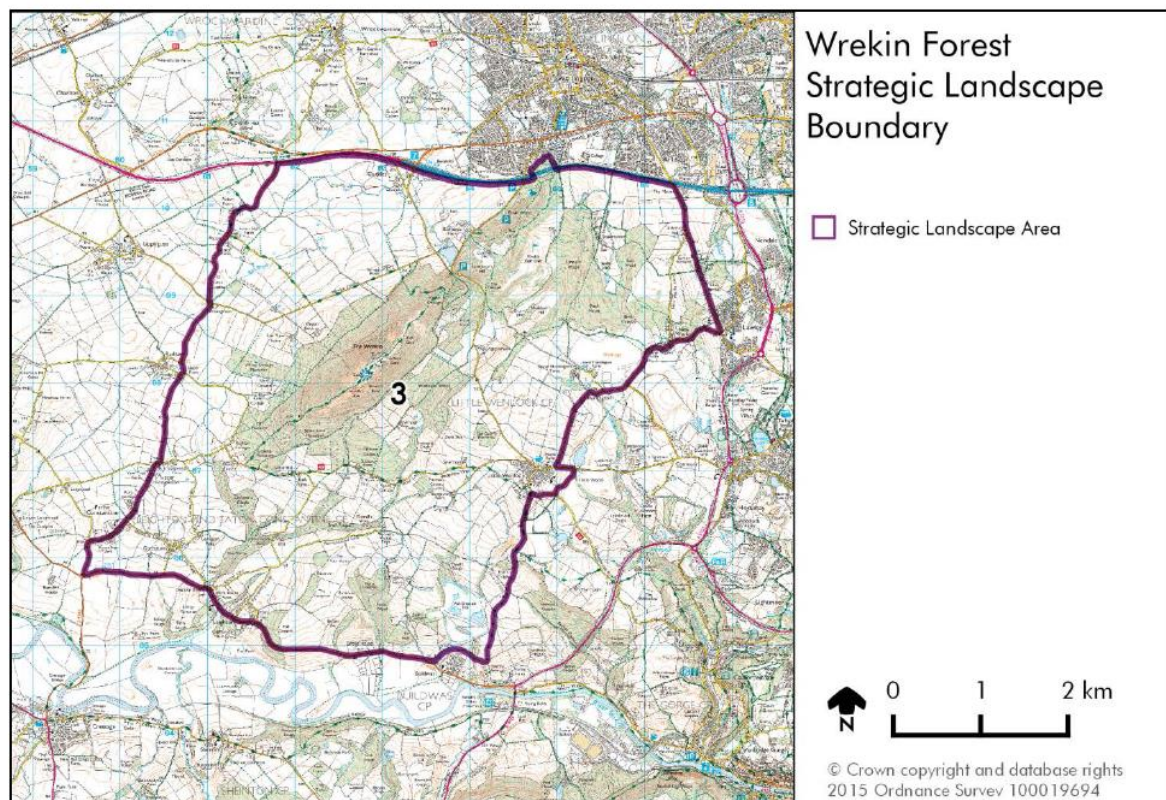


Fig. 13: Wrekin Forest Strategic Landscape Boundary