

## 8 FARMING AND FORESTRY

### 8.1 Aims

To encourage a healthy rural land economy that conserves and enhances the landscape character, biodiversity and historic environment of the AONB.

### 8.2 Background

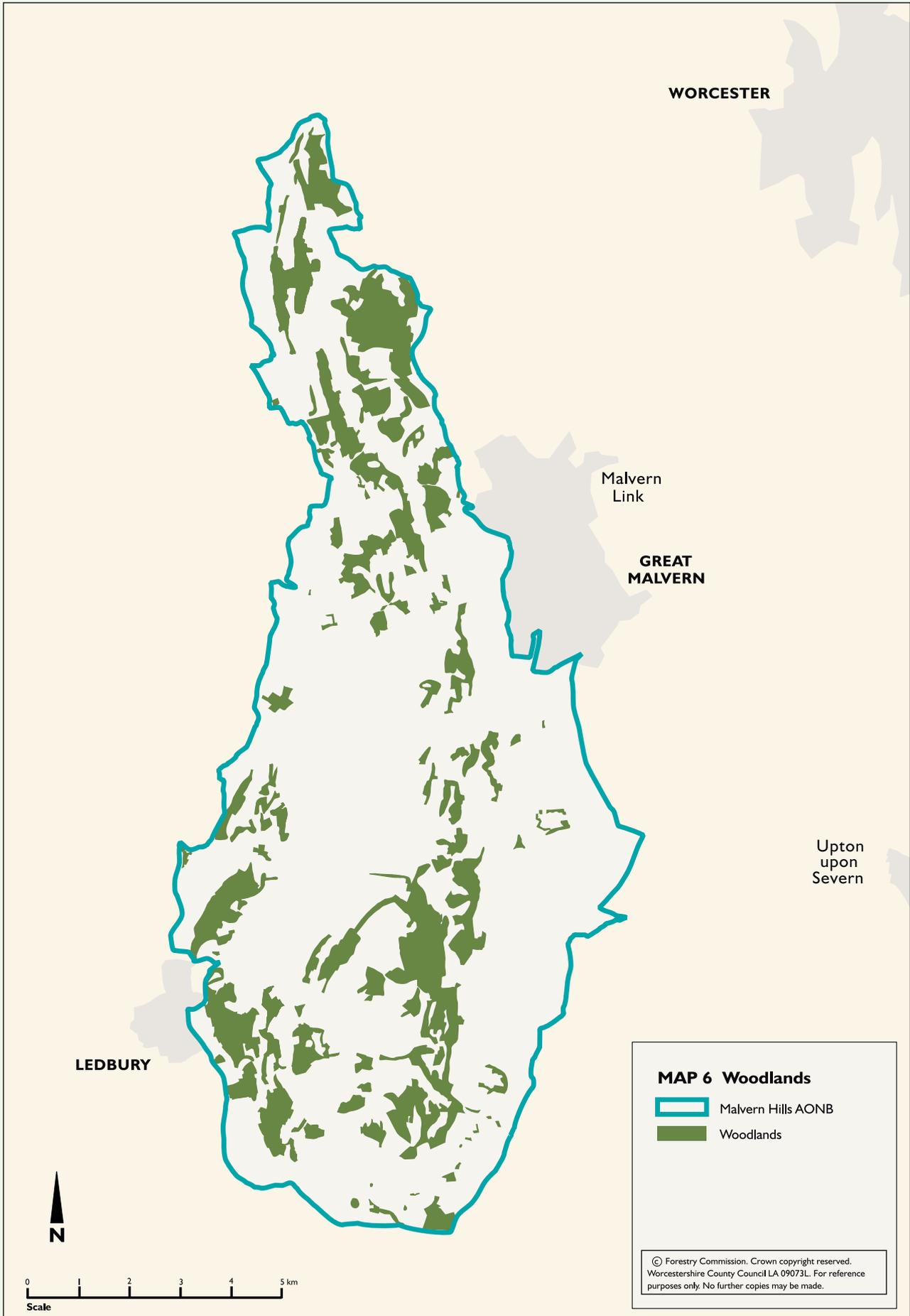
Farming and forestry have shaped and influenced the unique landscape character, historic environment and biodiversity of the Malvern Hills. Despite significant changes in agricultural practice, and the decline in the importance of this economic sector to the general economy, farming and forestry continue to provide jobs and income, and represent a significant form of land management in the AONB. The principal agents in the management of farm land and woodland are the landowners, farmers and tenants, as well as with the assistance of DEFRA and the Forestry Commission.



Coppice and bluebells



Agriculture is the dominant land use within the AONB, occupying over 70% of the area. The relationship between soils and land use is such that the complexities of the agricultural pattern and of woodland cover can best be understood by reference to the Landscape Character Types. About 20% of the total AONB area is covered in woodland, mostly small broadleaved woodlands on banks, ridges and hilltops, and in hedgerows. Larger woodlands at Eastnor, Storridge/Alfrick and Bromsberrow are in excess of 100 hectares in size. Woodlands make a major contribution to landscape, biodiversity and the historic environment of the Malvern Hills and also retain an economic value.



Since the last Management Plan in 1996, influencing factors in the farming economy have included the Foot and Mouth and BSE crises, and shifts in Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) away from supporting production towards more environment-led schemes. The many problems facing farming and forestry can only be solved by national and European policy changes. Farmers are facing increased competition from imported products, which are thus contributing further to the decline in income and availability of jobs that can be sustained in the long term. Forestry production has faced similar global competition, and as traditional practices such as coppicing have become less viable, the potential negative impact on the landscape has increased.

Adaptation for survival has therefore occurred within the rural economy, and continues with the changes in CAP, technological advances and the potential use of genetically modified crops. Farms have diversified in terms of the agriculture they undertake, as well as moving away from agriculture into other activities, particularly recreation based activities. The impact that these adaptations has on the environment in general, and on the special qualities of the

AONB, is of primary concern to the continued protection and enhancement of the AONB. A viable farming and forestry industry with sympathetic and sustainable management practices is therefore fundamental to the overall wellbeing of the Malvern Hills.

### 8.3 Special Features

Ancient semi-natural woodlands, representing approximately 50% of woodland in the AONB, several of which are designated as SSSIs;

Historically grazed grasslands and commons;

Cider, pear and cherry orchards;

Hedges and hedgerow trees;

Large wooded estates and parklands;

A mix of pasture and arable farmland, with varying concentrations of native, conifer and mixed woodlands, reflecting distinct landscape characters.

Cattle in Bromsberrow





Cattle in Cradley fields

## 8.4 Key Issues

### 8.4.1 Pressure to intensify or diversify land use and buildings

In seeking to regenerate the rural economy, the diversification of land use and buildings can cause harm to the AONB's landscape character, biodiversity and historic environment. For example, orchards and nut tree groves are being removed so that landowners can seek alternative grants or incomes from other land uses. Diversification of land for equestrian activities can alter the nature of field boundaries and margins, leading to a decline in hedgerows and change in field size. Restoration of barns into habitable dwellings robs bats and barn owls of their nesting and dwelling places.

In a similar vein, the intensification of agriculture and forestry has caused detriment to the special qualities of the AONB. For example conversion of pasture to arable land, and a decline in mixed farms can lead to the neglect and loss of features such as hedgerows, and hedgerow trees which are significant wildlife habitats as well as defining features of certain landscape character types. A reduction in or absence of grazing stock in certain landscapes is a result of farming changes, and has significant implications for landscape character changes and habitat loss.

### 8.4.2 Loss of trees to disease

Tree cover in the AONB has already been depleted by Dutch Elm disease. Current imported diseases of trees such as Alder Phytophthora and Sudden Oak Death also have the potential to dramatically affect the landscape character of the AONB.

Fallen oak, Storridge





Laid hedge, Mathon

### 8.4.3 Impact of existing coniferous trees within Ancient Semi-Natural woodland sites

Plantings of conifers within ancient semi-natural woodlands have a significant and detrimental effect on landscape character and species biodiversity in the AONB.

### 8.4.4 Loss of traditional agricultural and woodland management practices

Traditional skills such as coppicing, hedge laying and orchard management, have potential implications for the health and ultimately the survival of landscape character and biodiversity features

such as traditional standard orchards, hedgerows and ancient woodlands.

### 8.4.5 Locally sourced products

The by-products and products of farming and forestry can represent an important economical and recreational resource. For example, the production of woodland products that are locally sourced and locally distinct can make an important contribution to the local economy, as well as providing a fundamental link between the landscape and its character and tourism.



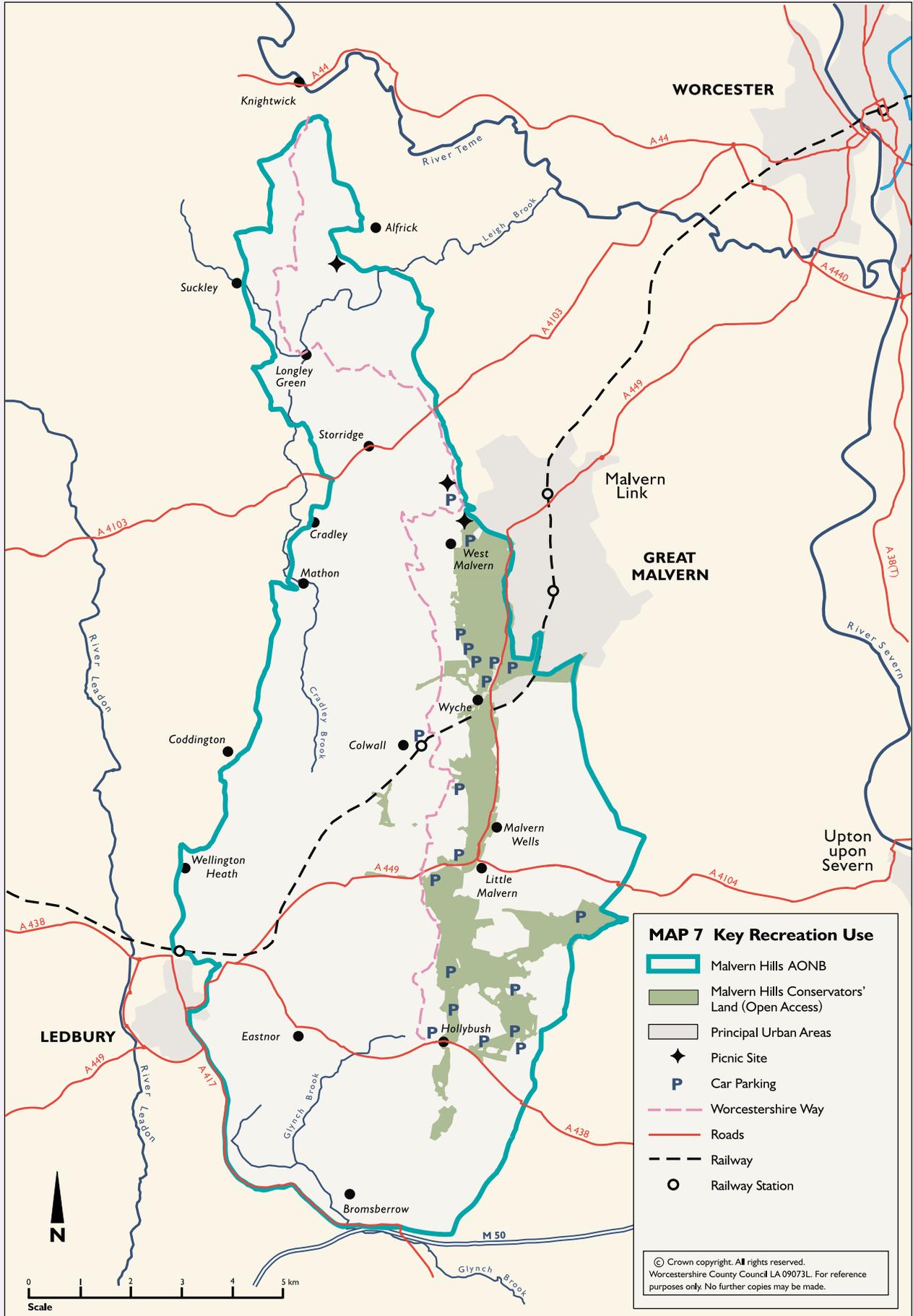
A pole lathe demonstration during the AONB coppice project



Conservators' Cheviot sheep grazing on British Camp

## 8.5 Strategic Objectives

- 8.5.1 Support a viable farm and woodland economy which maintains and enhances the landscape character, historic environment and biodiversity of the AONB, by:
- fostering schemes which offer payment for conservation and enhancement of landscape character and special qualities;
  - supporting initiatives to help the rural land economy recover from setbacks such as Foot and Mouth;
  - promoting uptake of the Government's Entry Level Scheme and higher tier schemes, where beneficial to the special qualities of the AONB;
  - support for environmentally farmed local produce initiatives;
  - supporting agricultural practices which benefit the environment;
  - demonstrating and encouraging forms of appropriate diversification of farm and woodland;
  - seeking enhanced levels of additional resources for sympathetic management of farm and woodland to maintain landscape features and special qualities of the AONB.
- 8.5.2 Promote best practice to achieve a sustainable rural economy within the limits of the AONB, particularly through appropriate diversification, non-intensive farming and appropriate woodland management;
- 8.5.3 Encourage sympathetic grazing management to maintain and restore landscape character and biodiversity where appropriate;
- 8.5.4 Seek to replace coniferous trees within ancient semi natural and broadleaved woodlands where consistent with conservation and enhancement of a particular landscape character; and/or biodiversity and the historic environment, through natural regeneration and replanting of native or local species;
- 8.5.5 Support appropriate measures designed to monitor, and control diseases and pests which damage biodiversity resources and deplete natural tree species, and mitigate the landscape impact of any losses;
- 8.5.6 Foster the best practice management of woodlands within the AONB for the production of timber and other products within the overall context of maintaining the landscape character, biodiversity and historic environment of the AONB.



## 9 TOURISM, RECREATION AND ACCESS

### 9.1 Aims:

To ensure that tourism, recreation and access management respect the conservation and enhancement of the AONB's qualities;

To ensure that the adverse impacts of tourism and recreation on the AONB are minimized and the quality of the environment is preserved;

To ensure that tourism, recreation and access are provided for in a sustainable, accessible and coherent manner across the AONB.

### 9.2 Background

The Malvern Hills AONB has attracted visitors in pursuit of quiet recreation for many centuries. Local springs in the Hills were promoted in the Victorian era for their purity and healing properties and transformed Malvern and its surrounds into a fashionable spa resort. Today some 1.25 million visitors come to the AONB to walk, cycle, horse ride and to undertake other recreational pursuits including leisure driving (Heart of England Tourist Board survey, 2000). It is also an invaluable resource for

residents wishing to undertake some of the many recreational activities on offer. Tourism and recreation make a significant contribution to the local economy, and the importance of the AONB as a recreational resource within the West Midlands and beyond is well established.

The nature and intensity of recreation and tourism varies across the AONB. The greatest level and range of recreational use is largely restricted to the 12 square kilometres of the northern and central Hills, reflecting the dramatic beauty and accessibility of this area. The most pronounced impacts of tourism, recreation and access lie in this concentration of visitors within a small area of a small AONB. The promotion of tourism and recreation activities, continued expansion of access to the AONB, and diversification of farming and forestry for recreational purposes may continue to provide economic, social and some environmental benefits for the AONB. However, without thorough and comprehensive information on how the AONB is being affected by these activities, there is danger that visitor pressure will cause increasing harm to the very qualities that draw them to the AONB in the first place.

Chase End Hill looking to Ragged Stone



## 9.3 Special Features

Unspoiled natural environment;

Dramatic scenery and views;

Quiet rural lanes for walking, cycling and horse riding;

Visitor attractions such as the Malvern Theatres, Three Counties Showground, historic buildings and parks such as Eastnor Castle;

Villages and market towns such as Ledbury (partly within the AONB boundary);

Marked routes for leisure driving, such as the Elgar Route, the Cider Trail and Literary Guide;

A wide range of recreational activities, including angling, equestrian activities, hang gliding, kite flying, model gliding, sledging, cycling, abseiling and walking.

## 9.4 Key Issues

### 9.4.1 Fragmented public footpath and bridleway network

The fragmented nature of the public footpath and bridleway network detract



Malvern Festival Theatre

from the enjoyment of the whole extent of the AONB and lead to the over intensive use of the existing path network, contributing to footpath erosion, and use of sensitive areas for walking particularly on the ridge.

### 9.4.2 Quiet lanes

Many of the AONB's small rural roads are used for walking, cycling and horse riding. There is a need to protect the tranquillity of this network of 'quiet lanes' in the face of increasing congestion, in order to preserve this aspect of recreational enjoyment and encourage healthy and sustainable alternatives to the car.

Event at the Three Counties Showground



### 9.4.3 Visitor impact

There are numerous effects of high visitor numbers to the AONB, most notably: increased traffic congestion; parking on verges; noise pollution and disturbance to the quality of life of residents; damage to paths, common and agricultural land, habitats and the historic environment; and the disturbance of wildlife and livestock. These impacts occur throughout the AONB, but in particular in the central section encompassing the ridge. There is a lack of data and research on the physical ability of the AONB to sustain the current levels of visitors within accepted environmental limits.



Photograph by Pat Edwards

### 9.4.4 Links between the rural land economy and the tourism and recreation industry

Links between farming and forestry management and the tourism and recreation industry in terms of promoting locally distinct, locally sourced products to sustainably regenerate the rural land economy are underdeveloped. Strengthening

this link would contribute to establishing a new environmental function for land which is suffering in the throes of agricultural and production changes, whilst conserving and enhancing features of landscape character, biodiversity and the historic environment.

### 9.4.5 Poor accessibility

For some sectors of society, particularly the less mobile, access to tourism and recreation facilities in the AONB is less than adequate. However recent examples of good practice are to be found on the easier access trails on the Hills.



## 9.5 Strategic Objectives

- 9.5.1 Support the quantification of visitor impact and their activities on the special qualities, main land uses and the local communities of the AONB;
- 9.5.2 Support measures to establish a sustainable physical capacity of the AONB, and encourage the best practice management of access and facilities accordingly;
- 9.5.3 Encourage the improved accessibility of tourism and recreation facilities and Public Rights of Way and other highways to all appropriate users through:
- restoration of paths and bridleways;
  - appropriate access improvements through the implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plans;
  - assessing accessibility for all new and existing countryside sites;
  - developing infrastructure and furniture which respect local distinctiveness;
  - develop quiet lanes for walking, cycling, horse riding and those with mobility restrictions;
  - encouraging relevant Highways Authorities to maintain a Right of Way network that is free of obstruction, legally defined and well promoted.
- 9.5.4 Seek to accommodate the demand for recreation around the northern and central sections of the Malvern Hills within the limits of sustainable capacity, and to respect the conservation and enhancement of landscape character and quality, biodiversity and historic environment, through:
- a proactive approach to visitor management;
  - the use of information and interpretation;
  - temporary closure of areas for regeneration/avoidance of wildlife disturbance (except PROW network);
  - highest standards of design, infrastructure and other relevant measures.

# 10 TRANSPORT

## 10.1 Aims:

To reduce the impact of car traffic on the special qualities of the AONB, and the quality of life of its communities;

To encourage opportunities for sustainable transport means by people of all abilities.

## 10.2 Background

The Malvern Hills AONB is easily accessed by major roads, including the M5 and M50 motorways which bring the populations of the South West and West Midlands close to the AONB. Despite its topography, several main roads cut through or skirt the Hills. There is a significant network of rural lanes which are sometimes heavily used by visitor traffic. Several car parks and informal verge parking contribute to the easy access of the AONB, particularly around the most visited part of the northern and central Hills.

Regular services are offered on the Hereford – Worcester – London and

**The Hills Hopper bus service helps the long distance walker**



Hereford – Worcester – Birmingham rail lines, which pass through the AONB, with all but one station (Colwall) lying beyond the AONB boundaries. Weekday services are frequent, and bus services connect to the stations, although not necessarily offering seamless links between both modes. A 'Hills Hopper' bus service operates during the summer which is designed to encourage bus access to the Hills for residents and visitors, and was a direct action of the previous Management Plan. This service is due to be improved with a new Saturday service and a capacity to carry wheel chairs and bicycles. Other frequent bus services connect the larger communities of the AONB and beyond.

Most walking, cycling and horse riding trips are made for recreation purposes, and there are a number of pedestrian routes between residential areas and recreation areas. There is some potential for journeys to school and work to be made on foot or by bicycle. However there are currently few dedicated paths for cyclists and horse riders within the

AONB, with use being made of the quiet rural lanes. Most freight traffic in the AONB is linked to the bottling plant at Colwall, and although there are no likely opportunities for transferring freight from the roads to rail in the near future, any that do arise will be supported, subject to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB and its special qualities.

Any objective to reduce the impact of traffic on the AONB

will largely be guided by the policies and programme of actions already determined in the Local Transport Plans for the three counties. However there are specific problems affecting the 'honey pot' sites along the Hills which need to be addressed jointly across the county boundaries.



### 10.3 Special Features

Potential good bus – rail linked journeys and specific recreation based bus services, e.g. the 'Hills Hopper';

Regional rail access to and from the West Midlands and the South East;

Easy access and car park provision to the high hills and ridges;

Rural character of minor roads defined by features such as hedgerows, routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, cast iron road signs and milestones;

Quiet rural lanes that provide routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.



## 10.4 Key Issues

### 10.4.1 Impact of car traffic

The impact of high levels of car traffic and parking during peak visitor times on noise levels and erosion of tranquillity in the AONB, disturbance and damage to wildlife and habitats, local communities and other road users, visual intrusion and verge damage (from informal parking), is unquantified yet likely to be considerable. The rural lane network is unable to accommodate more than small volumes of visitor traffic because of its physical capacity and the impact on tranquillity. There is a need to encourage greater use of more sustainable and less environmentally damaging forms of transport such as bus and rail (maximizing their use by those with visibility and mobility restrictions), cycling and walking.



Parked vehicles on Jubilee Drive

### 10.4.2 Unsympathetic and inappropriate road improvement design

The landscape character, biodiversity, historic environment and the tranquillity of rural roads in the AONB can be damaged by unsympathetic, inappropriate design of road improvements and street furniture, even where these are implemented to achieve safety objectives.

Improvement to Colwall Stone financed by AONB Partnership. Before (left) and after (right).



## 10.5 Strategic Objectives

- 10.5.1 Support the reduction in the total number of car journeys along roads within the AONB and their associated impacts through:
- 10.5.2 Promotion and co-ordinated planning of integrated bus and rail travel to and within the AONB;
- 10.5.3 Development of dedicated routes for walking, cycling and horse riding;
- 10.5.4 Continued and improved operation and service of the Hills Hopper;
- 10.5.5 Seek to conserve the character of quiet rural roads and their contribution to the distinctiveness of the landscape, biodiversity, historic environment and the tranquillity of the AONB through support for Local Transport Plans, and awareness raising;
- 10.5.6 Promote and support the development and management of car parks within the AONB to service visitor needs whilst helping to conserve the special qualities of the AONB;
- 10.5.7 Support the collation of information about journey purposes and the levels of usage of each type of transport and parking facility in the AONB, to facilitate better promotion and management of the services and network capacity available;
- 10.5.8 Identify areas within the AONB that are most vulnerable to speeding traffic, visual and noise disturbance, etc, and establish a programme of mitigation within the framework of the relevant LTPs.