



Proposed extension to Malvern AONB

WORKING TOGETHER

Lisa Walker | Abberley Hills Preservation Society | April 2023

Introduction

In 2015 after a call for proposals by Natural England, Abberley Hills Preservation Society made a proposal that Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is extended to include the spectacular landscape to the north of the existing boundary.

- A landscape survey was commissioned by AHPS who instructed Francesca Iribar.
- An indicative map showed the Worcestershire Way and the Abberley and Malvern Hills geopark help inform a potential northern extension.
- 27 years ago, in 1996 landscape architect Don Walters held a meeting in County Hall supported by CPRE that there should be an AONB boundary review which was also supported by Malvern Hills Joint Advisory Committee. There have been repeated calls by local campaigners to reconsider the existing boundary.
- In September 2019 an independent Landscapes Review: National Parks and AONBs was published by Julian Glover. This covered 44 national landscapes including National Parks and AONBs. The government issued a response in June 2021 and a policy paper was released in January 2022.
- A number of proposals had been received by Natural England relating to new AONB proposals and extensions to existing AONBs, amongst them the Malvern Hills extension.
- The four proposals that are currently being considered more closely are two new proposed AONBs the Yorkshire Wolds and the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge and two extensions to the Surrey Hills and Chiltern AONBs.
- 2017 Martley, Knightwick and Doddenham Neighborhood Plan proposed an extension to the Malvern Hills AONB.
- 2018 CPRE Worcestershire proposed an extension to Malvern AONB

NATURAL ENGLAND STRATEGIC MAPPING TOOL AND NATIONAL CHARACTER PROFILE

Natural England have launched their strategic mapping tool that clearly shows the proposed extension as having the highest landscape value. Natural England recognises that the area maintains its tranquil, rural landscape which has largely escaped the pressure of modern development and retained small villages and traditional timber frame buildings, hop yards, hop kilns and cider houses.

Natural England also identifies that the woodlands of the Teme Valley interconnects with the Malvern Hills and that the Abberley Hills are the most conspicuous landscape feature forming a visual continuation of the north/south Malvern ridge.

PARISHES AFFECTED BY PROPOSAL

The following parishes are included:

Abberley

Dunley

Great Witley and Hillhampton

Shelsley Beauchamp, Shelsley Kings, Shelsley Walsh

Martley

Clifton Upon Teme

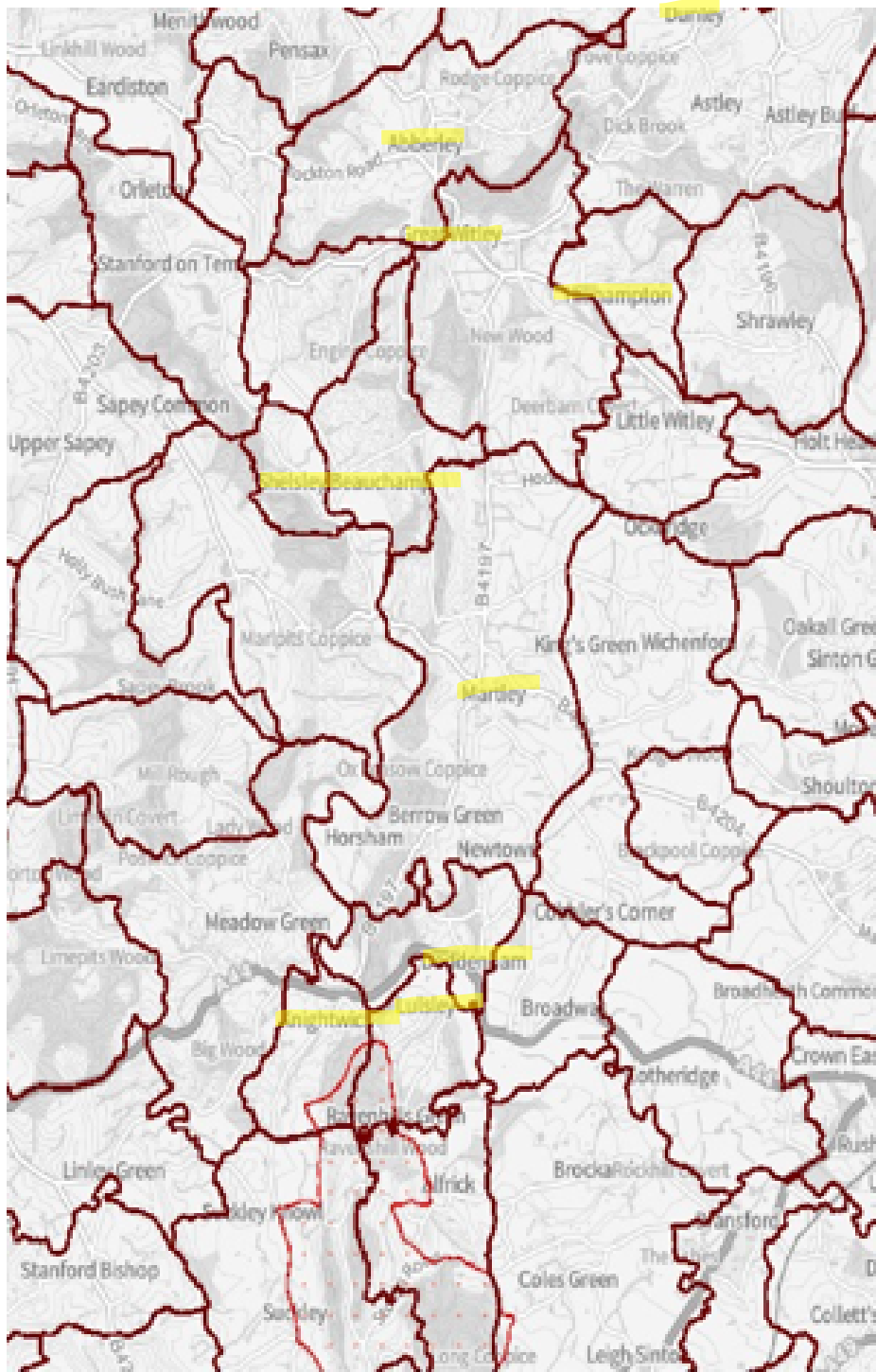
Doddenham

Alfrick and Lulsley

CONSULTATION

The parish councils have been consulted regarding their support on the proposal. We have yet to receive any objection and have been overwhelmed with the level of support received from other parishes.

District Councillors, County Councillors, Harriet Baldwin MP, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, NFU, CLA and CPRE have also been consulted.



PARISH BOUNDARY MAP

GLOVERS LANDSCAPES REVIEW

Julian Glover stated “we need to reignite the fire and vision which brought the system this system into being in 1949” when he referred to National Parks in Access to the Countryside Act. He also stated “we think AONBs should be strengthened with increased funding and governance reform” and “ we also want to see the process for creating designations and changing boundaries made simpler, easier and quicker.”

HOW THE AREA CAN CONTRIBUTE ON ALL AONB CONSIDERATIONS

GEOLOGY In 2003 the European Geopark network became a member of UNESCO endorsed global Geoparks. Within the Geopark boundary there is outstanding geology spanning 700 million years of Earth’s history. Through many rock types and striking folds and fault structures there is a rich variety of fossils. There is also evidence of the Ice Age. All of this is integrated within a wealth of ecological, historic, dramatic landscape and cultural heritage. The Abberley Hills themselves were formed 444 million years ago during the Silurian period. Tropical seas teeming with wildlife and coral reefs were prevalent and fossilised creatures are easily found in Silurian limestone.

The Teme Valley is recognised for important Tufa Springs emerging from beneath the Bishops Frome Limestone which is an important geo indicator of current environmental status and helps support a variety of species.

ECOLOGY

The whole area is a rich biodiverse environment with Peregrine Falcons, kites and Buzzards. It is a perfect habitat for many rare orchids. The disused limestone quarries create an important habitat for a variety of flora including the rockrose, thistles, wild thyme and Dyers Greenweed. There at least eight species of orchids due to the alkaline soils, the rare moths that lives on the lime trees and rare butterflies including Wood White are all noteworthy. There are several sites of special scientific interest in the proposed extension.

ARCHITECTURE

The area is known for its ancient settlements, churches, castles, mills, hop kilns, timber framed cottages, mediaeval farm houses and manor houses.

ARCHEOLOGY

Archaeological digs have taken place with unexpected Neolithic finds and evidence of very early settlements. There is still evidence of Roman terracing for growing grape vines on the hillside of Abberley. A lottery funded community project revealed some of its early medieval history but there is so much more to discover. Tantalizing clues to earlier occupation. The historical standoff between Owain Glyndwr and Henry IV. The hill forts at British Camp and Summer Hill are well known but Iron Age hill forts can also be found on Woodbury Hill and Berrow Hill. Their prominence can be attributed to the same geological feature, the Malvern Axis, this is the line of hills that was formed by powerful events millions of years ago causing uplift of the land that formed the hills.

ANCIENT TREES, WOODLANDS AND ORCHARDS

Ancient tree surveys by the Teme Valley Wildlife Group have been undertaken and there are some excellent examples of veteran oaks and ancient trees around the whole area. A particularly important habitat on Abberley Hill is on the North-west facing slope this type of woodland is not common in Worcestershire. Evidence of ancient natural woodland can be seen. It is also one of the few areas of ancient yew woodland in Worcestershire as well as semi natural woodland noted for large, leafed lime and narrow leaved Bittercress. Ancient orchards that once covered large areas can still be found.

HOW AN AONB EXTENSION COULD ENRICH THE GREATER ALLOCATION

- An extension would help create high quality natural environments that would help future generations enjoy a protected landscape.

- The Malvern Hills a AONB covers approximately 105 square kilometres one of the smallest of the country's AONBs.

- Enlarging the area would create a more strategic view of a larger landscape.

- The Geopark and Worcestershire Way already provide a natural route along the connected hill line that includes Abberley, Walsgrove, Berrow, Ankerdine and Malvern Hills. A coordinated and integrated approach would be a huge benefit to the greater area.

- There is no logic to the Northern boundary of the current AONB designation. Stopping the boundary at this point is not reflective of the continuation of the incredibly unspoilt, beautiful and in parts dramatic countryside that runs along the entire length of the natural hill line to the Abberley Hills.