



Committee and Date Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 18 October 2011 9.30am	Item 5
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AONB PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY UPDATE

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Summary

This paper provides members with a summary update of recent activity of the AONB Partnership staff team.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the information provided and offer comments.

KEY AREAS OF PROGRESS IN 2011-12 TO DATE (Since 1 April)

Take and co-ordinate action to conserve and enhance natural beauty, to promote wellbeing, enjoyment and understanding and to further sustainable development.

- Good progress with allocation of **LEADER** grants, project monitoring and claims (see attached paper 6).
- £17,087 allocated in **Sustainable Development Fund** grants to 8 projects for 2011-12. Two additional projects awarded grants since the last update in June are: Much Wenlock Walkers are Welcome £1,000; Newcastle Primary School PTA 'Inside my Farm' £1,451.
- **Farming Project** meetings in progress. Attended Burwarton Show, Story of Wool event, Newcastle Show. A meeting was held with commoners at Stapeley Common and agreement reached for the land to be RPA registered. Unfortunately Helen Kent has had to leave the project due to unexpected commitments on the family farm. Recruitment is under way for a replacement Farming Officer. Vicky Wood has worked with five primary schools, taking children on farm tours and is planning follow up workshops with them.
- Advisory visits and Management Plans completed for **Woodlands Project** (ongoing). A total of 92 owners (of 558 ha of woodland) have been visited in the two years of the project and 22 Management Plans completed. The Heartwoods SITA funded woodlands project is under way, with the Project Officer working 2 days/ week on Shropshire Hills sites, based from our office.
- SITA funded **River Clun Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project** under way (3 years). Preparation work on sites for practical work on Upper and Lower Clun. Additional funding available from Natural England through Species Recovery and River Restoration Funds. 12 week graduate placement completed through Keele University looking at waste water infrastructure in the Upper Clun catchment (Rosanna Fildes).

- **Shuttles** service for 2011 completed. Passenger numbers down 6.5% on 2010, ticket income has dropped by 25.5%, reflecting more single tickets and fewer Day Rovers. Planning for next season is about to start, with extra funding available from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.
- **Discover Local** events in progress. Family Whinberry Day 28 August attended by 28 people. The business marketing sessions held in September have been very well received. Follow up work on commercial recycling opportunities in Bishop's Castle and Clun.
- New 3 year pledge and Standing Order arrangement for longstanding members of **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme** to boost membership renewal.
- **Walking with Offa** delivery under way - walks leader weekends, events, 8 guided walks attended by 106 people to date, preparation of 12 self-guided walks, 4 Days Out itineraries, podcasts and web development. A PR contract has resulted in national publicity including articles in the Independent and Daily Express. A web marketing strategy (including social media) has been prepared under contract by Shropshire Tourism.
- **Walking with Offa cross-border LEADER co-operation project** – Welsh Government funding of £750k has been approved, along with all participating English areas. A new Co-ordinator has been appointed by Adventa in Monmouthshire to manage this project.
- **Walking for Wellbeing** – Walking Action Plan prepared. Support to Much Wenlock Walkers Are Welcome group.
- **Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme** Stage 1 pass by HLF. Recruitment for the 1 year Co-ordinator post is under way. BBC Midlands Today ran a piece on the scheme in September. A presentation was given to a public meeting called for by residents around Corndon Hill. Four consultancy contracts are to be let for specialist input on: natural heritage, cultural heritage, access and interpretation, and training.
- **Promotion activity.** New walking page on AONB website. 15 press releases and 1 E-bulletin issued. Improved output on social media (at 7 Oct AONB Facebook page has 193 likes, AONB Twitter 177 followers, Sustainable Business Scheme Twitter 724 followers). Annual Review for 2010-11 prepared.

Develop policy and strategy for the area through the AONB Management Plan, and influence the policies and strategies of others.

- **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan** formally approved by the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership. Update given to meeting of Shropshire & Telford Tourism Strategy Board. It is intended to apply for the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas in December 2011.
- Input to local authority and other **steering groups** (Biodiversity Partnership, Local Access Forum, Destination Development Partnership, and others).

Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.

- **Clee Hill Partnership** second meeting held.
- Progress with forming a **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** committee and constitution.

- New **funding Memorandum of Agreement** between Defra and local authorities under consideration for signing. Continued budget planning for 2011-14.
- Input to **West Midlands Protected Landscapes Forum** and **National Association for AONBs**, including AGM in London on 14 October.
- A review is under way of potential **structures** for the AONB Partnership as an alternative to hosting by Shropshire Council.

Support the involvement of the community in the management of the AONB (also a cross-cutting theme in some items above).

- Support and advice for a wide range of **community projects**.
- **Talks** to Parish Councils and other interest groups.
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** currently has 133 members, generating £1,200 of income for SDF this Financial Year (total of £3,771 through Friends group to date). Two Friends social events to Monastery on Stiperstones. Six Parish & Town Councils have now joined Friends.
- 26 AONB-led **events**, attended by a total of over 500 people. Support to at least 8 events led by others.

List of Background Papers

Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan.

The full 2011-12 Team work programme can be made available to members on request.

A summary is available at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/SHAONB-Team-Plan-Overview-2011-12.pdf>

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Environmental Appraisal

The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.

Risk Management Appraisal

Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.

Appendices

None