



<b>Committee and Date</b> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  20 November 2012	<b>Item</b>  <b>4</b>
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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 2012-13 TO DATE (April 2012 - present)

**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 4). Additional £25k of budget awarded. Attended European network conference in Brussels. 'Growing Gastronomists' co-operation project on local food with Loir Valley, Estonia & Warwickshire LAGs, including visit by project participants to Estonia. Input to West Midlands LEADER Forum and England LEADER Exchange group. AONB Partnership Tour held in July on LEADER with visits, networking and presentations on all approved projects. Discussions about future rounds of LEADER and booklet showcasing achievements of projects and the Shropshire Hills programme in preparation.
- £14,015 allocated in **Sustainable Development Fund** grants to 8 projects for 2012-13, all under way. Final claims and reports completed for 2011-12 projects.
- **Farming Project** – 120 one to one farm advice contacts now made. Farm visit by Ludlow WI, and work with 3 schools and Farming Champions. Children's book about farming in the Shropshire Hills with designer following completion of text. Paper presented about the project's work at International Farming System Association in Denmark. Well attended event on Farming & Forestry Improvement Scheme. Work with Stapeley Hill Commoners Association towards collaborative agri-environment scheme.
- Advisory visits and Management Plans completed for **Woodlands Project** (ongoing). Shropshire Hills sites in the Heartwoods SITA funded woodlands project are completed. Project Steering Group held. Funding committed for extension of project for remainder of Financial Year and extension of advisory work in an area surrounding the AONB.
- **Rivers Project**. Site works completed on Upper and Lower Clun for SITA funded **River Clun Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project**. £100k of additional funding secured from

Natural England for catchment related work. Riparian habitat management works in preparation for 9 additional sites. New Catchment Project Assistant post created (1 yr contract) and Ewa Prokop appointed. Feasibility work starting on wetland opportunity mapping and reducing sediment from Highways. Awareness campaign on septic tanks launched. Support with public consultation for Natural England on River Clun Restoration Plan. Three public meetings held on 'Caring for Rivers in the Clun Catchment', at Lydbury North, Bucknell and Clun. Meetings of Clun Catchment partnership and consultation with partners on draft Catchment Plan. Ongoing input to Teme Catchment pilot project.

- **Shuttles** service for 2012 publicised and under way, including new Wenlock Wanderer service from Church Stretton to Much Wenlock via Acton Scott. Consultations on new route from Ludlow for 2013.
- **Discover Local.** Discover Local main three day event at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm August Bank Holiday 2012. Green Events Guide published. PR contract under way to promote 'Buy Local' website & scheme.
- Renewals in progress with **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme** members. 2012 directory published.
- **Walking with Offa** leaflets, booklets and publicity material well received. Guided walks substantially booked up through the season. Over £2,000 of income generated. Promotional beer Up 'n' Down by Hobsons launched. Local Sustainable Transport Fund money secured for additional pub walks and reprint of Clun Valley walks book.
- **Walking with Offa cross-border LEADER co-operation project** - Contracts and good practice seminars under way, led by Adventa. Presentation made to EU Minister.
- **Walking for Wellbeing** – Joint promotion leaflet for Shropshire Hills Walkers Are Welcome groups published. New programme of guided walks organised. Walking celebration with Walking for Health groups held end April. Car free walks leaflets being designed.
- **Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme** – Development Phase under way from January with Joy Howells and Helen Fairweather working job share as Landscape Partnership Coordinators. Consultations, project development, meetings of Landscape Partnership Board, Steering Group and Special Advisory Groups. Event for farmers and public consultation events held. £50k of match funding secured from Jean Jackson Trust. Proposed projects agreed by Steering Group and Board, and final stages of preparation of Landscape Conservation Action Plan for submission end Nov 2012 as full Stage 2 application.
- **Promotion activity.** 29 press releases issued. Continued output on social media. Annual Review for 2011-12 published. Joint Shropshire Hills 2012 Events programme and visitor guide well distributed. 'Things to do' web pages substantially improved and relaunched.
- **Advice and support** to a wide range of activities and projects, including Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group, Western Power undergrounding programme and Youthful Landscapes project.

**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** to be formally approved by Shropshire Council Cabinet. Year 1 update on Action Plan prepared. Close involvement with

Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership and agreement of new destination logo, formally licenced with area tourism groups. Verification visit for application for the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas completed and Charter awarded. Attendance at Charter Network meeting and Sustainable Tourism Symposium at Forest of Bowland AONB, and a seminar on visitor giving schemes.

- Input to local authority and other **steering groups** (Local Nature Partnership Shadow Board, Flood Forum and others). Meetings with Shropshire Council Business Growth & Prosperity Group Manager and other managers in the group.
- Objection to three **planning** applications (proposed car park at the Wrekin, wind turbine and use of Lea Quarry for woodchipping operation). Campaigning activity on Lea Quarry proposal. Various pre-application advice. Submission on Site Allocations & Management of Development (SAMDev) Preferred Options, and meeting with senior officers and portfolio holder for planning policy, to secure best protection for the AONB from Shropshire LDF.

#### **Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.**

- Input to **National Association for AONBs**, through seminars, regional Chairs & Lead Officers meeting, annual Conference and AGM.
- Paper on review of potential **structures** for the AONB Partnership as an alternative to hosting by Shropshire Council discussed at Management Board.
- Adaptation to new Council **systems** for Finance and HR, and improvements in office IT systems.
- Completion of 2011-12 **accounts**, with addition made to reserves.

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

- Support and running of Wrekin Forest Partnership and Clee Hill Partnership addressing local priorities related to the AONB. Project planning meeting held for Clee Hill.
- Support and advice for a wide range of **community projects**.
- **Talks** to Parish Councils, schools and other interest groups.
- John Muir Award programme started with **schools** (education/ activity programme themed on wild places).
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** currently has 87 members (with some renewals pending). Friends social event to the Wrekin 8 July.
- 22 AONB-led **events** held, attended by a total of around 750 people.

#### **List of Background Papers**

Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan.

The full 2012-13 Team work programme can be made available to members on request.

#### **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**

Appendix 1 Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme 2012 -13 Overview

## Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme 2012 -13 Overview

Key areas of work	Key actions and targets
<b>Take and co-ordinate action to conserve and enhance natural beauty; promote wellbeing, enjoyment and understanding, and further sustainable development.</b>	
LEADER in the Shropshire Hills	Award grants for remaining budget, in line with Local Development Strategy. Support projects with delivery, grant admin & claims, collaboration and publicity. Develop ideas for next LEADER round through new LEADER Development Group.
Sustainable Development Fund	Give grants and support projects with limited available funding.
Stiperstones & Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme	Prepare Landscape Conservation Action Plan and submit as Stage 2 HLF bid. Develop community involvement, Landscape Partnership Board and other advisory groups.
Rivers Project	Complete riparian management and supporting work for SITA funded project. Deliver practical and feasibility work in Natural England funding agreement. Develop Clun Catchment Partnership, continue public engagement and aim to approve Catchment Management Plan.
Farming Project	Meetings with 100 farmers, 4 farmer events, 4 workshops. Work with 7 schools, 6 farm tours and 6 presentations to community groups.
Woodlands Project	Advise owners of 25 woodland sites. Complete 10 Management Plans and bring 15 sites into active management. Support woodfuel opportunities. Complete partnership project with Heartwoods and seek to secure new funding.
'Buy Local'	Implement 11 events for Discover Local Project. Maintain membership of at least 40 businesses in Sustainable Business Scheme. Maintain and promote <a href="http://www.shropshirehills-buylocal.co.uk/">www.shropshirehills-buylocal.co.uk/</a> directory.
Sustainable Tourism Strategy	Implement Sustainable Tourism Strategy with Shropshire Hills & Ludlow Destination Development Partnership, and develop Europarc Charter activity.
Shropshire Hills Shuttles	Manage 2012 Shropshire Hills Shuttles bus service, including new 'Wenlock Wanderer' service, and plan for 2013.
Promotion	Improve websites and social media interaction. Publish 15 press releases, 4 E-newsletters, Annual Review and joint Events guide. Give 12 talks.
Walking for Wellbeing	Complete agreed actions from Walking Action Plan for the Shropshire Hills. Operate walking steering group and hold relevant events & training sessions.
Walking with Offa	Participate in Walking with Offa LEADER co-operation project with 7 other LAGs.
Support initiatives led by others	Support at least 15 conservation/ economic / recreation/ promotion projects. Respond to requests for information.
<b>Develop policy and strategy for the area through the AONB Management Plan, and influence the policies and strategies of others.</b>	
Management Plan	Produce annual Update of Management Plan Actions with progress. Establish and begin process of review of AONB Management Plan.
Planning	Comment on relevant LDF documents and planning applications. Maintain close links with local authority planning staff and members.
Other strategies & schemes	Provide input to at least 4 strategic consultations (non-planning). Comment on non-planning casework such as agri-environment schemes.
Local authorities and Partnerships	Establish and maintain links with relevant departments of each local authority. Input to Local Nature Partnership and Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.
Monitoring	Update framework for monitoring and data in line with national guidance.
Guidance & strategy	Identify opportunities to develop pro-active guidance on AONB related topics.
<b>Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.</b>	
AONB Partnership and sub-groups	Hold 20 meetings of 10 groups in the AONB Partnership structure. Provide training/ briefing session for Partnership members.
Local partnership working	Operate and support local partnership structures including Wrekin Forest, Clee Hill, Clun Catchment, Stiperstones & Corndon Landscape Partnership Board.
AONB Team	Hold monthly team meetings, complete performance reviews and training.
Business Planning	Undertake review of alternative structures, and diversify sources of income.
Wider networks	Continue involvement with NAAONB, LEADER & RDPE networks.
<b>Support the involvement of the community in the management of the AONB (cross-cutting above).</b>	
Friends	Develop 'Friends of the Shropshire Hills' group, and increase membership.
Support for groups	Support 30 community groups in total (includes SDF, LEADER, etc above).
Schools	8 schools involved with AONB related activity
Volunteering	Involve 300 volunteers through AONB-led and supported activities.