

**Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
Recreation, Tourism and Products Development
Group**



Present:

Tim King	Shropshire Council (Tourism Development Officer)
Ian Kemsley	South Shropshire Tourism Limited (SST)
Sue Lee	Long Mynd & District Bridleways Association
Bob Welch	Church Stretton Town Council
Phil Holden	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (AONB Partnership Manager)
Stephanie Hayes	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (Promotions Officer)
David Shelley	Ramblers Association
Anna Morris	Shropshire Council (Cycling Officer, Highways)
Jim Stabler	Shropshire Council (Access Development Officer)
Clare Fildes	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (Development Officer)
Miranda Stanley	Bishop's Castle Farmers' Market
Alan Garner	Church Stretton Area Tourism Group

Prof Les Lumsdon – University of Central Lancashire, presenting Feasibility Study on the Rea Valley Leisure Path proposal.

Apologies:

Zoe Griffin	Shropshire Council (Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre)
Deb Hughes	Shropshire Council (Countryside Access Manager)
Michael Whatley	Country Land & Business Association
Jo Bickerton	Shropshire Council (Leisure & Culture)
Helen Vaughan	South Shropshire Housing Association
Lynn Wood	Heart of England Fine Foods
Kate Norman	Ludlow 21 Food & Farming Group
Phil Moore	Hopesay Glebe Farm
Mark Measures	Institute of Organic Training & Advice
Alison Caffyn	Tourism consultant, AONB Partnership Vice Chair

Copies of the presentations made are available at
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/partnership/workgps.htm#accrec>.

1. Note of meeting of 22 September 2009 of Access, Recreation & Tourism Working Group and matters arising

David Shelley drew attention to the issue which had been raised about the proposed creation of the roadside cycle path at Minsterley which will involve removing a section of hedge, and whether the AONB Partnership should express a view on this. Phil said that he understood that the roadside route and the old railway route were not seen as alternatives because the roadside route was much shorter. He suggested we see if the issue needed further discussion after hearing Les's presentation. The actions from the last meeting had been completed, and with a correction from David about the bridge and Highways matters referred to, the notes were agreed as accurate.

2. Revised Working Group

Phil explained the rationale for merging the Access, Recreation and Tourism Working Group with the Sustainable Products Working Group. The number of AONB Partnership sub-groups has increased and capacity to support them has become an issue. The agenda items for both groups had become increasingly similar, and it was felt this combined group would fit better with the requirement for a Forum under the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism, to be explained in the next item. Thoughts and comments on this were welcomed from those present. David queried the new title and suggested 'sustainable' should be amongst the wording. Phil agreed this could be done, but felt that the title was perhaps long enough already. Bob approved the merging of the groups and explained that the Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Network Group was winding up and this new group would provide the platform to voice any ideas and concerns. It was noted that quite a number of people were on the distribution list in addition to those present, and they would be kept on the list unless they requested to be removed. **The Terms of Reference for the revised Group would be updated - Action: Phil.**

3. Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism

Clare gave a short presentation on this explaining that the Charter was a management tool which would give structure to sustainable development and tourism in the Shropshire Hills. She highlighted that the application process cost €5,000, and that accreditation lasted for 5 years. Having a Sustainable Tourism Strategy in place, and a Forum for tourism and protected area interests were pre-requisites. A funding application for production of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the Shropshire Hills has been made to Natural Assets (£25,000). Clare explained the Charter took a holistic approach to sustainable development and felt there were many benefits for the AONB including strengthening tourism relationships, influencing tourism development county-wide and giving structure to what we are doing already. Phil mentioned the possible further development of this Group into the Forum required, and suggested that this may fit with possible future changes to the Destination Management Partnership (DMP).

Ian asked what would we actually get out of it, what happens to the money spent on obtaining the Charter and in the present climate would the funding be found to commit to it? Clare explained the cost of obtaining the Charter included two people coming over to assess the application and all the associated administration costs. Phil said that £1,000/year could probably be found from AONB core budgets, as it was felt the Charter would add weight to the significance of the AONB in tourism terms. He said the experience of other areas was that the Charter had helped to support funding bids. Alan expressed that if the Charter created a framework for better communication and promoted the Shropshire Hills brand then this has to be a good thing. Ian also agreed that more weight we can add to the AONB acting as a lynchpin for other organisations the better.

David raised the issue of the AONB boundary. Clare said that it was necessary to look beyond the AONB boundary for the purpose of the Strategy, and for the bid she has worked with the wider Shropshire Hills LEADER boundary for convenience, which included the key market towns around the AONB. Les stated that he felt the process for obtaining the Europarc Charter was the most important part of it, with strong links made and good communication between organisations and local tourism businesses.

4. Presentation by Les Lumsdon re: feasibility study on the Pontesbury to Minsterley railway proposed cycle/walking route

Les started by explaining that he has worked on transport and tourism studies all over Europe, mainly looking at walking and cycling routes. He felt this project proposal had great potential and using Sustrans data, estimated more than 15,000 annual cycle usages and 16,000 walking usages for Phase 1 and respectively 26,000 and 24,000 annual usage for Phase 2 which envisaged linking the trail to Shrewsbury.

Landowners along the route and the local community including local businesses were contacted with some 1,800 survey forms sent out and 289 returned. Landowners had mixed feelings, and Les suggested further engagement and taking them to look at similar schemes elsewhere (e.g. the Manifold Valley in the Peak District) may address a number of their concerns. Of the 20% returned surveys 88% said it was a great idea and only 3% felt it was not, with the usual concerns such as more litter, dog fouling, etc. The forms also highlighted that currently 61% of respondents did not cycle because of the busy main road.

The economic impact was also calculated - Phase 1 (Minsterley to Hanwood) £185,000 per year into the local economy, and Phase 2 (Minsterley to Shrewsbury) £274,000 per year into the local economy. Les highlighted the critical success factor of any route is the trail design, and the link to Shrewsbury would be a key to this project providing an excellent access route into the Shropshire Hills. He also added that the attraction of 'groups' rather than solo cyclists bring greater benefits to local businesses. His recommendations included holding a public meeting to publicise the findings, more engagement with the landowners and presenting the proposal to major stakeholders.

Regarding the Council's proposal to a roadside cycleway between Minsterley and Pontesbury Les explained that this was targeted at school children and parents felt safer having their children on the main roads and visible rather than off road. There was some discussion about how to engage landowners, with suggestions that there should be a pragmatic approach to negotiation, e.g. with a willingness to relinquish little used footpaths in return for agreeing new access along the cycle route.

Phil thanked Les for his presentation and reminded the group that the AONB had put £1,000 into this feasibility study and would offer help to the Rea Valley Environmental Network to progress this proposal. He added that Les's team were also currently working on a Sustainable Transport and Access Study for the Wrekin Forest area, commissioned by the AONB Partnership.

5. Offa's Country – Sustainable Tourism Project

Clare gave a short presentation on this planned project, which had arisen out of the broader Welsh English Border Strategic Regeneration Study. An 'Offa's Country Strategic Partnership' had been formed with various bodies along the border to pursue the sustainable tourism work. A funding application for Phase 1, focusing on activity to support walking on Offa's Dyke and in the Shropshire Hills, Wye Valley and Clwydian Range AONBs and the Brecon Beacons National Park), has been submitted to the Natural Assets fund (outcome expected mid April). Work would include circular walks, Walkers Are Welcome scheme, long distance path development, information and interpretation, business and community engagement, promotion, sustainable transport and monitoring. Phase 2 would focus on cycling. Discussions are also ongoing about developing a LEADER collaboration project involving a number of LEADER Local Action Groups along both sides of the border area. This would possibly use £50,000 from the Shropshire Hills LEADER grant pot. David asked whether sponsorship had been considered, and Clare said she would raise the idea with Alison Caffyn who has worked up the project.

6. RDPE Shropshire bid for tourism

Tim explained that there was £50,000 per year for 3 years from the RDPE, but projects would have to have Council involvement as they are holding the funding. Disappointment was expressed regarding the greatly reduced funding from Advantage West Midlands which had been allocated to fund projects in Much Wenlock, walking promotion and improving the activity websites. The new Discovery Map for the Shropshire Hills and Severn Valley was also mentioned, which has received funding from the Southern Area Partnership.

7. Shropshire Farmers' Markets marketing project

Clare explained that a contract for £4,000 per year for three years had been secured to work on the development and promotion of Farmers' Markets across Shropshire. This was being managed by the Shropshire Rural Hub, but the AONB Partnership had agreed to bankroll the project. Tish Dockerty had been appointed as the co-ordinator.

8. Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Strategy Implementation

Bob explained that Church Stretton Town Council produced a Marketing Plan, which is guiding development of this year's promotional material. They are keen to align approaches with the 'Shropshire Hills' identity, and have held a number of workshops to revamp the Church Stretton website. They are also looking for funding for a feasibility study for a 'Transport and Information Hub' in the town and were looking to LEADER to help fund this. Phil said there had been some recent discussion about whether LEADER programmes could be expanded to include a tourism measure, but the Shropshire Hills LEADER Action Group felt that unless additional funding was made available, this would undermine the purposes of the agreed Local Development Strategy. Clare added that if funding became available, this could be reviewed.

9. Shropshire Hills Shuttles

Steph explained that a number of changes have had to be made to the routes this year due to funding constraints. The Secret Hills Shuttle is now a circular route between Craven Arms, Clun and Bishop's Castle, so no longer connects with the Long Mynd & Stiperstones Shuttle, and the service has been reduced to every Saturday and throughout Bank Holiday weekends – there is no longer a regular Sunday service. The Long Mynd & Stiperstones Shuttle remains the same figure of eight circuit running every weekend and Bank Holiday Monday. The Shuttles service starts on Saturday 3rd April.

14. AOB and date of next meeting

Date of the next meeting is **Wednesday 22nd September 2010**, 10am at the Craven Arms Community Centre.