

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
Recreation, Tourism and Products Development Group
Note of meeting 22 September 2010



Present:

Tim King	Shropshire Council (Tourism Development Officer)
Jim Stabler	Shropshire Council (Access Development Officer)
Deb Hughes	Shropshire Council (Countryside Access Manager)
Zoe Griffin	Shropshire Council (Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre)
Andrea Stanger	Shropshire Council (Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre)
Sue Lee	Long Mynd & District Bridleways Association
Bob Welch	Church Stretton Town Council
Phil Moore	Hopesay Glebe Farm
Alison Caffyn	Tourism consultant, AONB Partnership Vice Chair
Tish Dockerty	Ludlow Tourism
Phil Holden	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (AONB Partnership Manager)
Stephanie Hayes	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (Promotions Officer)
Clare Fildes	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (Development Officer)

Apologies:

David Shelley	Ramblers Association
Anna Morris	Shropshire Council (Cycling Officer, SC Highways)
Lynn Wood	Heart of England Fine Foods
Kate Norman	Ludlow 21 Food & Farming Group

1. Note of last meeting (9 March 2010) and matters arising

No matters arising from minutes of the last meeting. Outstanding action to revise Terms of Reference for the group to be shelved in light of discussions about Destination Development Partnership (items 3).

2. AONB Management Plan update

Actions related to the Group's remit had been circulated and Phil asked the group members for any progress reports or new actions to update the Plan.

Bob explained that Church Stretton were pursuing infrastructure issues at all levels with Shropshire Council to benefit residents and visitors alike. Some of the issues being discussed include a new northern access route from the A49 which would provide better access to Carding Mill Valley, and improved access to popular spots like Caer Caradoc, east of the A49. Bob would like the word 'infrastructure' included within the actions relating to Church Stretton.

Tim highlighted the new Discovery Map for the Shropshire Hills & Severn Valley had been produced and was being distributed. He also mentioned that the RDPE funded projects should be included in the actions. The funding is secure at the moment and is for promoting rural tourism that benefits rural businesses. Bob asked whether this would be able to fund projects like the revamping of the Church Stretton website. Tim said yes, and Lee Chapman already had the application forms. **Action: Tim to email Tish the RDPE application form as well for Ludlow web development.**

Phil concluded with the request for people to email him with any further progress reports to update the actions.

3. Destination Development Partnership and Sustainable Tourism Strategy

The AONB Partnership's response to Shropshire Council's consultation on the Destination Development Partnerships (DDP) had been circulated. The response was supportive and proposed to merge this AONB Working Group with the DDP structure, rather than simply co-ordinate them. David Shelley had commented prior to the meeting that he didn't want recreation and access to get lost in the new structure, and Clare reiterated that the DDP was not just 'tourism and accommodation', but much broader including recreation, transport and access and local produce etc. Tim supported the proposal to merge the groups but said that not all those on the Working Group would be able to sit on the DDP, which would be strategic rather than get involved in the day to day detail. Bob highlighted the importance of communication with sub groups such as the town tourism groups and wider stakeholders. Noting the comments made, the meeting supported the proposal to merge the groups.

Phil explained that the AONB Partnership had secured £25,000 Natural Assets funding to develop a 'Sustainable Tourism Strategy' for the Shropshire Hills. This was a requirement of attaining the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, and he hoped the DDP would be the forum to drive this forward and that the Sustainable Tourism Strategy could also be the action plan of the DDP. The grant had been offered for a consultant to write the Strategy, but discussions were being held to see whether the grant could support production of the Strategy by the AONB Partnership and DDP partners. It was felt this would produce a better result with partners having greater involvement and making the money go further. If this option is agreed Phil will contact key partners.

Phil explained the issues of geography in relation to AONB links with the DDP and the Strategy which needed to be borne in mind. In essence, the AONB Partnership did look beyond the AONB boundary in relation to tourism, including the market towns, but from the point of view of what the towns provided for tourism in the wider rural area. It did not have a remit to look at the particular tourism needs and activity of the towns themselves. It was possible however that the Strategy may be able to encompass tourism development needs of the towns through work carried out by the town tourism groups and relevant partners.

Tim highlighted the Council's current Market Town programme of £2.5 million. Both Ludlow and Church Stretton were in the first priority tier and Bob mentioned that Church Stretton had been asked to work up two schemes of up to £75,000 by April 2011, and another two by October. Craven Arms and Bishop's Castle were in the second tier.

Clare said the DDP would hopefully bring clarity between Shropshire Tourism, Shropshire Hills Tourism Ltd and the local tourism groups, so that everyone knew what each others' roles were to avoid overlapping and confusion. Alison asked Tish about the feeling in Ludlow tourism circles about linking with the 'Shropshire Hills'. Tish said a recent meeting had been very positive and the town saw the benefits of working together rather than as individual groups in isolation. The Chamber of Trade had been active for a year and was in a good position to embrace the DDP and the 'Ludlow and the Shropshire Hills' offer.

Bob highlighted the multi-dimensional tourism offer with Ludlow and food, Church Stretton and landscape, etc. Clare agreed that sense of place was key, and said that careful thought was needed to define in the Strategy what makes the Shropshire Hills and the market towns distinctive. Alison reminded the group about the work done under the 'Six towns branding' project and each town had spent a lot of time looking at what was special about their town. Tim said he still had the results in a computer file somewhere and would email to Clare.

Action: Tim to email Clare the Six Towns Branding research. It was agreed that the 'Six towns branding' project had to some extent led to the towns working in isolation of each other, and this Strategy would need to make sure the towns pull together.

Clare said that as well as gathering existing information, there may be a need through the Strategy process to undertake some primary research to address gaps. Tim mentioned some national work by Visit Britain which would be of use for the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

4. Walking with Offa Project

Clare circulated a summary of the project, for which £110,000 has been secured through Natural Assets funding. Clare reminded the group that the project is primarily about delivering economic benefits to the local area and businesses through promotion of walking routes rather than being principally an access development project.

Project outcomes included development of circular walks and creating four walking hubs, creation of a map based website for www.shropshirewalking.co.uk and a Harvey Map produced for the Shropshire Way and Shropshire Hills. Interpretation is another element and the project was looking at new media and its effectiveness. This was going to be done in conjunction with the Discovery Centre who will be able to monitor uptake, feedback, etc. Days out are being developed which include a short walk as part of a day out linking local attractions and other businesses. Training for businesses is also part of the project as direct experience makes it much easier to promote something. Alison said that incentives for getting businesses involved could be include a pub lunch, etc. Walking promotion included walks leader training, linking walking groups and promoting what they are doing.

Phil said that although this project concentrated on the western side of the AONB, other access projects were being funded through SDF such as the Wellington circular cycle ride and the development of circular walks around Much Wenlock.

Tim asked whether the 'Heart of Wales' line could be included into this project plan as the Heart of Wales board would be interested in this project. Bob also mentioned that Church Stretton railway station was undergoing improvements, along with Craven Arms and Ludlow. Dave Koring, Shropshire Council, was the contact to discuss promotion of walking at railway stations. **Action: Clare to add 'Heart of Wales line' into the Walking with Offa Project summary and email to Tim.**

5. Discover Local project

Clare handed out a summary of the project. This project looks at the products that make a difference to the Shropshire Hills landscape and how can we help those businesses involved and make the links back to the landscape. There are two elements to the project 1. consumer events, and 2. business events. All the events for this Financial Year have been organised and include the following:

Wednesday 27th October – Orchards, 10 – 3pm at Mahorall Cider Farm, Hope Bagot. Guided walk through the orchards, have a go at pressing apples and find out about chutney and how to make other apple products. This event is limited to 12 and costs £20 for Friends (£25 others).

Saturday 4th December – Christmas Crafts, 9 – 3pm at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre. An enjoyable way to stock up for Christmas with the regular Farmers market and additional local crafts marquee for special gifts and treats.

The project ends in March 2013 and the ambition is to develop some events into 2-3 day packages to market to visitors.

Tish mentioned the Shropshire Prune (a damson) and how a project is being worked up under 'Ark of Taste', part of the Slow Food initiative. The project would look at replanting trees, food producers, branding, etc. People want to know whether their damson tree is a Shropshire Prune and part of the project would be to identify the trees and any commercial growers.

6. Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Strategy Implementation

Under the Better Welcome scheme, it was hoped next month to complete the 60ft long illustrative timeline alongside the antiques centre in the town. Widening the pavements in the town has been overruled so will not be going ahead at the moment. The travel hub was still an aspiration and Bob hoped that through the Market Towns programme some officer

time would be put towards the project to drive it forward. A wetland development scheme south of the town, to recreate some of the pools that were drained in the early 19th Century was also being discussed. Eight landowners were involved and this was seen as a long term project. Interviews had taken place to select a web designer for the revamp of the Church Stretton website and the Area Tourism Group are improving the visitor information notice boards around the town. With the opening of the new cycle shop in town and Marshbrook Cycle Centre near by, mountain biking was taking off in the area and Bob would like to see an annual event for cyclists held in the town along the lines of the Long Mynd Hike. Bob also mentioned 20th Nov was the Church Stretton Christmas Fair and the regional Liberal Democrat Conference which he saw as an opportunity to showcase the local area.

7. Shropshire Hills Shuttles

Steph explained that the changes made to the Shuttles this year (increase in fares, reduced service on the Secret Hills Shuttle and turning the Secret Hills Shuttle into a circular route between Craven Arms, Clun and Bishop's Castle) had been a mixed success. The fare increase has had the desired effect of increasing bus revenue and the new concessionary fare income is around £3.50 per ticket compared to £1.91 last year. However, this had resulted in fewer passengers on the Shuttles and the majority of users were concessionary travel pass holders rather than paying customers, which means that the service is more vulnerable to changes in the concessionary fare reimbursement calculation.

For 2011, a reduction in funding means that the AONB Partnership would be liable to contributions of > £10,500 if the service remained the same as this year, with three buses. As this is not acceptable, we can only therefore afford to run two buses in 2011. Discussions between the steering group partners are ongoing to decide on how best to utilise two buses and a decision will be made in the near future.

8. AOB and date of next meeting

Phil invited group members to update on any other aspects of their current work:

- Jim reported that implementation work is about to begin on the extension of the Shropshire Way along Wenlock Edge which included possible reopening of the disused railway tunnel.
- Deb mentioned a new prioritising system has been put in place for work on the Rights of Way network. Walkers are Welcome areas are high priority, along with the promoted routes, but the priority accorded to particular routes can be changed if necessary. A comprehensive Rights of Way condition survey is ongoing across the network which includes looking at the potential of routes as well as their condition.
- Sue highlighted that bridleway clearances continue, everyone welcome.
- Phil Moore reported progress with his Care Farming project, subject to funding. He was also interested in making more of our local sheep breeds, Hill Radnor, Clun, Shropshire, Kerry etc.
- Zoe & Andrea said that Heritage Open Days weekend had been successful at the Discovery Centre with lots of people looking around the exhibition. Stokesay Court had over 400 people on the Thursday pm.
- Tim mentioned a recent BBC West Midlands programme 'Wild Weather' which had fantastic shots of Long Mynd from a glider, and was good PR for the Shropshire Hills.
- Phil said that a concern had been raised about changes to management of the Visitor Information Centres network within Shropshire Council, as Church Stretton appeared to be separated from the network. It was reported that these proposals had apparently been changed.

Date of next meeting. This was likely to be the last meeting of the Group in this form, but members would be kept informed of developments with the Shropshire Hills & Ludlow DDP.