

Shropshire Local Access Forum	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u>
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SHROPSHIRE HILLS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY

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Summary

This paper outlines the scope of the contract just started for production of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the Shropshire Hills AONB and surrounding area.

Background

1. Funding was secured in 2009 by the AONB Partnership from Advantage West Midlands' Natural Assets programme (administered by Natural England) to appoint consultants to produce a Sustainable Tourism Strategy and five year Action Plan for each of the Shropshire Hills and Wye Valley AONBs, meeting the requirements of the EUROPARC Federation European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The development of these Sustainable Tourism Strategies forms part of the Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme, one of the interventions recommended in a major research study completed in July 2009, the Welsh-English Border Strategic Regeneration Programme. This programme, which was funded by Welsh Assembly Government, Advantage West Midlands and Natural England, outlines a number of *"opportunities to develop a more sustainable rural economy based on the high quality natural and cultural assets of Offa's Dyke and the surrounding landscape"* and identified Sustainable Tourism of one of the eight priority interventions.
2. As part of the Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme the four Protected Landscapes along the border are being used as pilot areas to develop improved sustainable tourism activity. The Brecon Beacons National Park and the Clwydian Range AONB are both members of the EUROPARC Charter for Sustainable Tourism and have the required Strategies and Action Plans in place. The present contract will result in all four of the Protected Areas along the Welsh - English Border becoming members of the Charter and sharing a joint approach to the development and experience of sustainable tourism. The Charter does not itself directly bring specific funding, but experience in other areas has shown both that the process is very valuable in bringing together the aspirations of the protected landscape body and the tourism industry, and in supporting funding applications for projects and actions arising. The Strategies will also deliver key priorities in the statutory Management Plans (2009-2014) for both AONBs, which both outline the desired approach to tourism development: for the Shropshire Hills *"To develop and support sustainable tourism strongly linked to the landscape of the Shropshire Hills, including policy, facilities and services, and approaches to marketing."*

3. Shropshire Council, working with stakeholders in the tourism industry, has recently established a series of Destination Development Partnerships (DDPs) for sub-areas of the county, one being the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow. These sit under the new Shropshire Tourism Strategy Board, developed from the former Destination Management Partnership. Some additional funding linked to the DDP has enabled the Shropshire Hills Strategy contract to be extended geographically beyond the AONB to cover the whole of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP area including the towns of Church Stretton, Bishop's Castle, Cleobury Mortimer, Craven Arms, Ludlow, Pontesbury/Minsterley and Much Wenlock. The influence on the destination of some other places (notably Knighton and Wellington which about the AONB) that are located outside it, and vice versa, will be taken into account but they will not be included as such in the strategy.
4. A focal aspect of the strategy will be the Shropshire Hills AONB, which relates to all parts of the destination. The strategy will be written to comply with the requirements of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and will be a key document in AONB's application for the Charter. The strategy will equally recognise the key role in tourism played by the market towns, which provide much of the visitor interest in the destination and contain many of the tourism facilities and services. It will pay particular attention to their opportunities and needs. The linkages (in all senses) between the towns and the AONB will be a key theme.
5. The strategy will be driven by the principles of sustainable tourism, which address economic, social and environmental impacts now and in the future. This is a key requirement of the European Charter. The strategy will be written as an integrated document for the destination. It will consider product, market and management issues and opportunities for the destination as a whole, leading to strategic objectives and a single action plan. It will not be divided up by location and should not be seen as a set of individual plans for each town or the AONB.
6. The European Charter requires that a single multi-stakeholder body should take responsibility for the strategy and its implementation. This should include representatives of the tourism industry together with tourism and conservation interests, with the protected area authority (in this case the Shropshire Hill AONB Partnership) playing a strong part in it. It is envisaged that the new Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP would be this body.
7. The contract has been let to The Tourism Company, based in Ledbury, who have completed a number of Strategies for areas which have gained the Europarc Charter, and sub-contracting some of the work to Alison Caffyn, a locally based consultant who prepared the Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Strategy around two years ago. The process and timetable of the contract is shown below. There will be a series of five local consultation meetings, covering town and countryside issues. These will be billed as a set open to everyone to choose which one to attend, rather than as town-centred meetings local to each town. The meetings will be spread geographically across the area.

Tourism Strategy contract – stages and timetable

	Nov-10	Dec-10	Jan-11	Feb-11	Mar-11	Apr-11	May-11
Inception meeting							
Assimilate background material							
Resource assessment							
Consultation with key people							
Online survey of enterprises							
Online survey of visitors							
Local consultation meetings							
Prepare issues report							
Client meeting							
Prepare draft strategy/ action framework							
Stakeholder workshop							
Circulate final draft strategy/ action plan							
Further round of consultation							
Client meeting							
Incorporate comments							
Submit final document							

8. Walking and outdoor activities obviously form a significant part of the tourism appeal of the Shropshire Hills, and the Strategy will seek to optimise these, taking full account of the Shropshire Countryside Access Strategy. Involvement of members of the Local Access Forum in the consultation processes for the Strategy production will be welcomed, and any members wishing to be involved are requested to contact the AONB Partnership Manager. It is intended that a presentation on the content of the draft Strategy will be given to the LAF meeting in April.

List of Background Papers

None

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 principle of applying for the Europarc Charter is included in the AONB Management Plan 2009-14, which was subject to extensive consultation.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Requirements of the EUROPARC Federation European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

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A Sustainable Tourism Strategy is, alongside an appropriate Tourism Forum, one of the key preconditions for applying for the Europarc Charter, and the requirements the Strategy must fulfil are laid down in detail in the Charter Principles as follows:

The strategy should be based on careful consultation and be approved and understood by local stakeholders. It should contain:

- *A definition of the area to be influenced by the strategy, which may extend outside the protected area*
- *An assessment of the area's natural, historic and cultural heritage, tourism infrastructure, and economic and social circumstances; considering issues of capacity, need and potential opportunity*
- *An assessment of current visitors and potential future markets*
- *A set of strategic objectives for the development and management of tourism, covering:*
 - *conservation and enhancement of the environment and heritage;*
 - *economic and social development;*
 - *preservation and improvement of the quality of life of local residents;*
 - *visitor management and enhancement of the quality of tourism offered.*
- *An action plan to meet these objectives*
- *An indication of resources and partners to implement the strategy*
- *Proposals for monitoring results*

The following key issues should be addressed:

To protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development by:

- *monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations*
- *encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions*
- *controlling and reducing activities, including tourism impacts, which: adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise*
- *encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation*

To provide all visitors with a high quality experience in all aspects of their visit, by:

- *researching the expectations and satisfaction of existing and potential visitors*
- *meeting the special needs of disadvantaged visitors*
- *supporting initiatives to check and improve the quality of facilities and services*

To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area, by:

- *ensuring that the promotion of the area is based on authentic images, and is sensitive to needs and capacity at different times and in different locations*

- *providing readily available and good quality visitor information in and around the area, and assisting tourism enterprises to do so*
- *providing educational facilities and services that interpret the area's environment and heritage to visitors and local people, including groups and schools*

To encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area, by:

- *providing and supporting activities, events and packages involving the interpretation of nature and heritage*

To increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism, by:

- *providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, other organisations and tourism enterprises, based on assessing training needs*

To ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents, by:

- *involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area*
- *ensuring good communication between the protected area, local people and visitors*
- *identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise*

To increase benefits from tourism to the local economy, by:

- *promoting the purchase of local products (food, crafts, local services) by visitors and local tourism businesses*
- *encouraging the employment of local people in tourism*

To monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts, by:

- *keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space, including feedback from local tourism enterprises*
- *creating and implementing a visitor management plan*
- *promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative to private cars*
- *controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development*

For further information about the Europarc Charter please see <http://www.european-charter.org/home/> and <http://www.european-charter.org/about-the-charter/>.