

Shropshire Council
Legal and Democratic Services
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
SY2 6ND

Date: Wednesday, 15 March
2023

Committee:
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

Date: Thursday, 23 March 2023
Time: 9.30 am
Venue: Shropshire Room, Craven Arms Community Centre, Newington Way,
Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 9PS

You are requested to attend the above meeting.
The Agenda is attached

Tim Collard
Assistant Director - Legal and Governance

Members of Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

Alex Carson-Taylor (Chairman)	Wayne Barnes
Cecilia Motley (Vice Chairman)	Gillian Binks
Heather Kidd	Jim Bunce
Hilary Luff	Sarah Bury
Dan Morris	Pete Carty
Chris Turley	Janet Cobb
Alison Caffyn	Veronica Cossons
George Chancellor	Nick Read
Adrian Cullis	Charles Edwards
Gillian Preece	Rhona Goddard
Fiona Williams	Carol Griffiths
Andrew Wood	Robert Harris
John Luck	Alan Jones
Ruth Houghton	Bill Klemperer
John Long	Sue Lee
David Mills	Hazel MacDowell
Steve Pennington	Leo Smith

Your Committee Officer is:

Tim Ward Committee Officer

Tel: 01743 257713

Email: tim.ward@shropshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies for absence

2 Minutes of the last meeting (Pages 1 - 4)

The note of the meeting held on 8 November 2022 is attached for confirmation

3 AONB Management Plan Review - support for one year delay and identification of new/changed issues to cover in review (Pages 5 - 12)

This paper seeks the Partnership's support to delay the substantive review of the AONB Management Plan by a year (to be approved by the two local authorities). It also sets out in a draft statement at Appendix 1 an initial list of new or changed issues and drivers which the full Plan review will need to take into account.

4 Update on AONB Partnership Ancient Woodlands and Peatlands Projects (Pages 13 - 16)

This paper gives members an update on the recently started Shropshire Hills AONB Ancient Woodlands project and the Peatlands project in the Upper Clun

5 Brief Update on other AONB Partnership Team and NAAONB activities (Pages 17 - 20)

This paper provides updates to Partnership members on certain topics and areas of activity which do not need an agenda item of their own

6 Access for All - better engagement and services in the AONB for under-served groups (Pages 21 - 24)

This paper introduces some action research currently under way to improve provision for and engagement with under-served groups in relation to the Shropshire Hills AONB.

Kate Garner, a freelance consultant will lead discussion at the meeting.

7 Stepping Stones Needs Assessment Consultation (Pages 25 - 26)

This paper introduces the consultation on Needs Assessment for the Stepping Stones project. Helen Fairweather from Resources for Change and Andrew Hearle and Anam Choudhury of the National Trust will speak on this item at the meeting and seek the views of members as part of the consultation

8 Date of Next Meeting

Members are reminded that the next meeting of the Partnership will be held on Thursday 20th July 2023 at 9.30am



Shropshire Hills
AONB Partnership

23 March 2023

9.30 am

Item

2

Public

MINUTES OF THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MEETING HELD ON 8 NOVEMBER 2022 9.30 - 11.55 AM

Responsible Officer: Tim Ward

Email: tim.ward@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 257713

Present

Local Authorities

Shropshire Council

Cllr Heather Kidd

Cllr Hilary Luff

Cllr Cecilia Motley (Vice Chair)

Telford & Wrekin Council

Cllr Chris Turley

Statutory/Voluntary Agencies & Individual members

Individual Member

George Chancellor

Individual Member

Adrian Cullis

Town & Parish Council representative

Ruth Houghton

Town & Parish Council representative

John Long

Town & Parish Council representative

David Mills

Caring for Gods Acre

Gill Binks

Campaign to Protect Rural England

Sarah Bury

Historic England

Alison MacDonald

Land Life & Livelihoods

Robert Harris

Middle Marches Community Land Trust

Janet Cobb

National Farmers Union

Carol Griffiths

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Veronica Cossons

South Shropshire Climate Action

Nick Read

The Strettons Civic Society

Hilary Clayton-Smith (Vice Chairman)

Upper Onny Wildlife Group

Leo Smith

Observers/Officers

Foundation for Common Land	Renee Wallace
National Trust	Anam Choudhury
National Trust	Andrew Hearle
Shropshire Council	Tim Ward (Committee Officer)
Telford & Wrekin Council	Jennifer Engwell (Biodiversity Technician)
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership staff team	Rachel Glover (Natural Environment Officer) Phil Holden (AONB Partnership Manager) Alison Jones (Farming in Protected Landscapes Adviser)

71 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

- 71.1 In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair Cecilia Motley took the chair and welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 71.2 Apologies for absence had been received from Pete Banford, Jim Bunce, Alison Caffyn, Alex Carson-Taylor, Pete Carty, Charles Edwards, Sue Lee, John Luck and Dan Morris.

72 Minutes of the last meeting

- 72.1 The Committee Officer pointed out one amendment to the minutes in that Alison MacDonald's name had been omitted from the list of attendees.

72.2 RESOLVED:

That subject to the above the minutes of the meeting of the AONB Partnership held on 12 July be approved as a true record.

73 Shropshire Hills AONB Trust update and trustee nomination

- 73.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which updated them on recent activity of the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust and proposed that George Chancellor be nominated as a trustee from the Partnership.
- 73.2 The AONB Partnership Manager reminded the meeting that the Charity had eight trustees, three of which were nominated by the Partnership. He advised that there was currently a vacancy for such a trustee and that it was proposed that George Chancellor be nominated.

RESOLVED:

That George Chancellor be appointed as a Partnership Trustee on the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust.

73.3 Mr Chancellor thanked the Partnership and gave a brief update on the work of the Trust. He stated that currently the Trust currently raised in the region of £15,000 for the Conservation Fund but that Trustees were looking to expand this and were setting a target of £30,000. He asked all members of the Partnership to encourage people to join the “Friends of the Shropshire Hills” and to encourage local businesses to join the newly launched Business Supporters Scheme.

73.4 Mr Chancellor advised the meeting that there was currently a vacancy for a trustee from outside the Partnership and asked that if anyone knew of a person that may be interested they should let the AONB Partnership Manager know.

74 Draft AONB Partnership Climate Change Action Plan

74.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which set out a draft Climate Change Action Plan for the AONB Partnership.

74.2 The AONB Partnership Manager reminded the meeting that the national statement of commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action which had been signed at the last meeting, contained a commitment to develop a local climate action plan for the AONB, and that the attached draft had been developed following the discussion at the workshops held at the last meeting, discussion at the Strategy and Performance Committee, and discussion with other groups. He invited comments from members and stated that further comments could be submitted to him outside of the meeting.

74.5 Members generally welcomed the plan and made the following comments: -

- Role for the Partnership as a pressure group to encourage change and good practice and to act as an exemplar.
- Need for more integrated policy on housing – local plan not strong enough in encouraging new builds to be climate friendly

74.6 It was agreed that a small working group be set up to look the subject of climate change, and especially communications. Several members expressed an interest in joining the group.

75 Our Upland Commons Project

75.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which gave an update on the ‘Our Upland Commons’ project operating in the Shropshire Hills AONB and other areas.

75.2 The meeting received a presentation from Renee Wallace, project officer for the Shropshire Hills which gave a brief overview of the project and updated members on some of the work that had been carried out. She then took questions.

76 Stepping Stones Project Update and Sustainability

76.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which gave an update on the Stepping Stones project including recent project delivery and current work on a Sustainability Roadmap and Needs Assessment.

- 76.2 The meeting received a presentation from Andrew Hearle, project manager which gave a brief overview of the project and updated members on some of the work that had been carried out.
- 76.3 The meeting received a presentation from Anam Choudhury, which outlined work being carried out on future sustainability of the work which included the carrying out of a needs assessment to inform the future work that was required to sustain the Stepping Stones activities, identify needs, and to help when seeking funding.

77 Farming in Protected Landscapes - Showcase of Project Activity

- 77.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which gave an update on projects supported by the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.
- 77.2 The meeting received a presentation from Alison Jones, Farming in Protected Landscapes Adviser which gave members more details on some of the projects which had been funded, and some of the projects that were currently being developed. She also updated the meeting on some of the work that had been carried out to increase awareness of the programme.

78 AONB Team Activity Brief Update

- 78.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which gave an update on the recent work of the AONB Team.
- 78.2 The AONB Partnership Manager reminded the meeting that this was a short update papers, and that more full reports were made at the Strategy & Performance Committee. He advised that if members had any specific queries they could contact him outside the meeting.

79 Dates of Future Meetings

- 79.1 Members were advised that future meeting would be held on the following dates: -

Thursday 23rd March 2023
Thursday 20th July 2023
Thursday 23rd November 2023

All meetings at 9.30am

<TRAILER_SECTION>

Signed (Chairman)

Date:



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 23 rd March 2023	<u>Item</u> 3
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AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW - SUPPORT FOR ONE YEAR DELAY AND IDENTIFICATION OF NEW/CHANGED ISSUES TO COVER IN REVIEW

Responsible Officer Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager
e-mail: phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 254741

Summary

This paper seeks the Partnership's support to delay the substantive review of the AONB Management Plan by a year (to be approved by the two local authorities). It also sets out in a draft statement at Appendix 1 an initial list of new or changed issues and drivers which the full Plan review will need to take into account.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to support the proposed delay to the full Plan review, and to comment on the draft statement and any further issues for inclusion in this.

Background

At the 12th July 2022 Partnership meeting the possible delay to the full Management Plan review was discussed, and the minister's letter had just been received (this is included at Appendix 2). There are a number of reasons why a delay to the full review of the Management Plan is desirable and why many AONB Partnerships are taking up this option. These include:

- Establishment of the new Landscapes, Parks and Trails Partnership and new strategy for protected landscapes arising from this.
- New guidance commissioned by Natural England and in preparation on protected landscape Management Plans.
- Defra's development of a new outcomes framework for protected landscapes to include new targets and monitoring requirements.
- Alignment with government target to protect 30% of land by 2030 (30 by 30).
- National Landscapes rebranding
- Government's proposed changes to the purposes of AONB designation

This paper proposes that the Partnership supports the one year delay to the full review of the Management Plan, and that our two local authorities approve this, such that the relevant official notification can be made.

The legal requirement is set out in S89 of the Countryside & Right of Way Act 2000:

S89 Management plans

(10) Where a conservation board or relevant local authority review any plan under this section, they shall—

(a) determine on that review whether it would be expedient to amend the plan and what (if any) amendments would be appropriate,

(b) make any amendments that they consider appropriate, and

(c) publish a report on the review specifying any amendments made.

Our current process is essentially that this 'light touch review' concludes that it is not expedient to amend the existing Management Plan. The statement we will provide does not therefore need to specify amendments (as in b and c above) but will serve to confirm the validity of the current plan until 2025 and also to identify new or changed issues and drivers which the full plan review should address.

Despite this delay to the end of the review process and therefore approval of the new 2025-2030 Management Plan, it is proposed to commence the review process more or less from now, to allow ample time to do this. Appendix 3 gives a proposed timetable and process for the Management Plan review. This is based on that used for the last plan review and may need to be amended as further guidance is received. Some stages or tasks may be started earlier than stated here, working first on areas least affected by pending new guidance, etc.

List of Background Papers AONB Partnership paper & minutes 12 th July 2022 item 5 Delay to Management Plan review
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 Draft Management Plan review statement Appendix 2 Minister's letter of 7 th July 2022 Appendix 3 Proposed timetable and process for Management Plan review

Appendix 1 Draft Management Plan review statement

(to be accompanied by a letter from the AONB Partnership Chair on behalf of the two local authorities)

Review Statement - Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan, draft at 14th March 2023

The letter of 7th July 2022 received from Defra Minister Lord Benyon outlined formally an option to delay the full review of the AONB Management Plan, allowing completion nationally of new management planning guidance, establishment of the Landscapes Trails & Parks Partnership, a new Protected Landscapes Outcomes Framework and other evolving policy for AONBs, and will bring the next Plan for 2025-2030 in line with government programmes such as 30 by 30. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has supported taking up this option to delay, undertaking the suggested 'light touch review' of the current Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24. The two local authorities Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council *have agreed (tbc)* that it is not expedient to make amendments to the Plan at the current time. **This Statement therefore confirms that the 2019-24 Management Plan will stand for a further year until 2025 when the full review leading to a new Plan will be completed.** We will reserve the option to use the full period to 31st December 2025 for the review process but will aim to have the new Plan in place by the end of March 2025. A further progress update and revision of the current Management Plan actions will be produced by March 2024.

The Partnership's light touch review has identified the following issues to address in the full plan review, and as areas for development of new content in the new 2025-30 Management Plan (note that list is not exhaustive and topics inter-relate and overlap):

- Climate change mitigation and adaptation, including integrating and developing content from the Partnership's Climate Change Action Plan, local and national strategies and plans for Net Zero
- Nature Recovery – linking to the Colchester Declaration, the AONB Nature Recovery Plan and emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Agriculture transition, the development of the Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme and support for those forms of farming most compatible with AONB purposes
- Priorities set out in the Landscapes Review and government response, and any changes to purposes, duties and targets which result from this
- The government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (revision to 25 Year Environment Plan)
- Closer attention to natural capital assets and the ecosystem services they provide
- Emerging opportunities for green finance
- Local authority policies, including the Shropshire Plan (Shropshire Council)
- New Shropshire Local Plan and review directions for the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan
- Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Rebranding of AONBs as National Landscapes

(further suggestions of issues and areas to include are welcome from Partnership members)



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
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SW1P 4DF

The Rt Hon Lord Benyon
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

T 03459 335577
defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

07 July 2022

Dear colleagues,

I am writing to confirm a decision by Defra, effective today, to give you and your partners an option to delay the publication of upcoming Management Plans by up to 1 year from their original planned review date, after new Management Plan guidance and new Protected Landscapes outcomes are published.

I am addressing this letter specifically to those Protected Landscape Management Plan Partnerships (hereafter: "Partnerships") that are required by law to review their next Management Plan in 2023 or 2024. For awareness, I have copied this letter to Protected Landscapes bodies who will not be affected by this option to delay and can proceed with their current review timetable as planned.

Please allow me to explain the rationale for this, and to reassure you that you are under no obligation to delay the publication of your next Management Plan if you would prefer not to and/or if a delay is unsuited to your management planning cycle.

The government committed to strengthen Management Plans in its [response to the Landscapes Review](#). We have already begun work to implement non-legislative change during 2022. For example, we are working with Natural England, National Parks England, and the National Association of AONBs to update the Management Plan guidance for both National Parks and AONBs. We are also working to ensure that new ambitious outcomes are agreed for the role of Protected Landscapes in delivering on the government's goals, aligned with the revised 25 Year Environment Plan and interim environmental targets under the Environment Act 2021 and the Net Zero Strategy.

We recognise the scale and significant implications of these reforms for management planning. We have also listened carefully to those of you who have voiced support for a more flexible and less prescriptive approach to management planning during our consultation on the Landscapes Review Response, which ended on 9 April.

We have therefore decided to grant you an option to delay publication of your next Management Plan. In practice, this option to delay will only apply to Partnerships that are required by law to review their next Management Plan in 2023 or 2024 and will therefore apply to Partnerships who currently find themselves in the middle or nearing the end of their five-year Management Plan cycle. Protected Landscapes that are due to publish their next Management Plan from 2025 onwards will not be affected by the delay and will work to the same timelines as planned.

The purpose of this optional delay is to give Partnerships time to digest new outcome-based targets (due to be published in January 2023), new Management Plan guidance (due to be published in Spring 2023), and new policies outlined in the government's response to the Landscapes Review, and to embed these more easily into their Plans.

Defra considers that that any Partnerships wishing to delay their next Plan would still need to respect their five-year review cycles as stipulated by the Environment Act 1995 (for National Park Management Plans) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (for AONB Management Plans). In order to comply with the law without compromising the integrity of future Management Plans, Defra judges that Partnerships could simply produce a light-touch review in which they commit to produce a new Management Plan after the new guidance is published.

Defra has considered what a light-touch review might look like and advises the following: Partnerships would agree and publish one page of text setting out their intentions for the next Management Plan. This could include a brief vision statement, a summary of how the Management Plan will be structured, and a summary of the Partnerships' objectives over the next five-year review period (carrying forward actions and/or adding new ones for the year affected by the delay). Producing a light-touch review of this nature would allow Partnerships to carry over their existing Plan by demonstrating they have considered the next Plan, in compliance with the law. Partnerships would not need to consult extensively to produce this light-touch review, as we expect it would be pitched as a continuation/extension of the current Plan.

We remain committed, however, to ensuring substantive Management Plan reviews are conducted. We therefore ask all Protected Landscapes electing to delay their next Management Plan to complete a review of that Plan no later than 31 December 2025. We will consider any requests for an additional, exceptional extension on a case-by-case basis. Although we are committed to ensuring the management planning process is more flexible going forwards, we envisage this being a one-off delay in light of the wide-ranging and significant reforms we are proposing to make.

Let me be clear that any Plans that have recently been published will remain valid and effective for their current cycle in full (that is, five years from the date of publication). We recognise the considerable work that has gone into these Plans and want to assure you that any new targets, guidance, or policies can be embedded at a later stage, either during your current cycle or as part of the next five-year review.

Once again, I would like to reassure you that this delay is optional; it is entirely up to you, as Partnerships, whether to exercise it.

I hope that this option to delay can help to ensure a smooth and flexible transition as we roll out reforms to strengthen Management Plans. As we begin this process of longer-term reforms to Management Plans, we would like to explore how we can better harmonise Management Plan cycles so that we can promote partnership working and coordination of plan implementation across the 44 Protected Landscapes, while respecting local circumstances. I look forward to your input as we develop this work.

Management Plans are vital strategic documents and I am grateful for your tireless work to draft, develop and deliver them. My officials and I look forward to continuing to work with you on multiple programmes of work linked to Management Plans, including updating the new Management Plan guidance, setting new targets for Protected Landscapes, and developing the National Landscapes Partnership and the National Landscapes Strategy.

I would be grateful if you could share this letter among your Partnerships and wider networks to ensure they are informed.

I have also copied this letter to Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, Philip Hygate, Chair of the National Association of AONBs, and Andrew McCloy, Chair of National Parks England.

Yours ever,



THE RT HON LORD BENYON

Timetable for review of the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan for 2025-30

Including Sustainability Appraisal (SA), with required Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

TASK	WHO	EXPECTED TIMETABLE
FORMALITIES AND NOTIFICATION		
Authorisation from local authorities to undertake review on their behalf	AONB Team	Nov 23
Agree process and timetable of review	Partnership	Nov 23
Notify Natural England S90(1) and other stakeholders	AONB Team	Nov 23
Announce requirement for SEA/SA	AONB Team	Nov 23
SCOPING		
Gather information relating to new evidence/ issues, including partner input at Partnership meeting	AONB Team & Partnership	Nov - Dec 23
Discussion of Plan review priorities among Team, Partnership, Transition Board and key partners. Incorporate within planned events where possible	Partnership	Nov 23 – Jan 24
Identify main areas requiring update or new work	AONB Team & Partnership	Nov 23 – Jan 24
List and assess relevance of new strategies/ plans, including in Wales	AONB Team	Nov – Dec 23
Collate community views on issues from existing sources	AONB Team	Nov – Dec 23
Write scoping report for SA/SEA, setting context and objectives, establishing baseline evidence and indicators (stage A)	AONB Team	Nov – Dec 23
Consult on scoping report for SA/SEA	With statutory agencies	Jan 24
Publish update to State of the AONB report	AONB Team	Jan 24
REVIEW		
Undertake specific targeted consultations /participatory workshops with relevant groups	Partnership & wider	Jan – Mar 24
Redraft main issues, aims and objectives and discuss with relevant groups.	AONB Team & Partnership	Jan – Mar 24
Work on topic sections with relevant groups – issues, policies and actions.	AONB Team & Partnership	Jan – Mar 24
Assess effects of objectives, policies & actions and for SA/SEA and develop alternatives. (Stage B) An element of independent review is required.	AONB Team	Feb – Mar 24
Collate new draft plan and Environmental Report for SA/SEA (Stage C) plus non-technical summary.	AONB Team	Mar - April 24
Approve Consultation Draft	Partnership	May 24
CONSULTATION & APPROVAL OF FULL PLAN		
Run public consultation on new draft plan and SA/SEA report (Stage D). 12 week period.	AONB Team/ Partnership	May - July 24
Run consultation events	AONB Team	May - July 24
Consider comments from consultation and amend plan	AONB Team	July - Aug 18
Report on consultation and suggested amendments	Partnership	Aug 24
Send to Natural England for formal observations	AONB Team	Sept 24
Consider comments from formal observations and amend plan	Partnership	Nov - Dec 24
Get new plan formally approved through Cabinet of local authorities	Local authorities	Jan 25 -
Send approved Plan to Secretary of State and disseminate	AONB Team	By March 25
Publish Statement on how SA/SEA was taken into account and changes made.	AONB Team	March 25
Implement and monitor Plan and its effects (SA/SEA Stage E).	Partnership	April 25 on

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ANCIENT WOODLANDS AND PEATLANDS PROJECTS UPDATE

Responsible Officer Rachel Glover, Natural Environment Officer
e-mail: rachel.glover@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 255231

Summary

This paper gives members an update on the recently started Shropshire Hills AONB Ancient Woodlands project and the Peatlands project in the Upper Clun.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the update and ask questions or make comments.

Background

Shropshire Hills AONB Ancient Woodland Restoration Project

In the Shropshire Hills AONB, Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands (ASNW) are key natural assets and are a highly important for habitat in the landscape, supporting a wealth of biodiversity. Ancient woodlands cover 4.97% of the AONB, but approximately two thirds of that area are sites classed as Plantation on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS). These are woods that have been planted with trees that would not naturally grow there, particularly non-native conifers.

This project aims to overcome some of the barriers to restoration of ASNW sites and PAWS within the Shropshire Hills AONB. We are working collaboratively with the Woodland Trust, who secured project funding from the Forestry Commission's Woods into Management Forestry Innovation Funds. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership team will be delivering the project, primarily through our new Woodland Project Officer (Dougald Purce), with support from Natural Environment Officers, Mike Kelly and Rachel Glover. Dougald Purce joins the team with a wealth of experience and will be working to engage and advise woodland owners about the potential their sites have for restoration. Dougald's role on the project is full time from 14th March onwards, with the project running until March 2025.

Extensive mapping work has already been undertaken by Mike Kelly to identify key sites, with the project focusing on identifying ASNW and PAWS sites, including smaller woodlands owned and managed by private landowners and farmer. Historical mapping records have also been drawn up to help inform the project's focus.

For many sites, the first step will be to undertake a woodland condition assessment, identifying woodland attributes, assessing condition and biodiversity indicators. Depending on the woodland owner's long-term aspirations, such information could then be used to inform a site management plan, advising on key restoration measures that could be

implemented. There is also the potential then to seek funding for restoration works from organisations such as Severn Trent Water, who are looking to improve biodiversity. Such works could include: felling works on PAWS; thinning to encourage native broadleaves and increase light levels to the forest floor; replanting with native broadleaves; fencing to reduce grazing pressure or coppicing works.

At this stage, we have begun initial discussions with 8 woodland owners regarding their sites and have agreed with them that woodland condition assessments would be a useful first step. Dougald will be working alongside Woodland Trust consultants to carry out these assessments and then take recommendations forward. The project has been promoted on our website and through other networks, and we are in touch with a range of other woodland owners who are also interested in being involved. We are also promoting the project through different professional networks and working groups and would encourage partnership members to promote the project to any potential interested stakeholders where possible.

Peatlands Project in the upper Clun catchment

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) states that peatlands are among the most valuable ecosystems on earth, through their roles in supporting rare species; mitigating flood risk; storing carbon and regulating water quality. The IUCN UK Peatland Programme has developed the UK Peatland Strategy 2018 - 2040, stressing the need for immediate action to protect and restore these habitats. At present, 80% of UK peatlands are in a damaged and deteriorating state.

At a local level, soil mapping shows areas within the Shropshire Hills AONB as having peaty soils present, including in the upper Clun, Stiperstones, Black Hill, Brown Clee and Catherton Common. As part of ongoing work in the Clun catchment, we have linked up with partner organisations, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Natural England, to seek opportunities to gain a better understanding of the current condition of areas in this catchment mostly of shallow peaty soils (plus some pockets of deeper peat). Evidence published by Natural England shows that these soils are currently high carbon emitters. Their value as carbon sinks could be increased if areas were re-wetted, less intensively grazed and conifer plantation cover reduced.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust have successfully secured Farming in Protected Landscapes funding for detailed eco-hydrological survey of 449 ha of land in the Clun Forest area, testing for current peat depths and overall condition or level of degradation. Their consultant's analysis will also identify specific locations where different peatland restoration measures could be implemented. Such results will be shared with landowners, and it is hoped will be a useful evidence base to inform future land management decisions and possible environmental payments for carbon storage and headwater restoration. The Shropshire Hills AONB team has been supporting this project, particularly with mapping work and landowner engagement.

In addition, an opportunity has arisen to build on the work of the FiPL funded survey and undertake similar survey work on a further 657 hectares of mapped shallow peaty soils in this catchment. This project would be funded by Natural England, as part of their Protected Sites Strategy work, of which the Clun is one of five pilot areas in England. A funding Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) is currently being developed between Natural England, the Shropshire Hills AONB team and Shropshire Wildlife Trust. The AONB team would lead on project delivery and contractor management under the MoA.

List of Background Papers

Project information listed on Shropshire Hills AONB website

[The AONB's ancient woods are some of our most valuable natural assets.
\(shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk\)](http://shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk)

UK Peatland Strategy

[2018 UK Peatland Strategy DIGITAL 3.pdf \(iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org\)](http://iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org)

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

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BRIEF UPDATE ON OTHER AONB PARTNERSHIP TEAM AND NAAONB ACTIVITIES

Responsible Officer Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager
e-mail: phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 254741

Summary

This paper provides updates to Partnership members on certain topics and areas of activity which do not need an agenda item of their own.

Recommendation

Partnership members are recommended to note the updates and offer comments.

Background

Farming in Protected Landscapes

An allocation of 10 grants in December was followed in January by a significant increase in Countryside Stewardship rates of grant for which many FiPL agreement holders were eligible. This has had the effect of moving us very quickly to very high levels of commitment against our grant budget, including for year 3 (2023-24). There has been considerable admin work in applying the new grant rates to around 26 eligible projects, which has also affected the phasing of some projects. We have had the opportunity to bid for more funding in 2023-24 and are seeking a grant budget of £1.5 million. Defra have also announced an extension to a year 4 (2024-25) and we have requested a grant budget of £1.37 million for this year 4. We hope also to receive some additional budget for advice & guidance and for admin. We have 65 projects funded to date.

'Access for All' capital works

Joy Howells has been working hard with partners to make best use of the 2022-23 allocation of Defra capital funding for 'Access for All' priorities. Projects being funded include benches at Cardingmill Valley, pond/wetland/dragonfly viewing platform replacement at the Discovery Centre, and weatherproof noticeboards, benches and an all-ability path at the Bog Centre. We are also looking at improvements to the AONB website and reprint of some leaflets. The research and development contract to Kate Garner covered in item 6 is also funded from this allocation. There is no funding for 2023-4 but a further allocation in 2024-25.

Climate Change Action Plan

The Action Plan has been updated and finalised following comments made at the last meeting and will be recirculated separately to members. Dates are being trawled for the proposed sub-group of Partnership members focussing on communications. We continue to work closely with the NAAONB collaboration group and with Zero Carbon Shropshire, especially on sharing knowledge of carbon storage and sequestration in land and soil.

Fix the Fort

Practical repair works on the hillfort at Caer Caradoc (by Church Stretton) are now substantially complete. The public appeal raised over £4,000 and this was matched by a £10,000 grant from the HF Holidays Pathways Fund (HF run the Long Mynd Hotel) and a £13,000 grant from Farming in Protected Landscapes. After a helicopter lift of 50 bags of soil and stone in November, the majority of the work was completed before Christmas, mostly by contractors, but also including two sessions with the Young Rangers groups. A couple of public engagement events linked to the project are programmed for the spring.

Young Rangers

Extension of the project has now been approved until the end of December 2023, using budget underspend. Weekend and half term/holidays activities continue to be well attended and popular. 80 young people (aged 12-16) are registered on the project and of these, around 30 have achieved at least one AQA Unit Award Scheme certificate on subjects relating to nature conservation. We hope to send two Young Rangers to the Europarc International Junior Ranger camp in Denmark in the summer.

Green Leaders

We continue to work with students at Ludlow College on Green Leaders sessions. 5 students have gained a level 1 Green Leaders AQA certification. We hope to connect the Green Leaders with the Partnership at some stage, with a view to improving the representation of youth voice into our governance and activity.

Shropshire Hills Shuttle Buses

Following a consultation with regular users, the 2023 service is being redesigned to provide a better service and to improve financial sustainability. The new timetable will be publicised shortly when finalised.

Shropshire Council Chief Exec visit

Andy Begley Shropshire Council's Chief Executive is spending the afternoon visiting the AONB team on Tuesday 21st March, including discussion at the office and a site visit.

AONB Partnership vacancies

Hilary Claytonsmith stepped down from the Partnership in December. The Strettons Civic Society may appoint a new representative, but Hilary was also one of our two Vice Chairs, so this role is now vacant. If anyone is interested in taking up this role, do please get in touch and we will arrange a nomination process. Mark Hughes of Llanfair Waterdine Parish Council also stood down in January so there is a vacancy for a Parish or Town Council representative. Unless anyone has a strong suggestion or nomination to make, we may leave this seat vacant until the biennial membership review this autumn.

Consultation on changes to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

We provided comments on the NAAONB response to the recent consultation on changes to NPPF. The most significant change in relation to AONBs is probably changes to policy making onshore wind energy developments more feasible. The response welcomes this in principle recognising the need for increased capacity for renewables, but recommends continued care regarding wind developments in AONBs and measures to reduce potential conflicts with landscape quality. The response also recommends some improvements to the main policy paragraphs on AONBs, as well as identifying the climate and ecological emergency (including nature recovery) as justifying greater emphasis throughout the NPPF. The full NAAONB response is available at the link below.

National Landscapes rebranding

The National Association for AONBs has received funding from Defra this Financial Year to progress rebranding AONBs as National Landscapes, with a particular focus on making our areas more appealing to a wider range of society. A steering group representing AONB partnerships has been working with the NAAONB and the branding agency Nice & Serious to develop and define the National Landscapes brand, incorporating input from a Creative Council (representing people underrepresented in our landscapes). Unfortunately the face to face sessions at venues around the country (including Church Stretton) did not attract sufficient bookings, so have been cancelled and reconsidered. Without these briefings, we are not at the time of writing in a position to provide a full update on the rebranding strategy and proposals. Further opportunities to share this will hopefully follow shortly.

Landscape Parks & Trails Partnership

Defra has been progressing the formation of this Partnership (adapted from the Glover Review recommendation for a National Landscapes Service). Its purpose is to create a more collaborative way of working that amplifies and scales up the impact and influence of the (English) National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Trails. Two themes for strategic programmes have been identified for joint work, these are nature recovery and diversity of workforce and visitors. Financial support will fund dedicated resource within existing partners to support the partnership to develop and deliver the programmes. A Chair and Partnership Manager are being appointed and the Partnership will start to function in April 2023.

List of Background Papers

The full NAAONB response to the consultation on changes to the NPPF is available at https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/application/files/6816/7776/9804/NAAONB_Levelling_Up_and_Regeneration_Bill_NPPF_consultation_response_2.3.2023.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



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 23 rd March 2023	<u>Item</u> 6
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ACCESS FOR ALL - BETTER ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICES IN THE AONB FOR UNDER-SERVED GROUPS

Responsible Officer Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager
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Summary

This paper introduces some action research currently under way to improve provision for and engagement with under-served groups in relation to the Shropshire Hills AONB. At a later stage this will include specific recommendations for the Partnership, team and partners.

Recommendation

Partnership members are recommended to contribute to the discussion on this topic and offer perspectives, experience and comments.

Background

Kate Garner, a freelance consultant will lead discussion at the meeting.

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 topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.
Appendices Appendix 1 Interim report from Kate Garner



Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership meeting - 23rd March 2023

Progress report on the delivery of a brief for research and recommendations into improving engagement with under-served groups in the Shropshire Hills AONB

The brief

To provide an understanding of under-served groups in relation to the Shropshire Hills AONB. Make recommendations for engagement with them and improving services and provision by a range of partner organisations.

Timeline

The work will be completed by the end of March 2023 with the potential for some further activity in April 2023.

Background and context

Following the national designated Landscapes Review in 2019 there is a greater emphasis on ensuring the benefits of designated landscapes are enjoyed by all sections of society, and of the need to plan proactively for this, given the known under-representation of certain groups and sections of society.

In 2023 the AONBs will be rebranded as National Landscapes and will continue the implementation of the recommendations made in the Landscapes Review. The name change is designed to create a more unified, coherent and up to date brand, which will underpin a more fundamental shift in how the results needed for nature and the communities served are delivered.

This piece of work will support Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and its partners to be well-placed to locally respond to these national changes.

There are a number of formally recognised Protected Characteristics groups whose specific needs public bodies have a duty to consider in the design and delivery of their services.

These are the groups known or believed to be under-served in their participation in what the AONB as a natural landscape offers:

- People with health conditions or disabilities
- Young people
- People from minority ethnic backgrounds
- People living on low incomes, without access to a car, who are socially excluded or rurally isolated.
- Elderly people
- People who face hard or soft barriers in participation because of religion, sexual orientation or other factors

Objectives and outputs of the brief

- Provide a clear understanding of identified under-served groups in relation to the Shropshire Hills AONB



- Identify barriers and opportunities for greater involvement
- Identify case studies of good practice
- Develop and recommend strategies and potential actions for engagement by the AONB Partnership and partners.
- Create and deliver a written report, presentations and briefing sessions that will inform the AONB team, the Partnership and partners and the review of the AONB Management Plan.

Activity undertaken to deliver the brief

- Research to understand existing local and national activity and work that is tackling equity, diversity, inclusion in the outdoors.
- Research to understand the quantitative and qualitative data that enables the identification of underserved and marginalised communities.
- Conversations with the AONB team, the Partnership and other partner organisations working in the AONB.
- Conversations with the local leads for social prescribing and other programmes that are connecting people into the outdoors to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Identifying case studies of good practice elsewhere that can inspire local activity.
- Identification and creation of resources that will support confident and proactive communication and engagement.

Gathering local intelligence through talking to the representatives and members of the communities identified as being less likely to participate within the AONB and finding out more about participation, e.g. -

- How are local people and visitors using the AONB for enjoyment (or not)
- The experience of taking part in organised events (or not)
- The opportunity to volunteer for activity that protects the AONB or helps people enjoy the landscape and doing things within it.

Initial thoughts through the work done so far

The demographic data available shows that Shropshire is a relatively homogenous area. However, when a variety of protected characteristics and intersectionality are considered, our local populations are in fact more diverse than we realise.

One of the challenges facing the AONB Partnership as an organisation is that it is impossible for it to know everything that is going on within the AONB. It could be that the range of people coming to the area to be active and explore are more diverse than is currently known.

It's important for the AONB Partnership as an organisation to appreciate that it doesn't have to understand every community that wants to participate in the area in some way, but to work effectively in partnership with the people who do understand those communities.



Proposed outcomes to be achieved as a result of the recommendations (to be confirmed in final report)

- Greater understanding of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion and the hard and soft barriers experienced by different communities
- Confident, proactively inclusive decision making, actions and communications
- The Shropshire Hills AONB area is recognised as being welcoming and proactively inclusive place for all communities
- Greater and different involvement in existing programmes and projects - participation
- Greater and different involvement in existing programmes and projects - volunteering
- New outreach activities co-produced with the people they are designed for
- Improved diversity in the people and communities who engage with and contribute to the review of the Management Plan
- Greater diversity within the organisations and structures that inform and decide governance actions within the AONB Partnership
- Greater diversity within the workforce of the Shropshire Hills AONB team and partner organisations workforce.

It is recognised that the recommendations will need to be realistic and pragmatic so that they can be integrated into current or planned AONB Partnership activity by adapting work practices and involving new stakeholders. However, it may be necessary to consider seeking additional resources to effectively deliver some recommendations at the desired pace.

Opportunities to share findings with other research activity

Resources for Change is currently completing a Needs Assessment for the Stepping Stones programme to assess and inform it's work and future development. There are opportunities for engagement with some local groups to be held jointly, and it is hoped that the two pieces of research will complement and add value to each other.

Next steps

The final local conversations will take place and case studies of good practice identified. The recommendations and associated actions will be confirmed, and the final report written by the end of March 2023.

Adventures in Communities

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Committee and Date Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 23 rd March 2023	Item 7
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STEPPING STONES NEEDS ASSESSMENT CONSULTATION

Responsible Officer Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager
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Summary

This paper introduces the consultation on Needs Assessment for the Stepping Stones project. Helen Fairweather from Resources for Change and Andrew Hearle and Anam Choudhury of the National Trust will speak on this item at the meeting and seek the views of members as part of the consultation.

Recommendation

Partnership members are recommended to participate in the consultation process.

List of Background Papers Previous discussion on this topic at 8 th November 2022 AONB Partnership meeting, agenda item 6.
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 Stepping Stones Needs Assessment consultation paper



STEPPING STONES NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CONSULTATION WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE AONB PARTNERSHIP

Thursday 23rd March 2023

The Stepping Stones is a nature conservation project based in the Shropshire Hills led by National Trust and its partners including AONB Partnership. Our 50-year vision is for natural habitats in the Shropshire Hills to be restored, healthy and connected, & for the people who live, work and play in this remarkable area to understand, benefit from, and support our efforts. The Project has been supporting the local communities, farmers & conservation of the natural & cultural heritage. In planning the sustainability of the Stepping Stones Project, National Trust has appointed Resources for Change to undertake a **Needs Assessment** to get a better understanding of local needs and examine how nature-based and other local activities might be able to help meet them. Consultation with AONB Partnership is part of this Needs Assessment where we are asking members to participate in a short consultation session on 23rd March. Taking part in this session is entirely optional. To help you prepare for the consultation session, we are sharing with you the consultation questions as listed below. You may write the answers in advance and bring them with you to the meeting or email them to Helen Fairweather at helen@r4c.org.uk. Thank you in advance for your participation and inputs.

Consultation Questions

1. Name of your Organisation:

2. As a member of the AONB Partnership, what has been the key successes of working in partnership with the Stepping Stones Project? Please give examples.

3. As a member of the AONB Partnership, what has been the key challenges associated with working in partnership with the Stepping Stones Project? Please give examples.

4. Are there any new objectives that your own organisation would like to see supported by the Stepping Stones Project in the future?

5. Do you have any new project ideas for conservation of the wildlife, landscape and history in the Shropshire Hills that you would like to share?

6. Is there anything you would like to recommend that would make the current partnership with the Stepping Stones Project stronger and more effective in the future?