

AONB PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY UPDATE

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Summary

This paper provides members with a summary update of recent activity of the AONB Partnership staff team, along with a summary of the team work programme and budget for 2016-17.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the information provided and offer comments.

KEY AREAS OF RECENT PROGRESS IN 2015-16

Take and co-ordinate action to conserve and enhance natural beauty, to promote enjoyment and understanding and to further sustainable development.

- **LEADER programme handover**

Following decisions made in June, the running of the Southern Shropshire LEADER programme has been handed over to Shropshire Council's Outdoor Partnerships team. A new Local Action Group (LAG) has been formed, and George Chancellor is representing the AONB Partnership on this. Grant applications are now being invited, and further details about the LEADER programme can now be found at <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/southern-shropshire-leader-programme/>.

- **Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme**

The LPS Board met on 16th December, receiving a presentation from Resources for Change on the initial findings of the mid-term review, and will meet again on 16th March. A team session on prioritising outputs for the remainder of the scheme has been held. The LPS Management Group also meets monthly.

Coal and transport. A development and repair grant offer for £108,000 has been received from Historic England for the 1784 Engine House at Pontesbury, and negotiations are in progress to get the contract signed by the landowners.

Lead & barytes mining. CBS Conservation have completed some restoration work at Snailbeach and Cothercott mine sites, and some further vegetation clearance has been carried out at Cothercott. Plans are being made for new interpretation at both sites.

Rescuing rocks & overgrown relics. Practical task days have been held over the winter at Earl's Hill, Poles Coppice and Nills Hill (mainly tree and scrub clearance) and at Snailbeach and The Bog (scrapes and vegetation management).

Volunteer survey work through 'Open hills, old ways and commons' is being fed into the Historic Environment Record, with professional support. Access improvements have been carried out at the entrance and parking area at Roundton NNR.

Hillforts & Castles. Ground stabilisation has been carried out at Castle Pulverbatch motte and bailey (parking area) and task days held here and at Callow hillfort.

A wildflower meadows talk was given on 22 November and a new contractor is being sought to run the machinery in 2016.

Buzz in the Borders workshops on pollinators and wildlife gardening have been held in Pulverbatch, Stiperstones and Chirbury.

Ground-nesting Bird Recovery Project. The Jean Jackson Charitable Trust has agreed an additional £36,000 for this project in 2016-18. Monitoring data for 2015 has been reported and a series of well attended feedback events held for farmers and the community. Unfortunately, curlew breeding success was very poor in 2015, with no young successfully fledged. Proposals for nest protection in 2016 have been developed and nest monitoring will begin again shortly.

The three Community Wildlife Groups in the area have reported their plant and bird surveys.

18 small grants for farming and smallholding have been completed to date.

Young people & heritage. The Young Rangers project is to be launched shortly.

Down to Earth projects are progressing in Hyssington/Church Stoke, Pontesford Hill and Snailbeach/Stiperstones.

Dynamic hills training. Jen Jones has been appointed to new part time Training Officer post.

Accessible records. Contracts have been let to Orangeleaf Systems and Shropshire Archives.

See <http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/> for further information.

- **Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund**

The 14 projects funded in 2015-16 are heading for completion by the end of March, and final claims are due mid-April. All projects on course to achieve expenditure and outputs. The Grant Award Panel visited the Arvon Centre and Brineddin Wood (Redlake Valley CBS) in October. An AONB talk evening for grant recipients was held on 6 October and well received. The Jean Jackson Trust have confirmed an annual contribution of £15,000 for the next three years, which is greatly appreciated. For further information and a summary of the projects funded in 2015-16, see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/conservation-fund/>

Project ideas and applications for 2016-17 have been received, and 14 projects are going to the Panel on 17th March, with £23k to distribute. Advice and support has been given to applicants and potential applicants, including a number of site visits.

A small group of trustees have come together over the last year to develop the Conservation Fund into a **charitable structure**, which will be able to raise money more effectively. Considerable work has been done on a constitution and structure, and the formal application to the Charity Commission for registration was submitted on 4 March (outcome expected within 8 weeks). If the constitution is approved as proposed, the AONB Partnership will be asked to nominate three further trustees. If any Partnership members are interested in potentially becoming a trustee of the charity, please contact Phil Holden.

- **River Clun Recovery Project**

Advisory visits have been made to 40 farms or holdings, where issues affecting the conservation status of the River Clun SAC (Special Area of Conservation) have been identified. These include sites adjacent to the SAC right up to the top of the catchment near Anchor, plus tributaries such as the Folly Brook and the River Unk. Engaged with landowners to secure 13 practical projects, with farmers signed up to work with the project, 10 of which are now close to completion, and several more are under development. Completion of detailed riparian surveys, Felling Licence applications, Main River and Ordinary Watercourse Consents. Engagement of local contractors for tree management, fencing, tree planting and track restoration work.

Working towards implementation of the Management Plans for the two potential Freshwater Pearl Mussel Recovery Sites; involving liaison with 7 landowners adjacent to Recovery Site 1 (Bush Farm), and 2 landowners adjacent to Recovery Site 2 (Lawn Farm). Working with the landowners and obtaining necessary statutory consents, practical habitat improvement work has begun at Lawn Farm, including tree coppicing, soft revetment and fencing.

Clun Catchment Officer (Alison Jones) has increased from 3 to 4 days/week following reorganisation of the project budget.

Highways runoff in the lower Clun Catchment – working with Environment Agency and Shropshire Highways Team to map sediment pathways to the river.

See <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/> for further information.

- **Other Clun Catchment work**

Working with Woodland Trust, Land Life & Livelihoods and Severn Rivers Trust on a project to encourage woodland creation in upper Clun and Teme catchment.

Natural England are funding an additional Recovery Site Monitoring project with input from Plymouth University and West Country Rivers Trust.

The AONB Partnership leads the Clun Catchment Partnership, which met on 7 October and on 27 January, and will meet again on 20 April. Input also made to the Clun Freshwater Pearl Mussel Steering Group, Clun Field Officers Group, Teme Catchment Partnership and Severn Catchment workshop.

- **Shuttles**

The 2016 operating contract with Caradoc Coaches has been confirmed. The Shuttles will start 30 April and run until 2 October. Publicity material is being produced, and a number of businesses along the route are advertising in the leaflet this year. There will be a route diversion over summer holidays due to road works at Snailbeach lasting five weeks – amendments will be made to the timetable and disruption highlighted in the publicity material. See <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/enjoying-the-shropshire-hills/shuttles/>.

- **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Network**

The network has been relaunched with a stronger focus on sustainable tourism, and two year membership, with bronze, silver and gold certificates to reflect the businesses' commitment over 6 years. All the businesses in the old scheme have been invited to join the new network. The 2016 series of networking events are being planned. For more information see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/enjoying-the-shropshire-hills/buy-local-be-sustainable/>.

- **Promotion activity.**

The winter **Newsletter** was sent through the new .govdelivery system. Spring newsletter prepared for sending mid March.

Further content additions and updating of the AONB **website** www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk, as well as input into the new Outdoor Partnerships website www.shropshiresgreatoutdoors.co.uk and the new www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk website.

Interview on Big Centre TV regional programme just before Christmas.

2016 **events** have been added to the website.

Article on Highway drains survey into parish newsletter and Shropshire Star.

2014-15 Annual Review published (delayed due to office move)

<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Annual-Review-2014-15.pdf>.

- **Advice and support** to a range of activities and projects, including Memories of the Landscape (joint work with CPRE, Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust, Clun Forest History Group and Newcastle School), HeARTland project (joint work with National Trust, Arts Alive & Ben Osborne), Upper Gravenor (developing the farm for educational and community benefit), Sophie Holt (local food project), Tru Wood (social forestry), Friends of Pontesford Hill, and Cleef Hill signage proposals. Support to Land Life & Livelihoods and Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group with their joint application to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. Working closely with Shropshire Wildlife Trust on Local Wildlife Sites with advice, contacts and funding. Provided help, advice and contacts to Severn Rivers Trust for their new 'Springs of Rivers' HLF project.

- **Wrekin Forest Partnership**

Meeting held 21 January. The new **Wrekin Forest Plan** is being used as evidence to support the new Telford & Wrekin Local Plan. Shropshire Wildlife Trust are now developing a Stage 1

Landscape Partnership Scheme bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Wrekin area.
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/area-initiatives/wrekin-forest/>

- **Clee Hill Partnership**
Meeting held 23 November, and will meet again on 21 March.

Project development

- Final input into HLF application by the Foundation for Common land for '**Our Common Cause**' – **Upland Commons project**, a national project with activity in the Shropshire Hills AONB and four other upland areas. First meeting held 20th January of a Shropshire Hills Area Group for project. Further one to one meetings carried out, including with Stiperstones Commoners. Funding application to HLF submitted early February, awaiting outcome.
- Involvement in 'Stepping Stones' feasibility work for a **landscape-scale conservation project focused on the Long Mynd and Stiperstones area**. Paid work by Community & Landscape Officer to run stakeholder consultation workshops.
- Further discussions with Woodland Trust, Small Woods Association and Woods for Wellbeing about the **proposed Social Forestry project**. Successful stakeholder meeting held in January - well received and good support for the project. The Small Woods Association has submitted a funding application to our Conservation Fund to develop the project further.

Develop policy and strategy for the area through the AONB Management Plan, and influence the policies and strategies of others.

- Text version of approved **AONB Management Plan 2014-19** available on website. Work is still in progress on a basic designed pdf with figures and some images.

- **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan**

The **Shropshire Hills & Ludlow Destination Partnership** is being brought under the wing of Shropshire Hills Tourism as a 'Destination Management Organisation' recognised by Visit England. The AONB Partnership will continue to provide secretariat and lead for the Destination Partnership. <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/area-initiatives/shropshire-hills-and-ludlow-destination-development-partnership/>.

Tourism Co-operation project outline application submitted for EAFRD Growth Programme (EU) funding. £50k grant sought against £19k match for marketing, update of tourism strategy and Charter, and training for tourism/information providers. Partnership project overseen by the Destination Partnership, working with Shropshire Hills Tourism, Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, town tourism groups and others.

'**Great Days in the Shropshire Hills**' leaflet produced with Shropshire Hills Tourism.

Leaflet swap event for tourism businesses organised with partners on 17 March.

Input to Telford Visitor Economy Forum, Southern Shropshire Walking Forum and various steering groups led by others.

- **Planning**. Submissions made on eleven planning applications –
 - Baron of Bucknell camping pods – 29.1.16
 - Wheathill Caravan Site, Wheathill – 13.11.15
 - Spring Cottage extension, Leighton – 12.10.15
 - Anaerobic Digester, Bitterley – 11.9.15
 - Proposed Development, Land North & East of Cwms Lane, Church Stretton – 18.8.15
 - Solar Farm, Henley, Acton Scott – Appeal – 23.7.15
 - Church Stretton Housing, Land east of Shrewsbury Road – 2.6.15
 - Springbank Employment Site, Church Stretton – 2.6.15

- Whitton Solar Farm, Caynham – 23.4.15
- Proposed dwelling NW of the Fishpools, Pontesford Hill – 23.4.15
- Newcastle Hall Barns, Newcastle, Craven Arms – 14.4.15
- Input to other **non-planning casework and strategies**, including EA River Basin Management Plans, response to EU Habitats and Birds Directives consultation, Ordinary Watercourse Consent consultations, Natural England Environmental Impact Assessment screening decision consultations.
- **Western Power undergrounding programme** – Works have been completed at Crossways (Rhos Fiddle) and Norbury village. Undergrounding work is also about to start at the viewpoint at Clee Hill on the A 4117. With new funding approved by Ofgem, further undergrounding schemes are being explored.
- **National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative**. This programme offers opportunities for enhancement projects close to National Grid's high voltage line across the south side of the Wrekin. It has not been launched yet, but this is expected soon.

Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.

- Biennial review of **Partnership membership** completed, with 10 new members appointed, and new Chair and Vice Chairs. A briefing/induction session will be held on 22 March.
- The Partnership's annual **Tour** on 14 June will be based at Norbury Village Hall and will be themed to 'Landscape Scale Conservation'.
- Consolidation of **new office** base at Drovers House. Running arrangements, budgets, etc are being established. Installation of broadband with phone lines was completed late February.
- Input to **National Association for AONBs**, through annual conference, Chairmen's conference and AGM, Lead Officers meeting, and frequent information sharing and consultations. <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>. The Shropshire Hills AONB will be one of the host areas for the 2016 Conference based at Lilleshall, and we are organising field trips to the Long Mynd and Clun catchment.
- Support and input to establishing the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund as a **charity**.

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

- Support and advice for a wide range of **community projects**.
- **John Muir Award** programme with schools (education/activity programme themed on wild places), Bucknell and Rushbury primary schools have successfully achieved the award following their visits, conservation work and sharing event. Hope to work with Kinlet and St George's Shrewsbury if funding secured. Organising Clun Forest field study trip for Ludlow College A level Geography students in March. Working with Shropshire Wildlife Trust on setting up Wildlife Watch groups in Shropshire Hills schools.
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** currently has 134 members. Andrew Wood is helping as a volunteer with member recruitment. The Friends annual social event for 2016 is being planned.
- David Tomkins is currently helping as a volunteer on the River Clun Recovery Project in a technical research role. Volunteer tree planting tasks are planned in the Clun Catchment for this winter.

AONB TEAM WORK PROGRAMME 2016-17

A summary of the team's work plan for 2016-17 is shown in Appendix 1.

FINANCE SUMMARY

Due to improved levels of earned income, the 2015-16 budgets are currently expected to outturn more or less in balance, rather than in deficit as predicted in November. The office move will reduce ongoing costs slightly (after meeting one-off expenses associated with the move). The budget for 2016-17 as presented to Defra as part of our contribution bid, is shown in Appendix 2.

List of Background Papers
Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-19.
The full 2016-17 Team work programme can be made available to members on request.
Human Rights Act Appraisal
The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.
Environmental Appraisal
The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.
Risk Management Appraisal
Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.
Community / Consultations Appraisal
The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.
Appendices
Appendix 1 Shropshire Hills AONB Team Work Plan Summary 2016-17
Appendix 2 Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Budget 2016-17

Key areas of work	Key actions and targets
Take and co-ordinate action to conserve and enhance natural beauty; promote enjoyment and understanding, and further sustainable development.	
Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund	Give grants and support projects with available funding. Support establishment of the Fund as a registered charity.
Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme	Deliver agreed outputs for year 4 of scheme (see http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/)
Clun catchment	Continue four year River Clun Recovery Project (WREN funded) and deliver year 2 outputs: 2,000m riparian buffer strip created, 5 willows pollarded, 100m revetment, riverbed restoration, 1,000 trees planted, 1 livestock watering system installed, 200m track restored, 8 gateways surfaced, 4 sediment traps installed, 1 watercourse crossing. Continue to lead Clun Catchment Partnership and input to Teme Partnership and other Clun steering groups.
Sustainable Tourism	Support operation of the Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership . Update Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy . Renew Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas . Continue operation of Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Network . Organise networking events and streamline administration. Manage 2016 Long Mynd – Stiperstones Shuttles bus service.
Promotion	Continue to update websites and social media. Publish 15 press releases, 3 E-newsletters, Annual Review and joint Events guide. Give 12 talks.
'Our Common Cause' Upland Commons project	Support Foundation for Common Land with development of stage 2 bid (subject to HLF approval of Stage 1)
Support initiatives led by others	Support at least 15 conservation/ recreation/ promotion projects. Respond to requests for information.
Project development	With partners, pursue development of Stepping Stones project (Long Mynd – Stiperstones) and other opportunities as arising.
Develop policy and strategy for the area through the AONB Management Plan, and influence the policies and strategies of others.	
AONB Management Plan	Promote the approved AONB Management Plan 2014-19. Continue delivery priorities for the team and with key partners.
Planning	Comment on relevant LDF documents and planning applications. Maintain close links with local authority planning staff and members.
Other strategies & schemes	Provide strong input to new Wrekin Forest Plan. Provide input to at least 4 strategic consultations (non-planning). Comment on non-planning casework such as agri-environment schemes.
Local authorities and Partnerships	Maintain links with relevant departments of each local authority. Input to Local Nature Partnership and other groups.
Monitoring	Collate data as part of Management Plan monitoring framework.
Guidance & strategy	Develop guidance page(s) on AONB website. Progress development of AONB specific planning guidance. Input to development of Council Supplementary Planning Documents.
Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.	
AONB Partnership and sub-groups	Hold 20 meetings of 10 groups in the AONB Partnership structure.
Local partnership working	Operate and support local partnership structures including Wrekin Forest, Clee Hill, Clun Catchment, Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme Board.
AONB Team	Hold monthly team meetings, complete performance reviews and training.
Business Planning	Continue to diversify sources of income.
National Association	Active involvement with NAAONB and other relevant networks.
Support the involvement of the community in the management of the AONB (cross-cutting above).	
Friends	Increase membership of Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB.
Support for groups	Support 30 community groups in total (includes through activities above).
Schools	4 schools involved with AONB related activity, including John Muir Award.
Volunteering	Involve 300 volunteers through AONB-led and supported activities.

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Budget 2016-17

<u>Expenditure</u>	2016-17	<u>Income</u>	2016-17
Staff costs	£201,655		
Salary	£158,597	Defra AONB Single Pot	£186,416
NI	£10,987	Shropshire Council	£40,830
Superannuation	£21,410	Telford & Wrekin Council	£2,694
Pension lump sum	£8,360	Earned income	£10,593
Travel & Subsistence	£1,350		
Training	£950		
Office costs	£33,128		
Rent & Services	£10,700		
Rates	£6,100		
Waste & cleaning	£860		
Office equipment & maintenance	£700		
Printing & stationery	£1,750		
Postage, telecommunications & broadband	£6,418		
Office vehicles	£6,600		
Promotional Activity	£1,550		
Events publicity	£200		
Website development	£300		
Annual Review	£350		
Other promotion	£500		
Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB	£200		
Meeting and Partnership costs	£4,200		
AONB Partnership and sub-groups	£1,200		
Subscriptions (NAAONB and international groups)	£3,000		
sub total	£240,533		£240,533
RIVERS		RIVERS	
Staff costs (inclusive of NI, pension, training, T&S)	£18,727	WREN Biodiversity Action Fund	£59,090
Office costs and management	£4,452	Woodland Trust	£10,000
Habitat restoration	£46,500	Volunteer activity (in kind)	£2,750
Training & volunteer support	£1,000	Landowner contributions (in kind)	£2,406
Woodland creation	£5,000	Natural England match activity (agri-environment)	£54,040
Volunteer activity (in kind)	£2,751	AONB Partnership cash match funding	£6,627
Landowner contributions (in kind)	£2,406		
Natural England match activity	£54,077		
Total	£134,913		£134,913
SHUTTLES		SHUTTLES	
Long Mynd & Stiperstones service operating costs	£19,740	Ticket Income	£2,800
Leaflet for next season	£1,100	Concessionary fare compensation	£6,000
Misc	£300	Shropshire Council contribution	£7,500
Management fee	£1,057	National Trust	£5,000
		Brought forward	£21,790
		Carried forward	-£20,893
Total	£22,197		£22,197
SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS NETWORK		SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS NETWORK	
Events and marketing	£500	Membership fees	£1,000
Management fee	£500		
Total	£1,000		£1,000
CORE TOTAL	£398,643	CORE TOTAL	£398,643
CONSERVATION FUND		CONSERVATION FUND	
Grants	£23,000	Millichope Foundation	£5,000
		Friends of Shropshire Hills AONB	£3,000
		Jean Jackson Charitable Trust	£15,000
TOTAL	£23,000		£23,000
STIPERSTONES & CORNDON HILL COUNTRY LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME			
Delivering conservation outcomes to natural heritage	£115,359	Heritage Lottery Fund	£468,903
Delivering conservation outcomes to built heritage	£121,222	Jean Jackson Trust	£20,000
Delivering community participation outcomes	£35,808	English Heritage - Management Plans/grants match activity	£94,799
Volunteer time	£10,000	Powys County Council	£5,000
Delivering access outcomes	£48,078	Shropshire Wildlife Trust	£5,000
Delivering learning outcomes	£172,768	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	£5,000
Delivering training & skills outcomes	£56,770	Natural Resources Wales	£6,377
Overheads: Staff team	£137,056	WREN	£30,262
Overheads: Professional fees	£0	Arts funding (to be secured)	£57,000
Overheads: Scheme Office	£8,244	Private contributions	£7,000
Other Scheme costs & overheads (project equipment)	£4,037	Volunteer time in kind	£10,000
Total	£709,341		£709,341
GRAND TOTAL	£1,130,984	GRAND TOTAL	£1,130,984