



<b>Committee and Date</b> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  18 March 2014
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<b>Item</b>  <b>3</b>
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## 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, and a budget update.

### Recommendation

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

### KEY AREAS OF PROGRESS IN 2013-14 TO DATE (April 2013 - present)

<b>Take and co-ordinate action to conserve and enhance natural beauty, to promote wellbeing, enjoyment and understanding and to further sustainable development.</b>
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- **Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme** – Delivery Phase under way from July '13 with Joy Howells as Landscape Partnership Manager. New team of six in place from September. The Scheme is operating as an identifiably separate project, but part of the AONB team. Scheme launch event on 12 November, with 70 people attending. Meetings of Landscape Partnership Board and other groups. Major external contracts let, including for LiDAR survey, and for delivery of 'Rescuing Rocks and Overgrown Relics' project. First public events held, and activity in Wales to draw down funding from Natural Resources Wales. See <http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/>
- **LEADER** project claims and reporting complete for 2009-13 programme. Hosted exchange visit for 'Growing Gastronomists' co-operation project on local food with Loir Valley, Estonia & Warwickshire LAGs (project awarded Nordic-Baltic LEADER Co-operation Award). Transition programme under way with Defra funding, discussions about next round of LEADER 2015-20, contact with LEP, and Partnership workshop held on priorities for new Local Development Strategy.
- £24,160 allocated in **Sustainable Development Fund** grants to 12 projects for 2013-14 with additional funding from Jean Jackson Charitable Trust. Membership review of SDF Panel completed. Final claims and reports completed for 2012-13 projects, available at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/sdf/>. Panel for 2014-15 grants on 20 March.
- **Farming Project** – completed in July, with a total of 203 one to one farm advice contacts made. Final report and evaluation published. Work with 15 schools and 3 Farming Advocates. Children's book about farming in the Shropshire Hills published. New Uplands project being considered with Herefordshire.

- **Rivers.** 2013-14 site works ongoing for SITA funded **River Clun Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project**, virtually complete. Volunteer involvement with tree planting and river monitoring. £90k of additional funding secured from Natural England for Clun catchment related work, including riparian habitat management works, erosion control at critical locations and strategy for control of Himalayan Balsam. Catchment Project Assistant post extended. Wetland opportunity mapping and Highways sediment reports published. Meetings of Clun Catchment Partnership held, and ongoing input to Teme Partnership, Clun Steering Group, Clun Field Officers Group and Clun Nutrient Management Plan Group. The web pages are developing as a significant reference of information, and are where reports on the River Clun commissioned by Natural England are made publicly available <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/>.
- **Shuttles** service for 2013 completed with over 7,500 passenger journeys made between May and September, including new Castle Connect service from Ludlow. 2014 services planned and commissioned (Long Mynd – Stiperstones and Castle Connect).
- **Discover Local** project completed June 2013. New 'product profiles' available on website, illustrating products that rely on specific habitat conservation, see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/discover-local/>.
- New SDF funded **Buy Local** project. Business and public events under way and renewals or new members recruited to **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme**.
- **Walking with Offa local delivery** 6 additional self-guided walk leaflets published. Events held for co-operation project. 6 guided walks enjoyed by over 60 people. See <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/things-to-do/walking-with-offa/> and <http://www.shropshirewalking.co.uk/walking-with-offa/>
- **Walking with Offa co-operation project** Offa Hoppa bus promotion, seasonal marketing campaigns, new 'Irresistible Offa' map, and 'Talking Walking' Conference well attended. Walking with Offa Conference being held 9 April in Craven Arms. <https://www.facebook.com/WalkingWithOffa>
- **Walking for Wellbeing** Project completed June 2013. Committee and joint brochure in place for Shropshire Hills Walkers Are Welcome towns.
- **Promotion activity.** 28 press releases issued and continued output on social media. Reduced format Annual Review for 2012-13 published. Joint Shropshire Hills 2013 Events programme and visitor guide well distributed, and 2014 guide prepared. Website updated. AONB display at a number of events including HF walking holidays AGM in Shrewsbury, Ludlow Green Fair and Newcastle Show.
- **Proposed Clee Hill Heritage Project.** Substantial progress with project planning, involving a wide range of stakeholders. Well attended public event held, and HLF visit mid-November. Stage 1 application to be submitted in March. See item 7 and <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/clee-hill-heritage-project/>
- **Advice and support** to a wide range of activities and projects, including Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group, Shropshire Outdoor Learning Organisations, Caring for God's Acre Veteran Yew Tree Initiative, Bettws History Group, Western Power undergrounding programme and Youthful Landscapes project.

<p><b>Develop policy and strategy for the area through the AONB Management Plan, and influence the policies and strategies of others.</b></p>
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- New **AONB Management Plan 2014-19** approved by both local authorities March 2014, following endorsement by the AONB Partnership and formal observations by Natural England.
- **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan** Close involvement with Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership. Licensing of new destination logo and improvements to consistency of text in websites and literature. Mid-term review of Strategy in progress. <http://www.shropshirehillstourismpartnership.org.uk/>
- Input to local authority and other **steering groups** (Local Nature Partnership Board, Biodiversity Partnership, and others). Represent West Midlands LAGs on national LEADER Exchange Group. Engagement with Local Enterprise Partnership and input into EU funding Strategy and LEP Strategic Economic Plan.
- **Planning.** Submissions on Site Allocations & Management of Development (SAMDev) Revised Preferred Options for Church Stretton, and 16 planning applications (see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/planning/planning-consultations/>).

#### Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.

- Input to **National Association for AONBs**, through annual Conference and AGM, and 'Future Landscapes' development and collaboration programme. <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>
- Further development work on **new Charitable body** linked to AONB Partnership, including Development Group and specialist advice contract. Following the advice received, the Management Board have agreed to take more time to consider options before going ahead with an application to the Charities Commission.
- Additions made to **financial reserves** from unattached income within 2012-13 and 2013-14.

#### 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**.
- **Talks** to Parish Councils, schools and other interest groups.
- New programme of **volunteer-led guided walks**, with new system established and six volunteers recruited to date.
- John Muir Award programme with **schools** (education/activity programme themed on wild places), currently working with Norbury and Bishop's Castle primary schools.
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** currently has 93 members (with some renewals pending). Friends social event to Bedstone College June '13 well attended.

A summary of the team's 2014-15 work programme is given as Appendix 1. The structure of the AONB Partnership staff team from 1 April 2014 is given as Appendix 2.

#### BUDGET UPDATE

Appendix 3 gives a simplified budget table, principally to show the AONB Partnership budget for 2014-15. The projected outturn budget for 2013-14 is also shown for comparison (note that the Farming Project, Walking for Wellbeing and Discover Local

projects finished earlier in 2013-14 and these are not shown, though the Core/Defra total and Grand Totals for 2013-14 includes the subtotals from these projects, in order to show the comparable full total amounts).

The outline budget for 2015-16 is also shown.

- a. The budgets have been reorganised to bring more elements within the Defra AONB funding 'core', enabling greater flexibility of allocation.
- b. Main core staffing costs are budgeted to rise in 2014-15 due to the creation of the new Natural Environment Officer post. This is however due to a transfer of staff costs formerly met under the Rivers subhead, and so with redundancy of the Planning & Landscape Officer post there is still a net saving on staffing going into 2014-15.
- c. Office costs are the main area where inflationary pressures have an effect, and these are budgeted to continue to rise slightly. The effects of possible relocation or lease renewal are not factored in at present as these are unknown.
- d. The Defra AONB contribution goes down by almost £15,000 into 2014-15 as part of Spending Review cuts, but is then to remain at the same level for 2015-16, subject to any further decisions.
- e. The earned income requirements into core (top right block) for 2014-15 currently exceed known sources of income, and new sources of income will need to be secured and/or further savings made.
- f. LEADER delivery budgets will add to the overall level of activity in future years, assuming this goes ahead. Further activity is also likely on Rivers, and with the Clee Hill Heritage Project.

<p><b>List of Background Papers</b>          Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan.          The full 2013-14 Team work programme can be made available to members on request.</p>
<p><b>Human Rights Act Appraisal</b>          The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.</p>
<p><b>Environmental Appraisal</b>          The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.</p>
<p><b>Risk Management Appraisal</b>          Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.</p>
<p><b>Community / Consultations Appraisal</b>          The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.</p>
<p><b>Appendices</b>          Appendix 1 Shropshire Hills AONB Team Work Programme Summary 2014-15          Appendix 2 Shropshire Hills AONB Team structure from 1 April 2014          Appendix 3 Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership budget update</p>