



Committee and Date Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 1 July 2014

Item 3

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 staffing update.

Recommendation

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

KEY AREAS OF PROGRESS IN 2014-15 TO DATE (April 2014 - present)

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

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

The LPS entered its second year of delivery on 1 April (although full team were only in post from Sept 13 and the Chirbury office was occupied only from Nov 13). Since April the team have been focusing on projects requiring seasonal input, particularly the Ground-nesting bird recovery project (i.e. promotion and land owner liaison/visits, breeding season monitoring surveys through volunteers), Wildflower meadows, pastures and verges (i.e. liaison with meadows owners, ID skills and condition survey training, preparation for meadow surveys, soil testing and prep of donor and recipient green hay sites) and Community Wildlife Groups (i.e. training of volunteer surveyors, organisation of bird and plant surveys, support to volunteer surveyors).

Cultural heritage project activity has focused on the Open hills, old ways and commons project with a launch event in Pontesbury at the beginning of May attended by 75 people, and community archaeology LIDAR training and field survey work has started this month June. Other work has focused on liaison with site owners (at Cothercott mine, Hyssington and Wilmington motte & bailey castles, and Pontesbury 1784 Engine House) to agree future capital, access and interpretation works. The Helping hillforts & earthwork castles project has started with support from Shropshire Council Historic Environment Team and Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust. The Down to Earth project in the Churchstoke area has progressed with engagement events during April and a number of community learning/sharing activities are planned for July/August 14.

The Education Officer has worked with Norbury School alongside Cath Landles to progress their John Muir Award 'Explorer' award and has recently started working with a group of boys from Mary Webb School to undertake JMA 'Discoverer' award. He has

laid the foundations for working with Stiperstones, Hope and Churchstoke primary schools during the next academic year. He has been planning a Young photographers project with Shropshire Media Network which will involve students from Welshpool High School, Mary Webb School and Science College and Bishop's Castle Community College and will run over Summer 2014.

Since April, the LPS has organised 18 events including family geocaching Easter egg hunt, Down to Earth engagement event, Churchstoke churchyard practical task day (with Caring for God's Acre), Community Wildlife Group bird and plant walks and training events, International Dawn Chorus Day guided walk, Land Between Lands (LIDAR) launch event, Curlew Capers family event, Open Farm Sunday event, Meadow plant ID and condition training, Butterfly ID training, LIDAR training day and fieldwork week (16-21 June), Callow Hillfort guided walk, and support to the Bishop's Castle Walking Festival.

See <http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/>

- **LEADER** Transition year continues with development for new programme 2015-2020. Evaluation report for 2009-13 programme completed. Meetings have been held with other potential LAGs in Shropshire, with Defra and with Shropshire Council. A proposed working area covering the south of the county (south of M54/A5/A458) has been submitted to Defra for approval. Contact with local partners has been opened up and a series of business consultation events undertaken. The new Local Development Strategy must be submitted in early September.
- £22,703 allocated in **Sustainable Development Fund** grants to 9 projects (see below) for 2014-15 with additional funding from Jean Jackson Charitable Trust and Millichope Foundation. Some projects from 2013-14 continuing.

Name of Organisation	Name of project	Amount of grant	Planned total project value	Rate of grant
Jenny Stevens/Beetles and Bees	HAWTHORN Wildlife Web Award	£2,200	£3,524	62.4%
Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust	Clun Forest Community Landscape Heritage	£3,000	£7,573	39.6%
Shropshire Media Network	Dip - wild swimming film	£3,000	£5,000	60%
Craven Arts CIC	Shropshire Hills Art Week	£3,000	£15,780	19%
Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group	Clee Hill Community Wildlife Group	£1,000	£1,333	75%
Shropshire Wildlife Trust	Discover Nature: Clun Valley John Muir Award	£3,330	£6,530	51%
South Shropshire Youth Forum	Clee Youth Development Programme	£2,500	£9,222	27.1%
Loudwater Studio	Loudwater Studio in the Shropshire Hills	£2,673	£3,564	75%
Four and Twenty Arts CIC	Art Adventures in the Landscape	£2,000	£7,930	25.2%
TOTALS		£22,703	£60,456	

- **Rivers.** Majority of 2013-14 site works complete for SITA funded River Clun Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project (completes August 2014) and additional Natural England funded activity. Capital work programme well supported by volunteer involvement to undertake riparian tree planting and river monitoring. Extreme winter weather delayed implantation of some capital works for both SITA and NE. Ongoing projects include: Removal of a woody debris dam on the Clun SAC, installation of solar pasture pump on Clun SAC, Hydraulic ram livestock watering system upper Clun, installation of sediment traps and upland re-wetting project supported by SWT. Meeting of Clun Catchment Partnership held, and input to Teme Partnership, Severn Uplands Partnership, Clun Steering Group, Clun Field Officers Group and Clun Nutrient Management Plan Group. The Clun Himalayan Balsam strategy was sent out for consultation and is now finalised.

£216k of WREN (landfill tax) funding secured for four year project focussing on freshwater pearl mussel recovery sites, runoff pathways and a lower Clun rural SuDS project. Includes a NERC funded research bid working with the University of Worcester investigating resistance in alder to *Phytophthora* disease. Third party contribution secured from Natural England.

<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/>

- **Shuttles** services for 2014 under way, including second season of Castle Connect service from Ludlow. 330 people used the services in the first Easter weekend. Promotional roadshow held.
- SDF funded **Buy Local** project. Six business networking events and a Sustainability Event have been completed and 35 renewals or new members are being recruited to the **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme**, now at 66 members. SBS Awards event held in April.
- **Walking with Offa co-operation project** Around a hundred people attended the Walking with Offa Conference on 9 April in Craven Arms. Proposals being developed for second phase of project to include business engagement and volunteer development. Key themes will be heritage, wildlife and culture.
<https://www.facebook.com/WalkingWithOffa>
- **Better Outcomes on Upland Commons** Team members undertook (as a fee-earning opportunity) a case study on the Long Mynd as one of five nationally for a project led by the Foundation for Common Land. Involved interviews with 13 stakeholders, a joint meeting and preparation of a report. The project focussed on mechanisms for the successful delivery of multiple outcomes (e.g. biodiversity, access, farming) and the potential for developing payments for ecosystem services. Attended London meeting of national sponsor bodies and continuing role in disseminating findings of the project.
- **Proposed Clee Hill Heritage Project.** Project planning is now complete and has involved a wide range of stakeholders. Stage 1 application delayed until 9 September due to decisions regarding ongoing leases for the heritage sites.
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/clee-hill-heritage-project/>
- **Promotion** activity. 6 press releases issued and continued output on social media. Joint Shropshire Hills 2014 Events programme and visitor guide well distributed. Website updated. AONB display at a number of events. 2015 Visitor Guide in preparation jointly with Shropshire Hills Tourism.

- **Advice and support** to a range of activities and projects, including Walkers are Welcome group, joint work with CPRE and Norbury School, Bishop's Castle Town Hall, Stiperstones Bioblitz event, Long Mynd Dark Skies initiative,
- Proposed **Marches Uplands project** Discussions ongoing with Bulmer Foundation and Herefordshire Rural Hub on development of a project along the lines of the earlier Shropshire Hills Farming project. Attendance at national Uplands conference at Penrith.
- Meeting of **Wrekin Forest Partnership** convened, and support for process to establish a new Management plan for the Wrekin Forest area.

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 published on website. Design contract let.
- **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan** Mid-term review of Strategy completed with Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership. Destination logo and consistent of text adopted in further in websites and literature. <http://www.shropshirehillstourismpartnership.org.uk/>
- Input to local authority and other **steering groups** (Local Nature Partnership Board, Biodiversity Partnership, Offa's Dyke Path Liaison Group, Southern Walking Forum and others). Represent West Midlands LAGs on national LEADER Exchange Group. Engagement with Local Enterprise Partnership regarding LEADER.
- **Planning.** Submissions on three planning applications – 2 dwellings at Snailbeach, accommodation block at Wenlock Edge Inn, and further comments on poultry sheds Corfton Farm. (see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/planning/planning-consultations/>).
- Input to Ordinary Watercourse consents and other **non-planning casework**.

Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.

- Input to **National Association for AONBs**, through frequent information sharing and consultations. Business Engagement is being investigated through a new Peer to Peer mentoring project organised by NAAONB. Brainstorming session with business representatives in London 23 June. Will result in defined process for AONB Partnerships to approach businesses for funding and opportunities for joint working <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>
- Staff appraisals completed and training on meeting and presentation skills through LPS. Discussions about possible alternative office premises. Shared contacts system in place across the team. Team-building practical task day held.
- 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 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**.
- 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 95 members (with some renewals pending). Friends social event planned for 13 July – bus tour on LPS Rescuing Rocks & Overgrown Relics project. A volunteer has offered to help with member recruitment.
- Attendance at AONB Partnership led **events** (excluding Landscape Partnership Scheme):

2 April	Sustainable Business Scheme Awards Ceremony	28
2 April	Norbury School, John Muir Award visit to Gleanings	24
27 April	Onny Valley Round guided walk	7
30 April	Clee Hill School, John Muir Award introductory session	25
2 May	LEADER Business Consultation workshop	17
3 May	From Clunbury quietness to Massacre at Hopton Castle, walk	5
7 May	Bishop's Castle School John Muir Award, Walcot Wood visit	32
7 May	LEADER Business Consultation workshop	18
11 May	Trees of the Shropshire Hills walk with John Tuer	15
20 May	Sustainable Business Scheme event at Long Mountain Centre (CANCELLED)	0
3 June	Sustainable Business Scheme event with Appleteme	6
11 June	Bishop's Castle School John Muir Award, Bury Ditches visit	34
14 June	In Berlin the last hours before the War with Keith Pybus, walk	16
19 June	Clee Hill School John Muir Award, Novers Wildlife Day	25
	TOTAL	252

STAFFING

As earlier reported, due to ongoing budget reductions, the Planning & Landscape Officer post (3 days/week) was made redundant at the end of March 2014, and Glynn Barratt left at that time. As part of this restructure, Mike Kelly took up a new core role of Natural Environment Officer on 1 April. This will give renewed emphasis to the natural environment in our work, in line with the new Management Plan. This role encompasses our ongoing rivers work, but seeks to work more widely across the AONB on a range of areas including uplands, woodlands, ecosystem services, etc. The continued momentum of the rivers work will affect how much new activity can be taken on board and how quickly. The proposed arrangement with planning casework is to involve a range of members of the team, co-ordinated by the AONB Partnership Manager, though this has yet to be fully rolled out. There is nevertheless an inevitable reduction in staff resources overall available for planning work.

Clare Fildes, Development Officer, is leaving the team to take up a post with Shropshire Council's Outdoor Recreation Partnerships team at the beginning of July. This has prompted a review of the team structure and options for replacement of this post. Partly in view of the recent creation of the Natural Environment Officer post, and also with a view to

development opportunities for other members of the team, it has been decided not to refill the Development Officer post directly, but instead to create a new different post of Sustainable Tourism & Business Officer. This will sit alongside the Natural Environment Officer in terms of grade (and potentially also the Community Officer, subject to a regrading process), creating a structure in which a number of more senior members of the team will have responsibility for developing new projects, accessing external funding and managing project staff. This is shown in the diagram in Appendix 1. The restructure also allows for the Landscape Partnership Scheme and LEADER to come under the direct line management of the AONB Partnership Manager, which is felt to be advantageous given the large scale of these programmes and the need for maximising alignment and synergies.

The new structure of the AONB Partnership staff team from 1 July 2014 is given as Appendix 1.

<p>List of Background Papers Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-19. The full 2014-15 Team work programme can be made available to members on request.</p>
<p>Human Rights Act Appraisal The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.</p>
<p>Environmental Appraisal The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.</p>
<p>Risk Management Appraisal Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.</p>
<p>Community / Consultations Appraisal The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.</p>
<p>Appendices Appendix 1 Shropshire Hills AONB Team proposed structure from 1 July 2014</p>

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership staff team

(new structure from 1.7.14)

Posts in grey boxes are funded from the Defra AONB contribution. Other posts funded from project grants.

