



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 20 th July 2023	<u>Item</u> 5
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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY

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Summary

This paper sets out some background on the review of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

Recommendation

Partnership is recommended to contribute ideas to the workshop session.

Background

The Sustainable Tourism Strategy for 2018-23 is reaching the end of its term. This period was greatly affected by the Covid pandemic but progress has been made on various actions and topics. The Strategy is complementary to and connects to the AONB Management Plan. There is no absolute requirement for us to have a Sustainable Tourism Strategy, but for the last 10 years the two strategies have been very useful to guide both the work of the AONB team and that of partners towards sustainability in tourism. The current Strategy has been effective in raising the profile of sustainability within the Shropshire Destination Management Plan, which is soon to go for formal Council approval. The Strategy is also one of the main requirements of the Europarc Federation Sustainable Tourism Charter which we have held for over 10 years. The process of evaluation for this helps greatly to ensure a thorough and effective approach to partnership working in sustainable tourism, and pushes us to achieve good practice across a wide range of topics and criteria. The Charter has value as an accolade for the area, and also through the networking and learning opportunities with other areas.

The AONB team are now initiating an in-house review towards the production of a new five year Sustainable Tourism Strategy which will support our reapplication for the Charter in December this year. Quite a lot has changed in five years. The strategy for tourism and structures at county level have developed through the Destination Management Plan and evolution of Visit Shropshire. It is important that activity supporting the tourism sector in the Shropshire Hills relates strongly to these county level initiatives. The Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership which we used to facilitate to support the Strategy and Charter has fallen away, partly due to the centre of gravity shifting to county level, plus interruptions of Covid and other factors. This next Sustainable Tourism Strategy will be supported by different partnership arrangements, within which the AONB Partnership itself will become more important. Though not everyone on the Partnership is closely connected with tourism,

this topic falls within the overall AONB remit and the scope of the AONB Management Plan, and the Partnership is well placed to support this integration.

The team have set out a process of stakeholder engagement and consultation over the coming months, and this Partnership meeting starts that process. At the meeting we will present some further information and then seek from members their views on what issues are pressing in relation to sustainable tourism (including recreation by day visitors), and what action needs to be taken by various partners. We are particularly interested in what has changed or is changing, and what needs to be done differently looking to the future.

Some of the issues affecting sustainable tourism in the Shropshire Hills include:

- The higher bar of sustainability now demanded by net zero commitments, affecting both tourism businesses and travel aspects of tourism.
- Connections to diversity and inclusion and broadening the benefits of tourism and visiting the countryside to all parts of society.
- Pressure on highly visited sites, and opportunities for dispersing visitors.
- Ongoing rise in use of digital information and social media, with some people excluded.
- Ways of influencing visitor behaviour to encourage a sensitive and environmentally friendly approach.
- Changing patterns of accommodation provision and demand.
- Planning issues around tourism developments, and the potential for farm diversification.
- Financial limitations on maintenance and investment in infrastructure supporting tourism including countryside sites and rights of way.

List of Background Papers

Current Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy at

<https://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/our-work/area-initiatives/destination-partnership>.

Shropshire Destination Management Plan consultation draft

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/25328/shropshire-dmp-2023-25-jan-2023.pdf>

<https://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/help-to-look-after/farming-in-protected-landscapes>

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