



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  20 <sup>th</sup> July 2023	<u>Item</u>  <b>6</b>
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## **BRIEF UPDATE ON OTHER AONB TEAM AND NAAONB ACTIVITIES**

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### **Summary**

This paper gives members some brief updates on activity of the team and of the National Association for AONBs, and will be supplemented at the meeting with some slides. (Please note this not a comprehensive update – the Annual Review for 2022-23 is in preparation and will be published soon).

### **Recommendation**

The Partnership is recommended to note and comment on the update.

### **Background**

Farming in Protected Landscapes – Uptake has considerably increased, and our expenditure on grants was £644,754 in 2022-23. The grant budget for 2023-24 is £1,037,564 which is already 80% allocated. Many agreements have been amended for raised Countryside Stewardship rates of payment, enabling farmers to benefit from enhanced grants. A new fourth year of the programme has been confirmed and the Shropshire Hills grants budget is £1.37 million. We are currently recruiting for a FiPL Administrator and will be recruiting for another Adviser.

Ancient Woodlands project – Dougald has been undertaking site visits and surveys, and is starting to try to identify sites where some practical management can be carried out (this requires separate funding).

Stepping Stones – The Upper Onny Farmers Group are interested in applying for Defra’s Landscape Recovery scheme. Three farmers from the group attended the Groundswell regenerative farming conference, along with Cath and Alison Jones.

Upper Clun peatlands and catchment headwaters – We are currently contracting hydrological/ ecological survey work in the Upper Clun with funding from Natural England. A complementary project funded by FiPL is undertaking similar surveys on adjacent land.

Staffing - Mike Kelly retired in June, with good wishes from the team and Partnership.

Middle Marches CLT conference on nature recovery - Alex, Rachel and Dougald gave well received presentations at this, with c90 attendees, mostly small land holders.

AONB Partnership summer Forum and field visits – This was held at Snailbeach on 2<sup>nd</sup> June and well attended.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion session – this was held on 13<sup>th</sup> June and attended by some Partnership members as well as other partners. This work will be continued.

Young Rangers – Summer sessions have been held including green woodworking and nestbox monitoring. Two of our Young Rangers recently went to Denmark for the Europarc International Junior Ranger camp, which was an excellent experience.

Shuttles – the new Shuttles route started on 27<sup>th</sup> May and has been reasonably successful. Some regular users are having to adapt to the new timetable.

Fix the Fort – A number of successful public engagement events have been held.

Council links – At the Culture Leisure & Tourism managers meeting, Phil met Cllr Robert Macey the new Culture & Digital portfolio holder with responsibility for the AONB team.

Cllr Chris Turley has been reappointed to the Partnership by Telford & Wrekin Council. Jennifer Engwell the Telford & Wrekin officer rep is moving on and we welcome Ben Holloway as the new rep.

Hay Meadow Festival – this was held on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July at the Discovery Centre. A good day despite less than ideal weather reducing public attendance.

Partnership membership – The individual and Parish/Town Council seats are up for re-election this year and a process of applications will be opened in late summer/early autumn to allow attendance by new members at the next meeting in November.

#### NAAONB and national update

We are hosting a national NAAONB – NFU liaison meeting in August in the Shropshire Hills with a farm visit and some local representation.

Phil attended the first meeting of a new Climate & Nature Panel as part of the new collaboration structure. Panels are being drawn together on Farming & Land Use, Placemaking & Planning and EDI.

Alison Jones, Cath and Rachel attended soil health training organised by NAAONB.

A £1M bid for a Nationally Significant Arts project has been submitted to Arts Council England, which if successful will allow all AONB partnerships to participate with events in 2025.

The NAAONB Conference is being held in Bath in September – Alex, Phil and Rachel will attend.

The new Protected Landscapes Partnership is being developed nationally with government funding. Terms of Reference are in draft. The partnership comprises the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Parks England, National Trails UK and Natural England. The partnership will be governed by a partnership board. Who represents each partner on the partnership board will be for the partner organisation to decide. The partnership will have an independent chair. The partnership board will also include an independent member with equity, diversity and inclusion expertise (the EDI champion). The partnership is supported by a recently recruited partnership manager hosted by Natural England. Defra will provide secretariat.

The partnership will collaborate closely on the delivery of national priorities for nature recovery, climate change mitigation and adaptation, health and wellbeing, equity of access

and thriving local communities. It will develop a shared business plan that will clearly define how the partnership will deliver these priorities adding value to the existing work of our organisations. Initially, its objectives will focus on:

- Recovering nature & tackling climate change: contributing towards 30 by30 and relevant Environment Act & Environmental Improvement Plan targets
- Promoting equity, diversity and inclusion of people living, visiting, volunteering, working in and governing these special areas and improving access for all
- Increasing the understanding, capability and capacity of the partners to attract private investment into nature recovery.

<p><b>List of Background Papers</b> None.</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> None</p>