



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  17 November 2015	<u>Item</u>  <b>8</b>
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## UPDATE ON TOURISM WORK

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### Summary

This paper updates members with the range of AONB Partnership activity on sustainable tourism, and changes to the organisation of tourism structures within the county.

### Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the information and provide comments.

### Background

The AONB Partnership's activity on tourism has gradually increased over recent years and become more coherent. The main reason for our involvement is to deliver our conservation remit by influencing the patterns, impacts etc of tourism, which is a significant and increasing influence on the AONB. Tourism also of course delivers economic benefit, and while this is not our own primary purpose, it helps the designation and our work to be valued, and tourism related work has the potential to be a valuable additional income stream for the AONB Partnership.

In the last five years the influence of the AONB and of sustainable approaches in tourism have considerably strengthened. When the Districts were merged into a new unitary Shropshire Council in 2009, a series of Destination Development Partnerships were formed on an area basis. This timed with the AONB Partnership securing Advantage West Midlands funding for a Sustainable Tourism Strategy, which formed the basis for our successful application to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. This accolade is held by 131 protected areas in 16 countries, including in the UK eight AONBs and six National Parks. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy is the only tourism strategy for the area. It is not a niche strategy for a small part of the market, but represents a collective view of how tourism in the area should be managed, which is a real strength.

Post-unitary, South Shropshire Tourism Association became Shropshire Hills Tourism. With its geography and identity thus aligned better with ours, we have worked more closely. This has included publications, such as combining the Events brochure with the accommodation guide for 2015, and as a new map-based visitor guide for 2016 (replacing an earlier, now out of print map printed in 2010).

Our strategic and promotional work on tourism has been complemented by other practical delivery projects, including the Shuttles, the Sustainable Business Network, and Walking with Offa, which have collectively raised the AONB Partnership's profile and value in tourism sector with key partners. In 2014 we restructured the team to include for the first time a core post focused on sustainable tourism.

### Current position/changes/drivers

- Shropshire Council has recently reduced its Tourism Officers from two to one in the county and changed the role. This has resulted in withdrawal from administrative support for the DDP, which the AONB Partnership has agreed to take on, to maintain momentum of the group.

- Tourism is a strand in current LEADER and EAFRD European funding programmes, in which the DDP area strategies are recognised as the main strategic direction, since there is no current county level tourism strategy.
- Shropshire Council is gradually reducing support for front line visitor information services, seeking them to be adopted by the voluntary and business sectors
- A new 'Visit Shropshire' partnership group at a county level has been formed (administered by Shropshire Tourism, it had its first meeting on 5 November). This follows demise of the county level Tourism Strategy Board. The DDPs are not directly represented on Visit Shropshire.
- The Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund charity offers a potential route for visitor giving.
- Our European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is up for renewal in late 2016.
- Our Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Network has been relaunched with a stronger focus on the tourism sector.
- Visitor pressures are increasing in certain areas, such as the Long Mynd.

#### Proposed directions

- Retain sustainable tourism as a strong strand of our work and area of developing influence and expertise.
- There is an ongoing need to ensure the importance of the AONB as a fundamental pillar of the visitor economy and its sustainable management are taken account of by county level structures.
- The Shuttles will be continued as far as possible, although new sources of funding will be needed to maintain the current level of service.
- Continued active role in promotion with a sustainable message – continue to expand visitor content on website, social media, TripAdvisor, collaborative work on publications, etc.
- Continue to develop relationship with Shropshire Hills Tourism.
- Ideally we would renew the European Charter, as this helps to ensure the processes of an agreed strategy are in place, but cost is a real issue (€5,000 to renew for a further five years).
- Continue to participate in NAAONB's Sustainable Tourism network.
- There is a more active role for us in helping to provide strategic management approaches for pressured areas and those lacking management – e.g. The Wrekin, Long Mynd, Clee Hill, Stretton Hills.
- On the ground projects through visitor giving, etc – e.g. Caer Caradoc eroded paths.
- There is potential for us to take a more proactive chargeable role in pre-application advice on tourism planning applications.
- Connect tourism to ecological/heritage projects e.g. visitor management, wildlife/heritage tourism.

<b>List of Background Papers</b> None
<b>Human Rights Act Appraisal</b> The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.
<b>Environmental Appraisal</b> The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.
<b>Risk Management Appraisal</b> Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.
<b>Community / Consultations Appraisal</b> The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.
<b>Appendices</b> None