



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  17 November 2015	<u>Item</u>  <b>9</b>
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## PROPOSED UPLAND COMMONS PROJECT

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### Summary

This paper outlines to members the proposed national project on upland commons, involving the Shropshire Hills AONB along with four English National Parks.

### Recommendation

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

### Background

The Foundation for Common Land has over 2015 convened a partnership of organisations who have an interest in common land to work together to sustain pastoral commoning alongside landscape and biodiversity conservation. It includes conservation, farming, sporting, landowning, water and access organisations. The proposed project 'Our Common Cause' focuses on enhancing the heritage of common land in five upland areas of England - Dartmoor, Yorkshire Dales, North York Moors, Shropshire Hills and Cumbria.

Grazing and management of Britain's common lands are fundamental to the continued provision of these benefits. Hill farmers practice commoning - the collective stewardship of common land. They maintain traditional pastoral systems developed over many centuries, adapted to local circumstances and informed by the experience of farming communities. Hill farming communities and conservation organisations are concerned about the loss of skills and heritage associated with commoning. All agree that once the traditional systems and techniques, local infrastructure and expertise is lost, it will be very difficult to re-establish threatening our natural and cultural heritage.

A major focus of the project will be on sharing experience and learning between the five areas through a programme of mentoring, skills sharing and the promotion of best practice. It will build on the findings of "Better Outcomes on Upland Commons" which conducted five case studies (including the Long Mynd in the Shropshire Hills), and identified 12 attributes of successful management, concluding that:

*'respectful and long enduring relationships between individuals and groups are at the heart of delivering better outcomes'.*

The project will implement these findings to ensure improved outcomes for all, giving particular reference to:

- increasing understanding of each other's interests and outcomes, and lack of motivation to deliver public goods,
- enhancing skills among commoners, conservation bodies and owners,
- resolving conflicts that impede heritage conservation,
- ensuring proper value is given to the cultural landscape and heritage provided by commoners,
- increasing awareness of the of role commoning in delivering numerous public goods.

A Steering Group with representation from national bodies and the five areas is overseeing the development of a project application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), with a target timescale of early December for submission. The project would provide staffing support and funding to each of the five areas including Shropshire Hills AONB, to work with three commons in each area, where commoners and landowners want to participate and benefit from this opportunity.

It is expected that the three year delivery stage of the project would:

- Support active management of the commons by encouraging uptake of funding such as agri-environment, and the delivery of statutory duties.
- Fund practical works which cannot be funded from other sources, e.g.
  - small capital works to assist commoners managing the common and grazing stock,
  - works to protect and enhance archaeological sites and biodiversity,
  - activities to record and celebrate the distinctive cultural heritage of commoning.
- Support commoners' associations and the ability of commoners, stakeholders, owners and local communities, to recognise and manage the assets of common land.
- Awareness raising to develop knowledge, understanding and pride about common land and commoning.
- Promote the range and extent of public benefits deriving from common land to ensure a wider understanding of their value and the need to conserve them.

If the application is successful, HLF would first fund a two year development stage, which would involve:

- Agreeing outcomes and joint plans for active management of commons in each area
- Evidence gathering working with hill farmers to investigate the state of pastoral commoning and record the environmental and cultural goods provided by each area.
- Identifying barriers to local aspirations, including skills of all stakeholders and developing a training plan including e.g. governance, negotiating and practical skills.
- Developing a programme to increase public engagement and understanding of commons and the public benefits that they provide.
- Reviewing the potential for payments for ecosystem services from upland commons and assess the potential for a pilot study in one of the project areas.
- Exploring the opportunities for working with commons and the farms to which rights are attached as part of more robust, landscape-scale ecological networks.

<p><b>List of Background Papers</b>          Report of the 'Better Outcomes on Upland Commons' project 2014, available at <a href="http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/recent-projects/better-outcomes-on-upland-commons/">http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/recent-projects/better-outcomes-on-upland-commons/</a>.          Foundation for Common Land website <a href="http://www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk/">http://www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk/</a>.</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>