



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  17 November 2015	<u>Item</u>  <b>6</b>
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## SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB CONSERVATION FUND

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### Summary

This paper updates members with progress to establish the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

### Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the progress and the proposed links with the new charity.

### Background

Since the Partnership meeting of 25 June 2015 and earlier papers on this topic, further progress has been made. A group of four founding trustees has formed and has met twice, on 24 August and 6 October, with a third meeting on 10 November. The trustees are Anthony Morgan, George Chancellor, Sarah Bury and Phil Holden. At the 6 October meeting, the trustees approved and adopted the constitution (with just minor refinements from the draft seen by the Management Board on 6 May 2015). The next steps are the opening of a bank account and then application to register as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with the Charity Commission.

It must be noted that the charitable body is not part of the AONB Partnership structure, and must exist independently of it. The trustees are a group of individuals with support for the proposed objects of the charity, and their role is to act in the interests of the charity and those objects, declaring any potentially conflicting interests where these may arise. The constitution sets out some of the preferred links between the CIO and the AONB Partnership, but these remain to be approved by the Charity Commission. They include the ability of the AONB Partnership to appoint up to three Nominated trustees (out of a maximum of eight trustees overall), and the AONB Partnership Manager to be an *ex officio* trustee (i.e. linked to occupation of this post). It is hoped that relating the charity's object closely to the purposes of AONB designation will ensure that it remains focussed on benefitting the AONB area, while avoiding what could be unacceptably close levels of perceived or actual 'control' by the AONB Partnership.

It is hoped that the round of Conservation Fund grant awards next spring will be made through the charity rather than through Shropshire Council as now. The trustees would reappoint the Grant Panel and take overall responsibility for the grants at that point. Subscriptions from the Friends scheme will also from then be paid directly to the Conservation Fund, with the advantages of charitable status. Note however that the Friends are not voting members of the charity. This is in keeping with the agreed concept of the charity as a 'fund' rather than a 'group', and to help ensure that it remains apolitical. There are also other streams of income for the Fund apart from the Friends, and it is hoped to develop these further. It is expected that the AONB Partnership team will continue to provide administration of Conservation Fund grants, and may be paid a small fee for this.

The relationships between the AONB Partnership, the charity and the Friends scheme will be a little complicated for those less involved to understand easily, and when the charity is fully established,

communicating this clearly will be a priority. The main expected activities of the charity will be to raise funds and distribute grants to benefit the AONB, in ways which it can do more effectively than the AONB Partnership. It can however, as the trustees decide, undertake a broad range of activities which meet the charitable objects. The AONB Partnership is allowed to benefit financially by receipt of grants or donations, or in payment for services supplied (within certain regulations).

<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