



Date: Tuesday, 11 June 2019
Time: 9.30 am
Venue: Clee St Margaret Village Hall, Nr Ludlow, SY7 9DT
Contact: Tim Ward, Committee Officer
Tel: 01743 257713
Email: tim.ward@shropshire.gov.uk

SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

3 Brief Updates (Pages 1 - 8) Report to Follow

4 Capacity Building Project - AONB Partnership Draft Business Plan and Skills Audit (Pages 9 - 22)

This paper provides Partnership members the draft of a Business Plan to guide future activity, and a skills audit for members, as part of our Capacity Building project.

Appendix 1 is to follow

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Agenda Item 3



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 11 th June 2019	<u>Item</u> 3
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BRIEF UPDATES

Responsible Officer Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager
e-mail: phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 254741

Summary

This paper provides brief updates Partnership members on some current matters of relevance to the AONB Partnership.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the information provided and comment.

Background

National

Defra 25 Year Environment Plan – first progress report published, and outcome indicator framework published. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>. Discussion paper on Nature Recovery Network circulated in AONB Network for comments.

Glover Review – some visits and meetings are continuing around England. The Review is due to report in the autumn of 2019. A government response will follow.

The Agriculture Bill and Environment Bill continue to work through parliamentary processes, and NAAONB are providing input.

The national AONB Conference is from 9th -11th July – a ‘Colchester Declaration’ on biodiversity in AONBs is being prepared for launch at the event.

NAAONB ‘Taking the Lead’ programme continues – a development and collaboration programme for around 40 AONB staff. Topic Working Groups are looking at priority topics - communications, advocacy, funding, technology & data, AONB priorities and staff development.

Attended Europarc Atlantic Isles annual member meeting (National Parks & AONBs throughout UK) – focus on youth involvement and participation.

Local

Paper going to Shropshire Council Cabinet 12th June for formal approval of the AONB Management Plan and revised Terms of Reference (see Appendix 1 and link at background papers). Also scheduled for Telford & Wrekin Council Cabinet in July.

The biennial membership review of the AONB Partnership will be conducted later in the summer. Individual and Parish/Town Council seats will be advertised and reappointed, and organisations with lower attendance will be asked to reapply. The number of appointments will be slightly reduced in line with revised Terms of Reference.

The Equalities Assessment for the Management Plan and the Partnership Terms of Reference highlighted the desirability of further youth engagement – ideally through the structure of the AONB Partnership as well as project work. Ways of trying to do this will be scoped out.

The Marches Nature Partnership is launching a Strategy and continuing to work closely with the LEP.

Shropshire Council - Peter Nutting (Leader), Clive Wright (CEO) and Mark Barrow (Director of Place) are visiting the AONB team on 6th June.

Ironbridge Power Station redevelopment Masterplan released (see agenda item 9).

AONB team activity

Development phase activity on 'Our Common Cause' project continues, towards Stage 2 bid submission in the autumn.

Next phase of Unmuddying the Waters project has started in the Clun catchment (agenda item 6).

Staff recruitment in progress for Water Environment Grant project (agenda item 7).

Shropshire Hills Tourism Expo held on 3rd April with Shropshire Hills Tourism was well attended and very successful.

Shuttle bus season is under way.

A farmer meeting has been organised locally for the Uplands Alliance.

Lucie Zak a post-graduate on placement is undertaking a study of soil erosion vulnerability in the Upper Clun catchment.

Landscape Guidance contract – ongoing, with some draft documents recently received.

Grants for 2019-20 Conservation Fund projects have been issued, and claims processed for 2018-19 projects.

New Shropshire Council IT system for finance and HR is in place.

We are helping to undertake a tourism and visitor economy study for the Stepping Stones project.

New AONB website for accessibility from mobile devices is in preparation.

Meeting scheduled to discuss motocross at Picklescott.

Talks given at annual parish meetings of Church Stretton and Llanfair Waterdine.

Attending CLA 'Making Space for Nature' event at Plowden Hall.

List of Background Papers

Shropshire Council Cabinet paper on AONB Management Plan and AONB Partnership Terms of Reference, available at <https://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=130&Mid=3932&Ver=4>

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

Appendix 1 Main sections of Shropshire Council Cabinet report 12th June 2019

Appendix 1 Main sections of Shropshire Council Cabinet report 12th June 2019

1. Summary

1.1 The Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 sets out the priorities for conserving and enhancing the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the next five years. The AONB is a statutory designation to conserve and enhance natural beauty covering 23% of Shropshire and has been in place since 1958.

1.2 The Management Plan is a statutory requirement and is produced jointly with Telford & Wrekin Council through the AONB Partnership – a Joint Advisory Committee. The Plan has been developed in partnership with a range of stakeholders and was made available for public consultation from November 2018 to January 2019. Formal approval is by the two local authorities.

1.3 The Vision of the Management Plan is:

The natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills landscape is conserved, enhanced and helped to adapt - by sympathetic land management, by co-ordinated action and by sustainable communities; and is valued for its richness of geology, wildlife and heritage, and its contribution to prosperity and wellbeing.

1.4 At the same time, but not directly connected to the Management Plan, the Terms of Reference of the AONB Partnership (Joint Advisory Committee) have been updated and slightly revised, and these also require formal approval by the two Councils.

1.5 A formal request to Defra to create an independent Conservation Board for the AONB (supported by the Council Cabinet on 19th October 2016) has been shelved by Defra while a national review of designated landscapes is conducted. The Review Panel, led by Julian Glover, is due to report in the autumn of 2019, and its recommendations may affect whether the Conservation Board proposal for the Shropshire Hills is likely to progress. In the meantime, the current structure continues, of a Joint Advisory Committee (the AONB Partnership) and the AONB Partnership staff team hosted by Shropshire Council.

1.6 Appendix 2 details the proposed revised Terms of Reference for the AONB Partnership (Joint Advisory Committee). These have been developed by the Partnership in consultation with the two Councils' Legal teams.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24, and the revised Terms of Reference for the AONB Partnership.

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

3.1 AONB Management Plan. Preparation of the Management Plan by the large and inclusive AONB Partnership group is the established national methodology, and national guidance has been followed. The team members leading the work have been responsible for previous Management Plan reviews.

3.2 The statutory timescale for completion of the review of the Plan is by 31st March 2019. Defra have been sent the completed Plan as endorsed by the AONB Partnership and informed that final approval by the Councils is imminent, and have congratulated us on the new Plan.

3.3 Natural England have given support to the draft Plan in their 'formal observations':

"Natural England considers that the plan meets the statutory requirement that the constituent local authorities for the Shropshire Hills AONB and wider project area have, acting jointly, produced a plan that formulates their policy for their AONB and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.

We consider that the Plan has broadly followed the guidance contained in CA23 and CA221 and the updated advice from the National Association for AONBs (prepared by Steve Preston Associates, 2017) and therefore presents a comprehensive strategy for the management of the AONB.

In conclusion, Natural England recognises that the production of this final draft represents the culmination of many months of intensive work on the part of Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and particularly the Shropshire Hills AONB staff unit. We congratulate you on this huge effort."

Emma Johnson, Area Manager West Midlands Natural England

3.4 In the Plan preparation, three workshops were held with the AONB Partnership, and Management Plan topics were also discussed at working groups such as the Clun Catchment Partnership, Wrekin Forest Partnership and Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership. Partnership members felt that:

- Protection of the landscape and biodiversity needs to be better in practice.
- The planning system needs to take more account of the AONB.
- We must help people to see the AONB as an asset rather than a barrier to economic growth.
- Sustainability should influence all areas – land management, tourism, communities.

3.5 A public on-line survey was carried out during April and May 2018. With over 200 responses, the survey revealed a high degree of support for the primary purpose to 'conserve and enhance' the AONB. The most valued characteristics of the Shropshire Hills were dramatic views and wide panoramas, opportunities to walk and explore, wildlife and relatively natural areas, peace and quiet and a chance to unwind. Top concerns were the loss/neglect of habitats and wildlife, inappropriate new built

development, losing the Shropshire Hills' distinctive character, the quality of water and condition of rivers.

- 3.6 The Sustainability Appraisal of the Management Plan conducted in parallel with the Plan review meets the legal requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment. A conclusion of the Sustainability Appraisal is that the high quality of the AONB's environment is a huge economic asset which, if sensitively used and not damaged by inappropriate development, can deliver great long-term economic benefits. In the need however to take a long-term view and protect this asset, there is a risk of the designation being perceived as hampering economic progress. This may be overcome by demonstrating the positive economic effects of the environment and of looking after it.
- 3.7 In the public consultation relatively few responses were received, partly since all key delivery partners are involved in the Plan preparation through the AONB Partnership. A specific meeting was held with representatives of the National Farmers Union to discuss their comments.
- 3.8 As well as underpinning the area's economy, the high-quality landscape of the AONB is vitally important to the health and wellbeing of both Shropshire residents and visitors. The AONB designation and activity linked to it brings huge benefits to the people of Shropshire.
- 3.9 There is a perception among a good number of partners that Shropshire Council does not take the AONB seriously enough or regard it as positively as an asset to the county as it should. The AONB Partnership seeks a process of awareness raising and greater engagement with various parts of the Council over the delivery period of this Management Plan to help address this. The national Glover Review is likely to recommend changes to strengthen the status of AONBs and their organisations, which should help to reinforce a higher profile locally.
- 3.10 AONB Partnership Terms of Reference. The process of updating the AONB Partnership Terms of Reference was led by the Partnership's Chair and its sub-group the Management Board (now Strategy & Performance Committee). Several consultations were held with the Legal teams of both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council, and drafts were seen and endorsed by the whole Partnership.
- 3.13 The Terms of Reference were last approved by the two Councils in 2010, when the Partnership also acted as the LEADER Local Action Group. Updates to the Terms of Reference endorsed by the AONB Partnership in October 2014 and November 2015 did not reach the stage of formal approval by the Councils.
- 3.14 The changes made this time are mainly minor amendments to wording. Small substantive changes include:
- The maximum number of seats on the Partnership is proposed to be reduced from 45 to 36. Reductions would be made by means of currently vacant seats and through the membership review due in the autumn of 2019. An inclusive group is valuable, but this has to be balanced with manageability, and the current size is believed to be the largest of any AONB Joint Advisory Committee in the country.

- The Management Board has been re-named the Strategy & Performance Committee and now has separate Terms of Reference. As a sub-committee of the Partnership, its Terms of Reference are approved by the Partnership itself.

3.15 The Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) initial screening and assessment follow up is shown in appendix 1.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 The Management Plan is a plan for the Shropshire Hills area and not for any one organisation. It sets out aspirations for projects and delivery activities but does not make any binding financial commitments.

4.2 Section 85 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act places a legal duty on all public bodies to 'have regard to the purposes of AONB designation' in carrying out their functions. The Management Plan is therefore relevant to a wide variety of Council services including planning, countryside and environment, highways, economic development, public protection, education and community. National policy is that AONBs should be distinguished from other areas and higher standards should be applied in relation to maintaining landscape quality. This may sometimes result in higher costs, but it is not possible to quantify these.

4.3 One of Shropshire Council's main direct commitments to implementing the Management Plan is through providing match funding for Defra core funding for the AONB Partnership team. Continuity of local authority funding is vital to the team's activities, and the gearing of Council funds with other sources is exceptional. Shropshire Council's contribution is among the lowest local authority contributions in the country for the size of the AONB.

4.4 The Council provides administrative support for the AONB Partnership Joint Advisory Committee meetings through the Democratic Services team, but there are no financial implications through this from the changes to the Terms of Reference.

5. Background

5.1 This is the fourth statutory Management Plan for the AONB since the requirement to produce a plan was enacted by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

5.2 The character and quality of the Shropshire Hills landscape are of high importance but under increasing pressure. The condition of some of the special qualities of the AONB is declining. Conservation activity through many schemes and projects is not enough to prevent some declines in wildlife. Not enough progress is being made with some water quality and catchment management targets. Farming, especially in the uplands, is at an important crossroads as we head towards new UK policy and funding regimes. Economic forces are increasing development pressure and reducing resources for positive management of the landscape, leading to more deterioration of valuable features by neglect.

- 5.3 The Plan sets out policies of the local authorities, and proposed actions for a wider variety of partners, under three main aims:
- Land management supporting natural beauty and landscape
 - Planning for a sustainable economy and communities
 - People enjoying and caring about the landscape
- 5.4 The Plan will help deliver many of the priorities of Defra's 25 Environment Plan - clean air and water, thriving plants and wildlife, reduced risk from flooding and drought, using natural resources more sustainably and efficiently, enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

6. Additional Information

- 6.1 Some of the Management Plan's top priority actions include:
- Working with Defra and other partners to ensure new Environmental Land Management Systems deliver AONB priorities.
 - Establishing a large programme of planting of trees outside woodlands, partly to offset losses from Ash dieback disease.
 - Developing the 'Stepping Stones' project into a long-term delivery initiative for the Long Mynd – Stiperstones area.
 - Developing Landscape Guidance and Design Guidance for planning.
 - Developing a youth engagement project incorporating the John Muir Award, Young Rangers and traineeships.
 - Supporting activities which will contribute to a low-carbon Shropshire Hills area, compatible with the AONB's special qualities.
- 6.2 The Management Plan Actions will be monitored and reviewed by the AONB Partnership and progress reported publicly. The condition of the AONB landscape will be monitored through a set of headline indicators, and a new set of performance indicators for activity of the AONB Partnership team are currently being developed nationally.

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

Business Plan 2019-2022

Version at 4 June 2019



Executive Summary

The AONB Partnership and its staff team work to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills.

The team are employed by Shropshire Council to work under the guidance of the Partnership, a Joint Advisory Committee to two local authorities. The team and Partnership itself play a leading role in delivering the statutory AONB Management Plan, but also support, facilitate and help to co-ordinate the activity of others.



The Partnership will seek over the next three years to:

- increase project delivery, balancing this with strategic and advisory roles
- improve communications and engagement – to show the value of the AONB landscape and our work
- improve its influence in planning
- achieve a good geographical spread of activity across the AONB
- work more with young people
- develop the Partnership, the staff and team, and joint working with the AONB Trust, with the two Councils, and the national AONB network
- strengthen the status of the organisation

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Business Plan

This Business Plan sets out the priority activities and directions of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and its staff team from April 2019 to March 2022. It is the organisational plan for the AONB Partnership - by which we mean the staff team and the collective actions of the Joint Advisory Committee. The starting point is those actions from the new 2019-24 AONB Management Plan for which the AONB Partnership has a lead role. This three year Business Plan will inform the more detailed AONB team Annual Work Programme as submitted to Defra.

This Plan has been prepared through a facilitated process involving the AONB team and the Partnership's Strategy & Performance Committee. It is supported by funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's 'Resilient Heritage' programme in a project to build capacity and joint working for the AONB Partnership and the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust.

1.2 AONB purposes

The single statutory purpose of AONB designation is **to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.**

Additional secondary purposes have been provided in national guidance:

In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves, conserve and enhance the environment.

Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

2. Our organisation

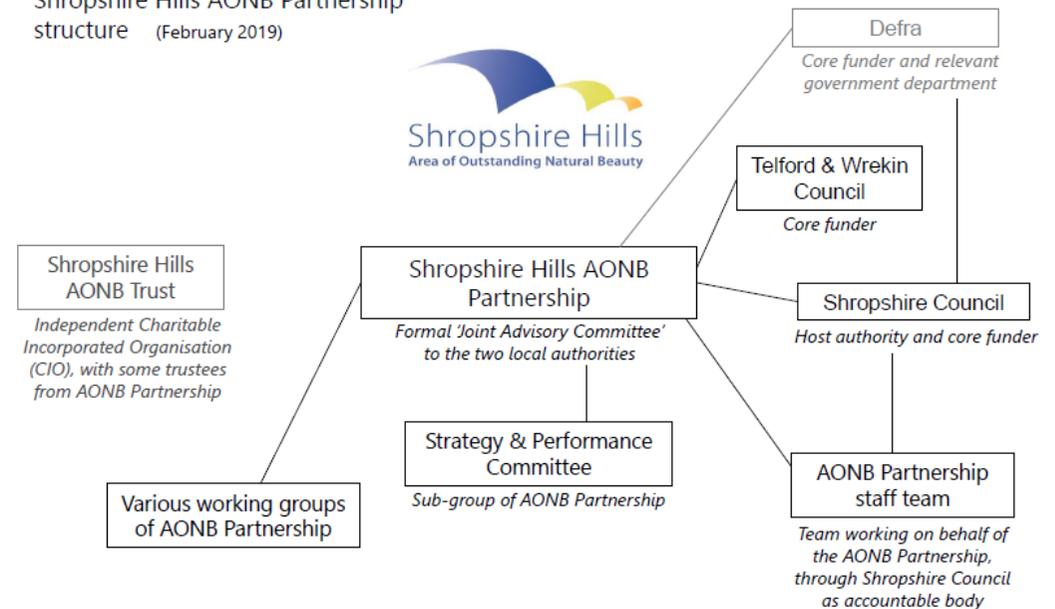
2.1 The AONB Partnership

The AONB Partnership is a Joint Advisory Committee to Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council, formed to co-ordinate the management of the Shropshire Hills AONB. The AONB Partnership staff team's work is guided by the Partnership, but Shropshire Council as the host and accountable body holds legal and contractual responsibilities. The Partnership with the team operates as an 'organisation' but is not a corporate entity, and is reliant on the Council hosting arrangement.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Trust, a registered charity formed in 2016, plays a complementary role to the Partnership, and is closely linked through trustee appointments and joint working. This Business Plan seeks to maximise synergies with the Trust.

The structure and key relationships of the Partnership are shown below:

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership structure (February 2019)



The Terms of Reference for the AONB Partnership have been revised during 2018-19, bringing the number of members to 36. The Strategy & Performance Committee is a sub-group to guide the work of the team on behalf of the Partnership.

2.2 National accountability and networks

The AONB is a national designation but local authorities have the main legal duty for its management. Core funding is provided by Defra for delivery of 'core functions' (see Appendix 1). The Defra funding contribution is bid for and claimed annually on provision of a work programme and reporting. Defra support for AONBs is strong and their funding is currently increasing after previous cuts. Defra operate a trusting, relatively arm's length relationship with AONBs.

The National Association for AONBs is an umbrella organisation providing roles of advocacy and sharing good practice. It is an active and effective network and provides national context and links for the Partnership's work. The NAAONB has defined these objectives for the AONB Family:

- *Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future,*
- *Support the economic and social wellbeing of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty,*
- *Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the nature and culture of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and encourage people to take action for their conservation,*
- *Value, sustain, and promote the benefits that the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty provide for society, including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation's health and wellbeing.*

2.3 The AONB team

The AONB team currently has eight posts, four of which are part-time, making a total Full Time Equivalent of 6.175 FTE. With the Landscape Partnership Scheme in place from 2013 to 2018, the team peaked at 15 people. The current staffing is:

AONB Partnership Manager – Phil Holden, full time
Community & Landscape Officer – Cath Landles, full time
Natural Environment Officer – Mike Kelly, full time
Sustainable Tourism Officer – Nigel McDonald, 0.6FTE
Funding & Programmes Officer – Joy Howells, 0.3 FTE
Promotions Officer – Stephanie Hayes, 0.6 FTE
Clun Catchment Officer – Alison Jones, 0.8FTE
Administrator - Alison Kay, 0.67FTE

The team's work programme is structured under three headings:

- **TAKING ACTION** – on the ground with communities to conserve and enhance natural beauty and promote enjoyment and understanding
- **INFLUENCING OTHERS** – collaborative grassroots and policy work to champion the AONB and the benefits it provides
- **MANAGING OUR BUSINESS** – developing capacity and ensuring a robust, effective and financially sustainable AONB organisation

We try to balance tangible, visible activity and more strategic, 'behind the scenes' work, both of which are important.



2.4 Budget summary

Turnover in 2018-19 was £480,099, of which the core budget makes up £278,357 and the remainder is project work. Staff and office costs make up the majority of the core budget. A summary budget is in Appendix 2.

Core funding

- The Defra contribution is currently under a four year funding offer up to 2019-20, with a 1.5% annual increase in this period. A funding settlement for the next period is expected this year.
- Funding from the Councils has recently become agreed annually, after the system of a Memorandum of Agreement with Defra lapsed. An MOA between the Councils would be desirable.
- The core funding supports most of our 'influencing others' work. Other external funding is secured to implement projects, which make up most of our 'taking action' work.

Staff costs and some office costs are currently rising faster than core funding contributions, creating budget pressures.

Project funding

- Some projects can earn a management fee as income into the core budget, but many require a cash contribution from us.

Other income

- Fee-earning work is carried out where this is compatible with our overall aims, and is a vital source of unattached income. This tends to be discrete items of contract work for partner organisations – we do not currently publicise chargeable 'services'.

Reserves

- Financial reserves are held on behalf of the Partnership by Shropshire Council, currently comprising £211,464, of which £79,581 is held forward for known commitments. The reserves help to protect the accountable body against risk, but are also used to provide cash match funding to project bids.

2.5 Recent achievements since 2014

- The **Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme** invested £2.32m in the area, working on 8 built heritage sites, habitat work on 6 sites, managing 20ha of meadows, involving 53 farmers in curlew conservation, given 43 small grants, involved 491 volunteers, completed four 12-month traineeships, 47 skills courses, 10 sites with improved access and interpretation, 129 public events, over 600 schoolchildren involved and many local groups supported.
- **Partnership project working in the Clun catchment** has included the SITA & Natural England funded Freshwater Pearl Mussel project, the four year River Clun Recovery project (funded by WREN and others) and the Environment Agency's 'Unmuddying the Waters' project.
- After a successful pilot, the National Lottery Heritage Fund is now supporting the national '**Our Common Cause' upland commons project**. The two year development phase connects upland commons work in four areas of England. The AONB team provides an Area Facilitator role and leads the Area Group for the project.
- The **Wrekin Forest Plan** was renewed and the Wrekin Forest was defined as a 'Strategic Landscape' in Telford & Wrekin's Local Plan.
- Facilitated the Shropshire Hills **Destination Partnership**, and led the production of a new **Sustainable Tourism Strategy** and renewal of the **European Charter** for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.
- Continuation and improvement of the **Shropshire Hills Shuttles**.
- Delivery of the **John Muir Award** with schools.
- Raised profile of the AONB through celebrating its **60th anniversary** in 2018, and co-hosted the national AONB Conference in 2016.
- Supported the creation of the **Shropshire Hills AONB Trust**, submitted a formal bid to Defra for creation of a **Conservation Board**, and secured National Lottery Heritage Fund **Resilient Heritage funding**.
- Secured a two year **Water Environment Grant** project, in partnership with Severn Rivers Trust.

2.6 Our current activities

TAKING ACTION:

River Clun Catchment – 2 year continuation of work with Environment Agency and Woodland Trust funding.

Our Common Cause upland commons project (HLF) – development phase

Sustainable tourism - Shuttle buses, Caering for Caradoc project

Water Environment Grant – farm advice project with Severn River Trust

Stepping Stones project – active partner in National Trust-led project

Projects in development – Monumental Volunteers, Youth project, Trees Outside Woods, Road Verges, Social Forestry

INFLUENCING OTHERS:

AONB Management Plan review – new plan for 2019-24 completed

Joint work with AONB Trust, including Conservation Fund grant scheme, Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB and Fix the Fort appeal

Planning – input to policy and selectively to casework

Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Destination Partnership, European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

Local area partnerships – Clun Catchment, Wrekin Forest

Landscape guidance document – contracted out

Communications and promotion – website, newsletters, social media, etc

Support for initiatives and projects led by others

MANAGING OUR BUSINESS:

Hosting and governance – Conservation Board request on hold, building relationships with the Councils and developing the Partnership

Resilient Heritage capacity building project

National Association for AONBs – active involvement

2.7 How we work and our values

- The Partnership seeks to engage people in support of the AONB's purposes. It helps to bring different interests together, raise understanding and break down barriers.
- We will seek to develop the roles of partners and promote the value of the landscape. We look to partners to champion the AONB and contribute expertise and experience to the work of the Partnership.
- We work at a landscape level and seek to apply the ecosystem approach. Our remit includes biodiversity, heritage, sustainable land management, recreation and tourism.
- The AONB Partnership team works through support, advice and facilitation with landowners, community groups and other organisations. We don't own or manage any land directly.
- Covering a wide area with a small team, we work collaboratively and complement the activity of other organisations. We have built expertise over time in areas such as rivers and catchment work, farmer engagement, the John Muir Award and sustainable tourism.



3. Moving forwards

3.1 Issues and Opportunities

The Management Plan sets out issues affecting the AONB, including new agricultural policies and funding, pressures on the landscape including declines in biodiversity, tree diseases, development, recreation pressure, increased urgency on resource protection and ecosystem functioning.

The main current organisational issues for the Partnership are:

- Influencing land management, with potential new roles for AONB teams in agri-environment funding
- Influence of the Glover Review on our Conservation Board proposal
- Communicating – improving recognition of the value of the AONB landscape and ecosystems to the economy and to people’s health and wellbeing, and influencing attitudes
- Increasing competition for funding, and lack of priority given to landscape and natural environment
- Need to have more influence with planners and developers

The main opportunities for developing our work are:

- Defra 25 Year Environment Plan, Environment Bill, Agriculture Bill, Environmental Land Management System, payment for public goods
- Likely positive changes for AONBs resulting from the Glover Review
- Renewed commitment from Shropshire Council on hosting
- Growing capacity of the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust and harnessing more volunteer support
- National awareness of climate change and biodiversity issues
- New Shropshire Rural Strategy and Shared Prosperity Fund

3.2 Our aspiration

is for the AONB Partnership to:

- **Involve and inspire people**
- **Work for our special landscapes**
- **Enhance natural and cultural assets**
- **Delivering better outcomes for the AONB.**

3.3 Development priorities

The following priorities emerged from workshop sessions:

- More time/ capacity to develop project funding bids, including in partnership with other organisations
- Strategic work vs on the ground delivery – getting the balance right
- Achieving geographical spread of activity, especially east of the A49
- Improved communications and engagement – to show the value of the AONB landscape and our work
- Improved engagement and influence in planning, e.g. design guidance for better development
- Working with young people
- Development of the Partnership, staff and team development
- Joint working with the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust and with the two Councils, and the national AONB network
- Strengthening the status of the organisation, along with governance and partner engagement

3.4 Actions

The priority activities for 2019-22 identified in the workshops are below:

	Land Management	Sustainable Economy and Communities	People Enjoying and Caring
Taking Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stepping Stones project Our Common Cause Delivery phase Clun Catchment Trees Outside Woods Social forestry Other area projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Down to Earth and supporting community projects Planning Officer capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shuttles Young People's Pathway Project, including John Muir Award Monumental Volunteers Urban outreach
Influencing Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Environmental Land Management System (ELMS) Developing relationships in the farming community and influencing perceptions Responding to consultations and strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning influence - landscape and design guidance, relationships with planning officers and developers, case studies Building the case for natural capital and value of the AONB Shropshire Council – at senior level, including Rural Strategy Parish & Town Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging responsible recreation - Duke of Edinburgh and activity centres, families Health & wellbeing Tourism Strategy & Destination Partnership Examples of sustainability

While we must prioritise, we also have to push forward on many fronts. Actions from the Management Plan with the AONB Partnership identified as the lead are shown in Appendix 3, with commentary on the next steps.

Some more generic targets for the next three years are:

- By March 2022 increase level of project delivery to £400k/year,
- By March each year meet income levels required for core budget,
- By March 2022 achieve a 50% increase in levels of volunteer activity.

3.5 Fund-raising strategy

Core funding - We need to actively make the case nationally and locally for continuation and enhancement of core AONB funding from Defra and local authorities, working with NAAONB.

Project grants - Continuing to raise funds for delivery projects will remain a central activity, and helps to reduce our reliance on exchequer funding.

Income generation - We currently have around 20 sources of income, which is healthy and spreads risk, but some sources bring in small amounts of money, and the return on time invested is very variable. Through the Resilient Heritage project we will explore further development of income generating opportunities including fee-earning contracts, consultancy work and trading. Prioritisation is necessary, and not all of these may be taken forward.

The AONB Trust is raising funds mainly for distribution through the Conservation Fund and a few other restricted income streams. This is currently relatively small but will hopefully increase through sponsorship / legacies and donations. The Trust helps to secure resources to benefit the AONB but is not seen as a source of income for the AONB Partnership in the short term.

3.6 Communications and engagement

Communications and engagement are seen as a vital and cross-cutting part of achieving the Partnership's ambition, and a Communications and Engagement Strategy will be developed to accompany this Business Plan.



4. Performance and Monitoring

Review and monitoring of performance is carried out in different ways by the AONB team themselves and by the Partnership, especially through the Strategy & Performance Committee. We also report nationally to Defra.

4.1 Reporting and Key Performance indicators

The National Association has just agreed a new set of national Key Performance Indicators to aid reporting to Defra, as follows:

1. **Caring for natural beauty** - Land where natural beauty has been conserved or enhanced through the work of AONB Teams

- Hectares of habitat conserved or enhanced for biodiversity

- Hectares of land conserved for geodiversity

- Hectares of land where the heritage asset condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced

- Hectares of landscape enhanced via the removal of overhead power lines

2. **Caring for heritage** - Heritage assets where the condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced by the work of AONB Teams

- Number of Scheduled Monuments where the condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced

- Number of other designated sites where the condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced

- Number of non-designated heritage assets where the condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced

3. **Engaging with people** - People engaged through the work of AONB Teams

- Number of volunteers

- Attendance at events convened/ organised by AONB Teams

- Number of young people (<18) engaged with via school visits, activities, etc

- Number of people engaged with via activities linked to the Health & Wellbeing agenda

- Number of members of the public engaged with during Management Plan review

- Number of people engaged with via AONB promotional publications –eNews, Royal Mail Door-to-Door deliveries, free AONB Newspapers, etc

4. **Power to convene** - Number of partnerships/ initiatives influenced by the AONB Team to deliver AONB Management Plan objectives

- Number of partnerships where the AONB Team is part of the project/team/ steering group lead

- Number of partnerships where the AONB Team is a supporting partner

5. **Sustainable development** – Strategies, plans, policy, guidance documents, development and land management schemes appraised or developed by AONB Teams

- Number of strategies, plans, policy or guidance documents appraised or developed by the AONB Team

- Number of Major 'development schemes' appraised – LPA planning applications

- Number of non-Major 'development schemes' appraised – LPA planning applications

- Number of other 'development schemes' appraised – Highways, Environment Agency, BT, DNO, private sector, etc

- Number of National Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) appraised

- Number of 'land management schemes' appraised – woodland management, Catchment Sensitive Farming, Countryside Stewardship, Natural Flood Management, etc

6. **Value for money** - Total value of work delivered directly or secured by the work of AONB Teams

- Amount of Local Authority funding received (Core funding)

- Amount of non-Local Authority funding received (Core funding)

- Value of other 'external' grants or contributions received for projects/non-core activity

- Value of external projects substantially influenced /generated by the AONB Team

- Value of volunteer days

Case studies are also submitted and collated at

<http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/about-aonbs/aonb-work/>.

4.2 Risk Management

Risk Management is carried out for Shropshire Council as part of the host authority procedures. Below is a summary of the most recent version from May 2019.

Description of Risk	Residual Risk Rating (with current controls)			Risk Exposure High/ Medium/ Low/ Very Low
	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Rating	
Loss of services, e.g. electricity, heating, IT network, telephones	2	2	4	V Low
Interruption to work due to damage/ fire at office.	2	3	6	Low
Disruption of work due to interruption in Shirehall services (e.g. finance, IT support)	2	3	6	Low
Loss of or damage to equipment (by accident/ theft)	3	2	6	Low
Loss of data (by accident/ malice)	2	3	6	Low
Risk to staff due to hazards on premises	2	3	6	Low
Risk to staff due to faulty or poorly maintained equipment	2	3	6	Low
Loss of funding from Defra and local authority partners	2	4	8	Med
Poor value for money from expenditure	2	3	6	Low

Description of Risk	Residual Risk Rating (with current controls)			Risk Exposure High/ Medium/ Low/ Very Low
	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Rating	
Failure to comply with regulations	2	3	6	Low
Difficulty with recruitment and/ or retention of staff	2	3	6	Low
Interruption to work due to staff sickness, including stress/ welfare issues	3	3	9	Med
Poor co-ordination/ internal communication	2	2	4	V Low
Poor conduct of staff	1	4	4	Low
Failure to meet targets/ service standards	2	3	6	Low
Unrealistic expectations from partners and public	4	2	8	Med
Inadequate performance by contractors	2	2	4	V Low
Inadequate supervision or support for volunteers	1	2	2	V Low
Risk to staff especially when lone working, including natural and people hazards	2	3	6	Low

Appendix 1 AONB team 'core functions' (defined nationally by Defra)

1. MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 1.1 Developing reviewing, preparing and publishing the AONB vision and the Management Plan
- 1.2 Promoting the AONB vision and Management Plan to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside
- 1.3 Advising upon, facilitating and co-ordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan
- 1.4 Accessing resources for management activities
- 1.5 Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB
- 1.6 Providing a management role to co-ordinate AONB protection through the actions of the AONB unit, the AONB Partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level
- 1.7 Problem solving with the unit acting as co-ordinator and facilitators

2. ADVISORY / ADVOCACY

- 2.1 Advising Local Authorities and other partners on their activities within AONBs, to encourage them to attain the highest possible standards in AONBs
- 2.2 Working with and contributing to the NAAONB activities, sharing advice and best practice nationally and regionally.
- 2.3 Providing landscape related planning advice (to local planning authorities and in conjunction with Natural England as appropriate in line with, and underpinned by protocols)
- 2.4 Financial support for NAAONB

- 2.5 Contribution and support to activity between AONBs and protected landscapes to strengthen the status of the AONBs individually and collectively.

3. MONITORING

- 3.1 To monitor and report on progress against Management Plans and Annual Business Plans to the Partnership.
- 3.2 To provide monitoring and reporting information to Defra in accordance with any guidance issued by Defra



Appendix 2 Budget summary table

Expenditure	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Core budget				
Staff costs (inclusive of NI, pension, training, T&S)	£197,566	£214,476	£229,985	£234,139
Office costs	£30,707	£24,378	£25,675	£25,870
Support services	£31,290	£31,290	£31,290	£31,290
Promotional Activity	£915	£402	£3,090	£600
Strategic & development		£519	£10,100	£1,000
Partnership running costs	£4,294	£4,012	£4,050	£4,100
Capacity building project		£3,280	£19,670	
Core total	£264,772	£278,357	£323,860	£296,999
Projects				
Rivers	£91,523	£165,856	£87,339	£86,247
Water Environment Grant			£113,223	£106,627
Sustainable Tourism		£5,516		
Shuttles	£17,113	£30,370	£31,256	£31,256
Stiperstones & Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme	£684,753			
GRAND TOTAL	£1,058,161	£480,099	£555,678	£521,129

Income	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Core budget				
Defra AONB Single Pot	£189,623	£192,884	£196,202	£196,202
Shropshire Council (gross - support services £31k)	£40,830	£56,830	£56,830	£56,830
Telford & Wrekin Council	£2,694	£2,694	£2,694	£2,694
HLF Resilient Heritage		£19,050	£19,050	
Earned income match funding into core budget	£31,625	£6,899	£49,084	£41,273
Core total	£264,772	£278,357	£323,860	£296,999
Project funding, various sources (including in kind)	£793,389	£185,367	£225,645	£208,877
Project funding match from earned income	£0	£16,375	£6,173	£15,253
GRAND TOTAL	£1,058,161	£480,099	£555,678	£521,129

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Project funding match from earned income	£0	£16,375	£6,173	£15,253
Earned income match funding into core budget	£31,625	£6,899	£49,084	£41,273
Surplus (+) or deficit (-) to reserves	£26,113			
Total earned income required/ achieved	£57,738	£23,274	£55,257	£56,526

Appendix 3 Management Plan 2019-24 actions with AONB Partnership identified as lead

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	2019-2021 aspiration/ next steps
	Actions led by AONB Partnership - High priority:			
LM5	Continue to improve habitat and water quality in the River Clun for Freshwater pearl mussel	Ongoing	AONB, EA, NE, SRT	Complete two year contracted delivery for EA Unmuddying the Waters project. Plan further work following this.
PL5	Continue to foster links and understanding between Partnership and planning officers and committee members	Ongoing	AONB, LAs	Increase level of direct communication.
PL6	Support activities contributing to a low carbon Shropshire Hills, compatible with the AONB's special qualities	Ongoing	AONB, LAs	Use this as a key strand of communication, especially for tourism and land management
EC2	Actively engage partners to develop the role and influence of the Destination Partnership, especially to oversee implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy	Ongoing	AONB, SHT and partners	Vary format and location of DP meetings to encourage attendance, engage with redevelopment of a Shropshire DMO
EC5	Continue to operate Shropshire Hills Shuttles, seeking new funding and refining service	Ongoing	AONB, SC, NT	Seek funding to enable 2020 and 2021 service to go ahead.
LM1	Work with Defra, NAAONB and local partners to ensure new Environmental Land Management Schemes deliver Management Plan priorities in the AONB	New action	AONB, NE, NT, SWT, NFU, CLA	Engage with Defra development of ELMS, including through Stepping Stones test/trial.
LM8	Establish a large programme of planting of trees outside woodlands, partly to help offset losses from Ash dieback disease	New action	AONB, WT & partners	Work with Woodland Trust to submit NLHF application for a Trees Outside Woods project.
LM11	Develop a 'Monumental Volunteers' project for management of historic sites	New action	AONB, HE	Resolve priorities with Historic England and submit project funding application.
PL2	Expand capacity within the AONB team for work on planning consultations	New action	AONB	Cost options for a new post within the team and for hiring in specialist support for key cases.
PL3	Develop Design Guidance and a checklist for domestic development	New action	AONB, LAs	Develop a project brief and scope when Landscape Guidance is completed.
PL4	Develop a Landscape Guidance document	New action	AONB, LAs, NE	Complete external contract and promote, use and disseminate guidelines document. Seek to develop interactive on-line version.
EC1	Develop a youth engagement project incorporating the John Muir Award, Young Rangers, and traineeships	New action	AONB and partners	Submit project funding application.
LM3	Implement 'Our Common Cause' upland commons project with local and national partners (subject to delivery phase approval)	In progress	AONB, FCL, NT, NE	Support submission of Stage 2 funding application, and if successful bid for Area Co-ordinator contract for Delivery phase.

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	2019-2021 aspiration/ next steps
LM2	Develop further web-based guidance material for land managers – about landscape features and about utilising environmental assets sustainably	Aspiration	AONB	Scope this out in consultation with land managers once new website is in place.
PL1	Press for stronger status for AONB structures as a statutory consultee in planning and the necessary resources to fulfil duties which go with this	Aspiration	AONB, NAAONB, NE, LAs	Case made through input to Glover Review. Continue to encourage where opportunities arise.
new	Adopt and implement recommendations from the Glover Review, and encourage implementation of actions led by others, e.g. government, local authorities.	New action	AONB, NAAONB	Awaiting report of Review Panel.
LM7	Work with landowners through the Water Environment Grant	New action	AONB, SRT	Complete recruitment and get project delivery under way towards target outputs.
	Other actions led by AONB Partnership:			
PL13	Demonstrate value of landscape to economy through tourism	Ongoing/Aspiration	AONB, LAs	Collaborate with partners to gain up to date evidence.
LM15	Support actions to manage hay meadows, species-rich grassland	Ongoing	AONB, SWT, NE	An integral element of Stepping Stones project.
LM16	Expand and support community projects managing road verges for biodiversity	Ongoing	AONB, SWT, SC	Support current partnership project application and seek further development.
LM18	Promote training for land management and conservation, and seek to address gaps in provision where identified	Ongoing	AONB, NE, NT, HE	An element in proposed youth project.
LM21	Continue network of Shropshire Hills Uplands Forum linking with national Uplands Alliance	Ongoing	AONB and partners	Develop farmer network with Uplands Alliance. Repeat Uplands Forum as national policy and schemes evolve.
LM22	Collate environmental data relevant to the AONB	Ongoing	AONB, NE, SC	Complete State of the AONB report.
PL8	Continue to foster stronger links with other relevant planning consultees – including Natural England, CPRE and other Council departments	Ongoing	AONB	Build relationships through casework.
PL9	Support new Community Led Plans to take the AONB fully into account	Ongoing	AONB	Find out where these are going on and engage pro-actively.
EC4	Publicise the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and use it as tool for engagement, including possible Charter Part II with businesses	Ongoing	AONB, SHT and partners	Build on momentum of the 2019 Tourism Expo, working with the DP and at county level.
EC16	Expand membership of Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB	Ongoing	AONB & Trust	Support Trust and volunteers with recruitment, seek to improve admin, especially of Direct Debits.

Ref	Action	Type	Lead & partners	2019-2021 aspiration/ next steps
LM12	Work with landowners on restorative management of Plantations on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS)	New action	AONB, WT, FC	Not currently top priority for Woodland Trust.
PL10	Make the case for an Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for motorsports in the AONB	New action	AONB	Pursue discussions with Council and interested stakeholders.
EC6	Establish a new sustainable tourism business network for the Shropshire Hills	New action	AONB, SHT	Scope out proposal.
EC13	Repeat five yearly visitor survey	New action	AONB, SHT	This is due now. Seek to pursue with partners.
EC15	Promote the area's best qualities to the business community and encourage an 'ambassador' approach	New action	AONB, SHT	Build on recent discussions at 2019 Tourism Expo.
EC20	Improve roadside signage marking AONB at entry points	New action	AONB, LAs	No current activity yet on this.
EC21	Foster links with the Shrewsbury University Centre and other HE and FE institutions	New action	AONB	Seek opportunities to develop links.
EC22	Improve links with Duke of Edinburgh Award and other outdoor activity providers to raise awareness of the AONB	New action	AONB and partners	No current activity yet on this.
EC12	Pursue 'Caering for Caradoc' fund-raising appeal and explore possibilities to replicate this, perhaps at the Wrekin	In progress	AONB & Trust	Continue to promote Fix the Fort appeal.
LM10	Develop an Upper Teme project – including expanding tree and woodland cover and enhancing the river SSSI	Aspiration	AONB, NE, SRT, EA, NRW	A target area within proposed Trees Outside Woods project.
LM13	Develop a social forestry project with funded officer capacity, and a hub linking service providers and users	Aspiration	AONB and partners	Continue discussions with partners and seek to support a funding application.
PL11	Develop guidance on management and design of roads in the AONB	Aspiration	AONB, LAs	No current activity yet on this.
PL12	Undertake work to identify key viewpoints within the AONB, and looking into it from surrounding areas	Aspiration	AONB and partners	No current activity yet on this.
EC23	Demonstrate value of landscape to health and wellbeing	Aspiration	AONB, LAs	Gather evidence and use as a theme in communications.
EC24	Develop an interpretation plan for the AONB	Aspiration	AONB & partners	No current activity yet on this.