



Committee and Date Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 15 November 2016	Item 7
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2014-19 AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

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Summary

This paper provides a brief progress update on the Actions from the 2014-19 AONB Management Plan.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to comment on the progress update.

Background

The Management Plan is halfway through its five year period, and a progress update is timely. Additional information from members on progress with any of the actions will be welcomed.

List of Background Papers Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-19.
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 2014-19 AONB Management Plan Progress Update

Appendix to item 7 Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-19 Actions, Progress Update at 1.11.16

Ref	Action	Status	Lead and key partners	Priority	Progress
CO1	Deliver the highest possible levels of uptake of the New Environmental Land Management Scheme , and uptake of scheme options meeting strategic conservation needs. Undertake promotion, awareness raising and training to support this.	In progress	NE, AONB, SC, SWT	H	The new Countryside Stewardship Scheme has been up and running since July 2015, and new agreements in the Shropshire Hills have been secured. While the government has undertaken to honour existing agreements and the new schemes for a period, there is a focus now on possible forms of agri-environment grants post-Brexit.
CO2	Produce and offer guidance and advice in a variety of forms for land managers, e.g. farmers, smallholders, woodland owners, on practices which support the special qualities of the AONB.	In progress	AONB, NE, SC, CWGs	H	Guidance page established on website with a range of materials available http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/guidance/ . More specific face to face support through Rivers project and Conservation Fund.
CO3	Develop and implement an integrated catchment plan for the Clun catchment , addressing biodiversity, water and other issues, working closely with land managers and the local community.	In progress	AONB, NE, EA, SRT, SWT, LLL, CWGs	H	Catchment Plan has not been published due to project commitments and the high number of initiatives in the Clun catchment. The Clun Catchment Partnership continues to provide a valuable co-ordination role.
CO4	Investigate possibilities for translocating or encouraging colonisation to new sites of the critically endangered population of freshwater pearl mussel in the River Clun.	In progress	EA, NE, AONB	H	Improving habitat conditions at two selected potential 'recovery sites' for pearl mussel is a key part of the 2014-19 WREN-funded River Clun Recovery Project.
CO5	Develop the Teme Partnership to implement the integrated catchment plan arising from the River Teme Catchment Pilot.	In progress	SRT, NE, EA, AONB	M	The Teme Catchment Partnership continues to operate (http://severnrivertrust.com/projects/teme-catchment-partnership/), and the Severn Rivers Trust are developing the HLF 'Springs of Rivers' project in the Teme catchment.
CO6	Develop a Clee Hill Heritage Project and other community heritage projects.	In progress	AONB, SC, NE, CGs	M	The planned Clee Hill Heritage project did not go ahead to full application to due problems securing agreements over leasing of sites for ongoing maintenance. There is much community heritage within the Stiperstones - Comdon LPS, and some within the planned Upland Commons project.
CO7	Provide support and networking opportunities to commoners undertaking grazing on important upland sites.	In progress	AONB, NT, SWT, NE	M	Following the successful 'Better Outcomes' pilot in 2014, a national project on upland commons involving the Shropshire Hills is being developed for second submission to HLF in Dec 2016.
CO8	Develop new initiatives to encourage more woodland creation and planting.	Aspiration	WT, FC, AONB, NT, SWT, NE	M	Woodland Trust are involved in the Clun catchment work and a number of sites have been planted through their Morewoods scheme.
CO9	Support the management of existing woodlands and their wildlife, including restoring Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites.	In progress	HW, FC, NT, SWT, NE	H	Woodland grants are now part of the Stewardship Scheme under RDPE. The Woodland Trust are interested in doing further work on PAWS in the AONB.
CO10	Promote principles and practices of land management for carbon sequestration, ecosystem resilience, flood alleviation and other aspects of resource protection.	In progress	EA, LAs, AONB, NE	H	These aspects are central to the delivery of the River Clun Recovery project and also included in the Commons project and developing 'Stepping Stones' project (see CO12 and CO18).
CO11	Support the operation of Community Wildlife Groups , to provide valuable survey information and engage local people with wildlife.	In progress	SWT, AONB, NT, SC	M	There are now eight Community Wildlife Groups in and around the AONB http://www.shropscwgs.org.uk/
CO12	Manage sites owned by conservation bodies and publicly owned sites to high standards and optimising connections with the wider landscape.	In progress	NE, NT, SWT, FC	H	Natural England and the National trust are developing the Stepping Stones project to look a better ecological management of the Stiperstones and Long Mynd and improved habitat networks between and around them.
CO13	Advise owners of Wildlife Sites and Site Alerts on their management, focusing on those at risk, e.g. grasslands, and designating new sites.	In progress	SWT, AONB SC, NE	H	Shropshire Wildlife Trust are running a project advising owners of Local Wildlife Sites. A few have received funding through the Conservation Fund.
CO14	Support and develop proposals for conservation or restoration works at key historic sites (e.g. 31 SAMs at High Risk, 3 Listed Buildings at Risk).	In progress	EH, LAs, NE, AONB	M	The Stiperstones - Comdon LPS includes work at the 1784 Engine House at Pontesbury, Cothercott barytes mill, Snailbeach and Roman Gravels mine sites, Castle Pulverbatch Motte and Bailey, and hillforts at Pontesford Hill and Callow Hill.

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CO15	Implement a programme of undergrounding of electricity cables , prioritised according to landscape impact.	In progress	CN, AONB	M	In 2014-15 undergrounding at Norbury and on Brown Clee at Abdon Burf was completed by Western Power Distribution. Other sites in the AONB which have benefitted include Rhos Fiddle, Bucknell Forest, Woolstaston and Picklescott. The biggest scheme at Clee Hill along the A4117 is due for completion in 2016.
CO16	Co-ordinate among partner organisations the holding, improvement and application of relevant data about the special qualities of the AONB and influences on it.	In progress	AONB, NE, SC, EA, SWT	M	Reduced staff capacity is a significant issue for all organisations in progressing this. The Natural Shropshire website has been closed, but the Shropshire Ecological Data Network continues.
CO17	Establish a programme of fixed point photography at key locations as a means of monitoring landscape change.	Aspiration	AONB	L	Not started.
CO18	Develop mechanisms to enhance habitat networks in the Long Mynd - Stiperstones and Stretton Hills areas.	In progress	NT, NE, AONB	H	Scoping work has been carried out by Natural England and the National Trust for a 'Stepping Stones' project, and a project officer has been employed for a year to develop the project.
CO19	Develop a project to co-ordinate conservation effort at a landscape scale on Wenlock Edge .	Aspiration	NT, SWA, AONB, LOs	M	Local activity continues, but there is no broader mechanism at present to co-ordinate or develop a larger project.
PL1	Work co-operatively on production of Supplementary Planning Documents including landscape, biodiversity, trees & woodland.	Aspiration	SC, AONB	H	Shropshire Council consulted publicly in spring 2016 on three draft SPDs covering: •Type and Affordability of Housing •Natural Environment •Historic Environment The AONB team had earlier input to the Natural Environment document.
PL2	Develop a planning guidelines document for the AONB, taking into account local distinctiveness of particular areas.	Aspiration	AONB, SC	M	Not started.
PL3	Integrate ecological networks and green infrastructure approaches into planning policy and guidance in relation to the AONB.	In progress	LA, AONB	M	Shropshire's Natural Environment SPD and Telford & Wrekin's new Local Plan make progress towards this.
PL4	Raise awareness of the AONB with Planning Officers and Planning Committee members .	In progress	AONB, LAs	H	A standard response has been adopted on all planning applications on which the AONB Partnership is consulted, with additional more detailed comments in some cases.
PL5	Provide greater planning protection to the Wrekin part of the AONB and its setting, on the fringes of Telford.	Aspiration	TWC, AONB	H	TWC's Local Plan makes reference to a 'Strategic Landscapes' study which identifies three areas, including the Wrekin Forest. http://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20172/planning_policy_and_strategy/1161/strategic_landscapes_study
PL6	Support the development of Village and Parish Design Statements .	In progress	AONB, LAs, PCs	M	The AONB team have had no involvement in any new Design Statements. The Church Stretton Town Design Statement continues to be highly relevant and well used.
PL7	Increase coverage of Parish Plans , and include landscape and sustainability issues.	In progress	PPSGs, CCS, PCs, AONB	M	Shropshire RCC continue to advise and support on Parish Plans but Shropshire Council withdrew its financial aid in April 2016, so plans have to be supported from Parish or Town Council funds.
PL8	Develop planning guidance on the sustainable use of farmsteads based on the Farmsteads Mapping project.	Aspiration	SC, EH	M	The project's reports are available at https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/environment/historic-environment/historic-farmstead-characterisation/ . These are referenced in the draft Historic Environment SPD.
PL9	Develop guidance on how renewable energy can be developed in the area with minimum impact on the AONB's special qualities.	In progress	LA, AONB	M	Government guidance is at https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/EN010013/EN010013-003019-WR_51_Written%20Representation_RWE%20NPower%20Renewables.pdf There is guidance in the Shropshire Core Strategy, SAMDev and the AONB Management Plan. A number of large solar farm developments have been contentious in recent years.

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Ref	Action	Status	Lead and key partners	Priority	Progress
PL10	Establish an AONB Design Award to recognise high quality sustainable development.	Aspiration	AONB, LAs	L	Not started.
PL11	Report annually on the number and type of planning applications in the AONB, and on the numbers granted, and refused or modified on grounds of the AONB.	Aspiration	LAs, AONB	L	Planning applications on which the AONB Partnership has been consulted have been logged since 2014 providing some data, but the outcome of these applications in relation to the AONB has not been monitored.
LM1	Provide guidance to help identify opportunities to land managers for economic return utilising the environmental assets of the area sustainably.	Aspiration	AONB, NE, NFU, SA, LEAF	H	This is a consistent strand of advice in specific initiatives such as the Rivers project, but the team do not have a mechanism to deliver this AONB-wide.
LM2	Promote local food by a variety of means including press, leaflets, exhibitions and events such as food fairs, farm walks, schools activities.	In progress	LAs, RH, PGs, AONB	H	Some previous initiatives have come to an end, especially with diminishing public sector involvement. A new website http://www.buy-from.com/ was launched in Oct 2015.
LM3	Develop the Shropshire Hills Farmers Markets , and collaboration with promotion.	In progress	FMs, AONB	M	Farmers markets continue at Bishop's Castle, Clee Hill, Cleobury Mortimer, Craven Arms, Knighton, Ludlow, Much Wenlock and Rea Valley. There is some joint promotion.
LM4	Develop the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme .	In progress	AONB	H	Scheme relaunched as the Sustainable Business Network in 2015-16. Numbers are however dwindling and the scheme may no longer be appropriate to the economic circumstances and priorities and capacity of the AONB team.
LM5	Develop a successor to the Shropshire Hills Farming Project, providing support to upland farmers , including the delivery of environmental benefits.	Aspiration	AONB	H	The Upland Commons project will if successful pick up many of these aspects.
LM6	Promote the uptake and supply chain development of woodfuel linked where possible to improved management of woodlands.	In progress	GWC, FC, AWM, AONB	M	Public sector projects on this have declined, though a number of businesses are still active.
LM7	Promote and develop training opportunities which support conservation land management.	In progress	WNSC, HAUC, RH, NE, LSC	M	The training element of the Stiperstones - Corndon LPS has delivered against this.
VE1	Support the Destination Development Partnership and implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy , working with partners in the AONB and continuing to strengthen links with the market towns surrounding it.	In progress	AONB, SC, partners	H	The DP continues to operate and oversee implementation of the Strategy. Though supported by the AONB team, the DP now comes under the wing of Shropshire Hills Tourism. The Strategy has reached the end of its five years and needs renewing. An EU funded tourism co-operation project is being taken forward focusing on marketing.
VE2	Raise awareness of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas , and participate in the Charter Network to exchange ideas and good practice.	In progress	AONB, SC, partners	M	UK-based Charter meetings have been attended. The five year Charter expires in Dec 2016, and the cost of renewing is a disincentive.
VE3	Improve the countryside content and profile of the Shropshire Hills in tourism promotion , use the Shropshire Hills & Ludlow identity and branding, and outline sustainable ways of enjoying the AONB.	In progress	SHT, ST, LAs, AONB	H	Shropshire Hills Tourism have a new destination website http://www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk/ . Joint production of the 'Great Days in the Shropshire Hills' leaflet. Identity guidelines for the destination have been developed and the logo licenced to a number of groups. An identity workshop is scheduled for Nov 2016.
VE4	Provide and promote opportunities to experience the distinctive landscapes and heritage of different parts of the Hills . This includes improving the experience at the Wrekin, and promoting areas with more potential such as the Clee Hills and Wenlock Edge. (<i>Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action 2.2</i>)	Aspiration	AONB, SC, NT, FC	M	The AONB visitor web pages have been substantially developed and made more prominent http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/enjoying-the-shropshire-hills/ . These include a new Wrekin page, a feature on 50 hills in the AONB and many ideas for places to visit. Support has been given for improved signage at Clee Hill Common.
VE5	Develop membership and networking activities of the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme in relation to tourism and local food businesses.	In progress	AONB	H	The relaunch of the Scheme as the Sustainable Business Network has focussed on tourism businesses.
VE6	Conduct a visitor survey to provide up to date information on which to base management and marketing decisions.	In progress	AONB, SC, partners	M	Completed http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Shropshire-Hills-and-Ludlow-Area-Visitor-Survey-Report-2013.pdf

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VE7	Support and promote walking opportunities, including a volunteer-led programme of guided walks, the Walkers are Welcome towns network, and promotion through Walking with Offa co-ordinated with other areas along the Welsh-English border. <i>(Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action 2.3)</i>	In progress	AONB, SC, partners	H	http://www.shropshiresgreatoutdoors.co.uk/ has been created, providing a valuable resource of opportunities. The Walkers Are Welcome towns network continues and funding is being sought for a new phase of Irresistible Offa. New walks are being developed through the Stiperstones - Corndon LPS.
VE8	Develop a programme of promotion of cycling opportunities in the Shropshire Hills, linking outside the area as appropriate. <i>(Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action 2.4)</i>	Aspiration	AONB, SC	H	Web pages including http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/enjoying-the-shropshire-hills/cycling/ promote opportunities, but there is potential to do more in a rapidly developing area of activity. New rides are being developed through the Stiperstones - Corndon LPS.
VE9	Further develop and promote the potential of the area for horse riding and other outdoor activities . <i>(Sustainable Tourism Strategy Actions 2.5 & 2.6)</i>	In progress	SC, site managers	H	Existing opportunities are being promoted. The Humphrey Kynaston Way bridleway route has been launched. Church Stretton is seeking to develop a reputation as an outdoor activity hub. There is potential for much more work on outdoor activities. This comes into the tourism co-operation project.
VE10	Continue the operation of the Shropshire Hills Shuttles , and ensure that public transport retains a high profile in promotion and events. <i>(Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action 6.4)</i>	In progress	AONB, SC, partners	H	The Castle Connect service finished in 2015, but the Long Mynd - Stiperstones Shuttle continues. New funding needs to be found for it to continue beyond 2017.
VE11	Establish a visitor giving scheme . Consider a priority to urgent path repairs not achievable by any other means. <i>(Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action 6.7)</i>	Aspiration	AONB	M	Intention to pursue this focussed on the Church Stretton area, using the new charity as the vehicle for fundraising.
VE12	Provide training related to sustainable tourism and the AONB for front-line staff and volunteers e.g. at Visitor Information Centres and walks leaders.	In progress	LAs, AONB, SHT	M	Some progress, but many of the VICs have been undergoing transition, reduced capacity, etc.
VE13	Improve and upgrade site-based and other interpretation facilities , making appropriate reference and links to the AONB and its special qualities.	Ongoing role	SC, FC, NT, SWT, AONB	M	Interpretation is being developed at a number of new sites through the Stiperstones - Corndon LPS. Some improvements have been made at existing sites. There is scope for greater co-ordination.
VE14	Work with activity users and user groups to raise awareness of the sensitivity of sites or features within the area and how to avoid damage while having greater enjoyment through better understanding of the landscape. <i>(Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action 6.1)</i>	In progress	NT, AONB, SC, partners	H	National Trust have worked with mountain bike and fell race organisers. Scope for more work on this, especially linked to establishing visitor giving (VE11).
VE15	Improve opportunities to experience and understand the area's wildlife and geology . <i>(Sustainable Tourism Strategy Action 2.7)</i>	In progress	SWT, NT, MT, AONB	H	Shropshire's Great Outdoors website can be searched by a 'Wildlife Heritage and Geology' theme. Consistent input from AONB website and publications. Scope for further work.
VE16	Demonstrate the value of a high quality landscape to economic returns in the visitor economy.	In progress	NT, AONB, SC, partners	H	Some data has been gathered and used e.g. in planning responses. Shropshire & T&W Local Nature Partnership has commissioned a study into the value of natural capital and ecosystem services and used this as a basis of engagement with the Local Enterprise Partnership https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/media/2737/marches-ecosystem-assessment-2016.pdf
VE17	Progress feasibility studies and if appropriate implementation of high standard multi-user routes along Wenlock Edge and other routes, such as Bishop's Castle – Craven Arms.	Aspiration	NT, AONB, SC	H	No significant progress with this.
AW1	Develop membership of the ' Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB ' group and fund-raising capacity through a charitable structure.	In progress	AONB	H	The Shropshire Hills AONB Trust was registered as a charity in July 2016, and Friends subscriptions will be transferred to it, along with a major recruitment drive.
AW2	Continue to provide a visitor information and focal point at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre while developing a more self-sustaining model of operation.	Ongoing role	GCL, SC, AONB	H	Grow Cook Learn is developing the Discovery Centre operation and retaining a visitor orientation role for the area. LEADER funding is being sought to renew the exhibition.
AW3	Support community groups and projects and co-ordinate funding and services available.	Ongoing role	CCS, CVS, AONB, LAs	H	Reductions in public sector capacity but support is still available.

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AW4	Provide and improve outdoor education for schools and support for in-school activities, with good co-ordination between providers and schools. Develop links between schools and local sites in order to foster sense of place and reduce travel.	Ongoing role	NT, SWT, LAs	H	The National Trust at Cardingmill Valley remains a very significant provider of outdoor education. See also AW7.
AW5	Understand development needs in training and skills related to conserving the AONB's special qualities and make proposals for addressing these.	Aspiration	AONB, LSC, LAs, WNSC, HAUC	M	The Stiperstones - Corndon LPS is addressing this but there is no AONB-wide initiative as yet.
AW6	Develop links with outdoor activity providers , e.g. providing talks and information on special qualities of the AONB and good environmental practice.	Aspiration	AONB	M	Talks given to HF Holidays (Long Mynd Hotel) and contact with some other providers. Scope for further work.
AW7	Develop delivery of the John Muir Award scheme within the Shropshire Hills, through both schools and for informal groups.	In progress	AONB, SWT, NT	H	The AONB team with Shropshire Wildlife Trust have delivered the John Muir Award with around ten schools over 3-4 years, with 224 children and teachers receiving the award. National guidance for the Award in AONBs is being developed from this experience.
AW8	Develop a Youth Rangers programme to engage involve young people in new ways, and optimise opportunities from linking with the Europarc Federation network.	Aspiration	AONB	H	Youth Rangers has been delivered by South Shropshire Youth Forum at Clee Hill and Church Stretton with Conservation Fund grants, and is starting through the Stiperstones - Corndon LPS.
AW9	Develop a follow on project to continue ' Youthful Landscapes ' activity.	Aspiration	The Hive, NT, AONB	M	No specific follow-on project developed.
AW10	Create more opportunities for experimental archaeology and practical demonstrations.	Aspiration	SC	M	Aspiration follows charcoal burning and iron smelting at Acton Scott. No significant progress, but Acton Scott continues to provide a range of courses http://actonscott.com/historic-working-farm/courses
AW11	Develop links with Higher & Further Education establishments	In progress	AONB, WNSC, HAUC	M	The AONB team currently has a placement student from Harper Adams for a year. Talks and trips are occasionally given for a range of establishments, including Ludlow College and the Shrewsbury University Centre.
AW12	Increase use of the Shropshire Hills for geological and heritage education including residential courses, through market research, improvement of facilities and key sites, and promotional activity.	In progress	SGS, SWT, NT, SC, AONB, EH	M	Pressure on public sector funding and changing demand means these uses may be declining for youth education. There is still considerable interest in the adult lifelong learning sector however.
AW13	Expand the capacity and uptake of Health Walking schemes in and around the AONB.	In progress	SC, PCT	M	Health walks run from Church Stretton, Rushbury, Cleobury Mortimer, Craven Arms, Clun, Ludlow, Ashford Carbonell, Clee Hill and Bishop's Castle. https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/walkfinder/west-midlands/south-shropshire-walking-for-health
AW14	Develop sense of place and awareness of the AONB through enhanced signage on key routes into the AONB and where appropriate on town and village signs.	In progress	AONB	L	No new progress with this. Some of the existing signs require maintenance.

References relate to 2014-19 Management Plan delivery priorities:

- CO Joining up the **conservation** effort
- PL Valuing the AONB in **planning** and decisions
- LM Encouraging a sustainable **land management** economy
- VE Supporting enjoyment and a **visitor economy** in harmony with the AONB
- AW Raising **awareness** and participation, especially among young people