



PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTALLY POSITIVE TOURISM IN THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS

Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2017-2022

Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership October 2017

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1. Foreword

This is a draft strategy for consultation on the future priorities for co-ordinating and developing tourism in the Shropshire Hills. The ideas and actions set out here have come from our many conversations so far, but we welcome your thoughts on these and on how you can help.

The Shropshire Hills to those who know it is a hidden gem. This strategy aspires to make it a stand out rural destination, while retaining its essence and quality. Our visitors are attracted by outstanding landscapes, fresh air, good food, challenges, simple comforts and feeling part of a traditional rural community. We want them to know that the places they cherish will be cherished in the same way by their children and their children's children. This goal cannot be achieved by one organisation working alone and that is why this strategy's main theme is working together. We will work with the businesses on the front line, and with organisations at a local, county, national and even international level. The Shropshire Hills are a jewel in Shropshire's crown, something to be enjoyed but treasured.

Paul Davis Chair of Shropshire Hills Tourism

Phil Holden Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
Manager and Chair of Shropshire Hills Destination
Partnership

2. Introduction

Tourism has changed a lot in the last five years. There are new challenges to face and new opportunities to explore. This strategy picks up from where the 2011-16 Shropshire Hills & Ludlow Sustainable Tourism Strategy left off. It will be the Destination Plan for the area, following the guidelines set out by Visit Britain. It will establish the priorities and set the direction for the next five years.

[The importance of tourism in the Shropshire Hills](#)

A study in 2011 stated that tourism was worth over £501¹ million to Shropshire's economy and provided over 15,000 jobs. A further study² indicated that over £211 million of this was spent by visitors in southern Shropshire³. This represents 28% of all employment, equal to 4,403 jobs⁴.

Tourism is vital to the economy of the Shropshire Hills. Many small businesses and farms depend on the opportunities tourism brings. Tourism is the lifeblood of many of our market towns. Money spent by visitors helps keep our communities together.

Tourism is part of our landscape's future. The Shropshire Hills are an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. People come to enjoy our clean air, unspoiled open spaces, stunning views, dark skies, wildlife, rich heritage, traditions and vibrant culture.

It is a special landscape that needs to be managed carefully and cherished. This strategy is supported by the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan. It is also the foundation for the AONB Partnership's application for continued recognition as a sustainably managed destination under the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

The Shropshire Hills AONB is part of the Europarc Federation, and was awarded its 'Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas' in 2011.

The Shropshire Hills is one of only seven AONBs of the 38 in England and Wales to have obtained the Charter. We hope that by renewing the Charter accreditation we can continue to benefit from a raised profile and reputation for the area, along with learning from a broad international network.

This strategy will help us renew our membership and maintain our international reputation.

¹ Shropshire Tourism

² Shropshire Tourism / The Research Solution (TRS)

³ Includes Bridgnorth and Severn Valley

⁴ FTE Full time equivalent

3. Who is the 'we' in this strategy?

The Shropshire Hills

The Shropshire Hills destination consists of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and surrounding area. This includes the market towns of Ludlow, Bishop's Castle, Clun, Craven Arms, Church Stretton and Much Wenlock. Ludlow is an established and well-known brand in its own right. The Shropshire Hills Destination benefits from Ludlow's popularity and seeks to work with and alongside its Destination Partnership.

The Organisations

Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership oversees the sustainable development of tourism in the Shropshire Hills. It has 32 members including Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, National Trust, Shropshire Hills Tourism, Shropshire Tourism, Ludlow, Church Stretton, Bishop's Castle and Much Wenlock Town Councils, English Heritage and Shropshire Gold.

Its membership seeks to represent everyone who has a stake in the area's visitor economy, from B&B providers and other small businesses to national conservation bodies.

Working together

Tourism can work more effectively, and more sustainably, if everyone involved works together. This strategy is all about improving co-ordination and collaboration, and working towards shared priorities and actions. We want you to contribute your ideas to the strategy and your actions to its delivery.

The 'we' is all of us

'Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.'

Henry Ford

Promoting environmentally positive tourism in the Shropshire Hills

4. Our vision

The Shropshire Hills is a nationally recognised, sustainably managed tourism destination, valued for its outstanding landscape, diverse visitor experience and important contribution to the economy of Shropshire.

5. Aim of this strategy

To guide tourism activity that develops, manages and promotes the Shropshire Hills as a high quality sustainable tourism destination.

6. Strategy objectives

- i. To promote the Shropshire Hills as a sustainably managed destination, highlighting and safeguarding the area's outstanding qualities and capacity for enjoyment, health and wellbeing
- ii. To increase enjoyment and understanding of our outstanding landscape's nature and heritage, promoting environmentally positive solutions to their management
- iii. To orientate visitors and promote exploration, spreading visitor use across the area and throughout the year to share economic benefits and reduce environmental impacts

- iv. To support the visitor economy through promoting sustainable businesses, produce, and activities
- v. To work in close partnership with tourism organisations, attractions and communities in the Shropshire Hills, across the county and with our neighbouring destinations



Pictures will look like this with floating captions

7. Action plan

The following action plan sets out the planned priorities for the next five years. It starts with our aim:

To guide tourism activity that develops, manages and promotes the Shropshire Hills as a high quality sustainable tourism destination.

Objective 1 To promote the Shropshire Hills as a sustainably managed destination, highlighting and safeguarding the area's outstanding qualities and capacity for enjoyment, health and wellbeing

Creating an 'Outstanding' destination

We will produce a new marketing plan that engages, inspires, coordinates and differentiates our unique destination.

It will define the Shropshire Hills as a stand out destination. It will maximise the benefits derived from association with Ludlow, Ironbridge and Shrewsbury whilst building its own market profile. It will differentiate us, promoting our distinctive qualities and develop cost effective ways of reaching audiences. It will maximise social media as a way of reaching audiences. This will create dialogues with them, encouraging

them to care about and enjoy our unique destination.

The values of the destination are reflected by the businesses that it supports. The new marketing plan will create ways to work with local tourism providers to communicate our shared values and messages to their customers. It will identify resources and support to develop web, e-commerce and social media skills within the sector.

Help others to help ourselves

Ludlow has been a successful independent destination for many years. We recognise its distinctive brand and celebrate its success. We believe both Ludlow and the Shropshire Hills benefit significantly by working closely together.

- We will work collaboratively, improving our access to funding, markets and maximising our resources

Coordinate our offer and messages

- We will use the marketing plan to bring together all of our partners in the adoption of a brand that represents them and speaks to our visitors
- We will seek to develop a brand image that businesses and partners see as essential to their business and its recognition within the destination

Case Study to follow

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Show off the beauty and uniqueness of the Shropshire Hills

We need to work on what differentiates us from other destinations. It is not enough to say we have hills and open spaces. Modern audiences are interested in unique opportunities and experiences.

- We will develop resources and improve methods of showing off the very best of our destination.

Well-informed activity

We need to do more to understand the needs of our visitors and the businesses that service them.

- We will seek resources for research purposes, gather better information and share it with our business community and destination partners

A valued Charter

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas will become central to our reputation.

- We will use the Charter to inspire businesses and our visitors to leave a greener footprint in the Shropshire Hills

Be a bigger part of the whole

Our destination represents over a quarter of the County's tourism offer.

- We will work to present a consistent and coordinated offer, working in partnership at a county level and beyond

Developing a reputation

It is unlikely that the Shropshire Hills will ever compete with the UK's top rural destinations. However, it has a lot to offer.

- We will build a reputation that celebrates the undiscovered, undeveloped, uncommercial and relaxed pace of the Shropshire Hills

Helping visitors find and enjoy the good stuff

Fear of missing out (FOMO) has become one of the biggest concerns for visitors. Studies show that increasingly visitors tend not to overthink their visit. They want to work out where they are going and where they are staying, but crucially they want to live in the moment when they have arrived. Their biggest worry is going home to find out that while they were staying they missed something good in the next village or valley. Providing up to date digital information is vital to this. Also vital is having a vibrant, sharing culture on social media. However, not all our visitors are 'digital natives' and in some places access to the net is patchy. We need to maintain our presence throughout our destination in traditional visitor centres and print.

Case Study

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Promoting environmentally positive tourism in the Shropshire Hills

- We will support our business community to produce effective promotion both digitally and in print
- We will support our network of visitor information centres to provide the best service. We will promote Shropshire Hills Tourism, Virtual Shropshire, Shropshire Tourism and Buy-From Shropshire as being the best places to communicate directly with visitors through vibrant web content and social media

Objective 2 Promoting environmentally positive solutions to the management of our outstanding landscape

Managing the impact of visitors on the environment

The Shropshire Hills does not attract the same number of visits as other similar rural tourism destinations such as the Peak District and Yorkshire Dales. However, some of its best-known locations regularly get significant numbers of visitors. Carding Mill Valley, the Wrekin and the Stiperstones are the most popular sites for day visitors of all ages across a range of activities. The Long Mynd has become particularly popular with day visitors and outdoor enthusiasts. Other locations such as the Stretton Hills are very popular with walkers, walking and orienteering events.

The need to manage visitor pressure in these areas is becoming more acute.

- We will encourage a partnership approach to address visitor pressure issues
- We will also work to ensure that the need for managing visitors is understood and widely supported
- In addition, we will work with the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust to create opportunities for the public and business community to support restorative work through charitable giving

Spreading visitor use across the area and through the seasons

The 2017 Shropshire Hills Business Survey told us that spreading visitor use across the destination and lengthening the season should be priority actions for the destination. This would not only help reduce pressure on honeypot sites, it would also ensure that expenditure from visitors could reach more of the area. This is important to sustaining the economies of isolated communities.

- We will work to put the promotional spotlight on less known locations and iconic, characterful places, celebrating the landscape's diversity, whilst helping to protect the better-known locations

Case Study – to follow

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Promoting environmentally positive tourism in the Shropshire Hills

- We will maintain web and print media designed to help visitors navigate, orientate and be inspired by our harder to reach places
- We will promote activities and events of communities across the destination

Managing the impact of visitors on people's lives

Traffic, inconsiderate parking and littering can have an adverse effect on the lives of people in the communities closest to our busiest places. These issues also affect the quality of the visitor experience. Partner organisations like Shropshire Council, National Trust, Natural England and Shropshire Wildlife Trust have considerable expertise in dealing with these issues. They also have the powers necessary to make changes on the ground.

- We will continue to work with our destination management partners to highlight and address these issues where they arise
- We will work with transport partners and providers to encourage greater use of public transport
- We will promote cycling routes and self-guided trails from our market towns and public transport routes.
- We will support initiatives that seek to generate income from visitors to help manage key sites

Objective 3 Sharing and promoting the economic benefits of a well-managed landscape

Reviewing and improving destination signage

It is important for any destination to have efficient signage, even in the age of sat nav and Siri. Better signage means efficient journeys, lower fuel use, happier visitors and greater footfall for businesses. The Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership are not responsible for signage, however we can help influence policy and implementation. We can also help businesses and communities who want to improve visitor orientation. In addition, many of our most treasured places can be tucked-away in hard to find places. This means that the easier to find places get more visitor pressure. It may also mean that visitors are missing some of our most inspiring places.

- We will work with partners to ensure our signage is fit for purpose
- We will work with the business community, attractions and visitor information centres to help orientate visitors

Promoting greener ways to travel

The Shropshire Hills Shuttle is a flagship for our sustainable ambitions. It has been an example of how partnerships can work effectively to provide

'Sustainable development is the pathway to the future we want for all. It offers a framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance.'

Ban Ki-moon

Promoting environmentally positive tourism in the Shropshire Hills

greener opportunities for visitors. It has also attracted green travellers and become a valued resource by the communities it serves. It is managed by Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership backed by the National Trust, Shropshire Council and Natural England. We will support the work of the Partnership to:

- involve other groups and organisations to help us make the most of the Shropshire Hills Shuttle Bus service
- expand the service, providing buses on busy weekdays as well as weekends and bank holidays during the peak seasons
- secure more carbon efficient vehicles with a view to securing electric vehicles when they become available
- develop monitoring and ticketing systems allowing us to make informed decisions about use and route planning
- develop further ideas for sponsorship and visitor giving to reduce the level of subsidies needed to run the service
- recruit local volunteers to act as eyes on the ground providing a greater sense of local ownership and involvement in the service's management

Promoting year round activities and events

Brexit, increasing costs of travel, and concerns about the security of holidaying overseas has led

to a boom in 'staycations' with more people choosing to holiday in the UK. Inbound tourism has also increased as visitors from the US, Australia and elsewhere have taken advantage of the weakness of the pound. These two factors lead naturally to opportunities to grow the visiting season. Our ambition is to be seen as a year round destination.

- We will develop and promote a year round calendar of events and activities through print, digital media and social media

Objective 4 To support the visitor economy through promoting sustainable businesses, produce, and activities

Promoting green businesses and services for a better environment

To be a truly sustainable destination we need to have the support of a green thinking business community. The Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme (2008-2017) showed what could be achieved when businesses work together for a greener environment. It also showed that thinking green and acting sustainably benefits businesses by reducing costs and increasing profits. In many ways, what was a new idea has now become mainstream. However, businesses working together toward a better environment is still a good idea.

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- We will launch a new membership scheme promoting green business products and services
- We will work with others to promote information and opportunities that help businesses prosper by being greener

Understanding your product is essential to successful sales. We believe that many local businesses would prosper through first-hand experience of what the area has to offer. We also believe that this will add value to the visitor experience and their ability to provide a high-quality personalised service.

- We will promote the area's best qualities to our business community

Objective 5 To work in close partnership with tourism organisations, attractions and communities in the Shropshire Hills, across the county and with our neighbouring destinations

Demonstrate how we make a difference

Our recent survey of the business community has shown that there is considerable confusion about how tourism in the destination is managed. Businesses are unlikely to have heard of the Destination Partnership or its work. In addition, the county is emerging from an unsettled period

in tourism management. In this time, we have seen a reduction in communication, finance, resources and skills. This has led to tourism being underrepresented to decision makers.

The statement within the 2017 Shropshire Economic Strategy prioritising investment in tourism is very welcome. We need to ensure that decision makers are aware of the support that we can offer in the delivery of the Strategy.

- We will grow the contacts, influence and reputation of the Destination Partnership as the central focus for tourism in the Shropshire Hills
- We will promote the work of the Destination Partnership and its members
- We will promote the Destination Partnership to the LEP and other strategic local partnerships and organisations
- We will work proactively with other destinations, AONBs and Visit Britain, promoting the Shropshire Hills, sharing best practice and developing ideas collaboratively

8. Next steps – making it happen

This is an ambitious strategy. It sets out the priorities and actions to address them. The only resources the Destination Partnership has for delivery is the energy and enthusiasm of its partners. Once this document is agreed, the next steps will be as follows

- Supporting and encouraging partners who deliver actions
- Bringing partners together to lead on key activities
- Identifying and signing up champions and partners within the DP and the wider Shropshire tourism network
- Working up details for each action, with further consultation where necessary
- Setting criteria for success

All of the actions within this strategy will be coordinated and monitored by the Destination Partnership. Progress will be reported at an

annual tourism event that promotes and celebrates the industry within the destination and County.

Appendix 1. Tourism context, challenges & opportunities

One of the biggest challenges facing tourism in Shropshire that has emerged in the past five years is organisational fragmentation. The Shropshire Hills are one of four recognised⁵ destinations within the county. There are a further three aspiring destinations. Visitor studies have consistently shown that UK market awareness of Shropshire is comparatively low. Some destinations within the country (such as Ludlow and Ironbridge) are better known than the county. However, understanding of their location is vague. People have heard of them, but they do not know where they are. Recent work for us by Gravity Consulting (2017) identified that it is likely that awareness of the Shropshire Hills as a destination is also considerably lower than of other similar rural destinations. This is consistent with previous studies.

There are however no shortage of organisations promoting Shropshire.

Appendix 2. Destination Management Organisations in Shropshire

Shropshire's key destinations are Shrewsbury, Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, Ludlow and The Shropshire Hills. They are supported and promoted by:

Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership oversees the sustainable development of tourism in the Shropshire Hills.

It has 32 members including Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, National Trust, Shropshire Hills Tourism, Shropshire Tourism, Ludlow, Church Stretton, Bishops Castle and Much Wenlock Town Councils, English Heritage and Shropshire Gold (for a full list see Appendix X)

Shropshire Hills Tourism is the official destination marketing body for the Shropshire Hills and is a not-for-profit membership organisation. The organisation has been running for nearly 30 years, and was previously the South Shropshire Tourism Association. In 2016, SHT became independent from Shropshire Tourism. It currently has 115 members listed on its website⁶.

Shropshire Council is recognised by Visit England as a Destination Management Organisation. Responsibility for tourism rests within the Infrastructure and Communities department. They work to influence policy concerning jobs and economic growth and promote economic value of the county's unique cultural offer. In addition, Outdoor Partnerships lead activity concerning access to the outdoors and management of the county's rights of way network and areas of open access. The Museum Service runs Acton Scott Historic Working Farm a popular attraction in the Shropshire Hills.

Shropshire Tourism is 'the official not-for-profit destination marketing organisation for Shropshire, with over 500 private sector members including accommodation providers, attractions, activity businesses, wedding and conference

⁵ By Visit Britain

⁶ www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk

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venues, shops, food and drink businesses and event organisers.⁷

Shropshire Tourism work together with Bridgnorth & District Tourism Association to promote tourism in the Bridgnorth and Severn Valley area.

Visit Ironbridge is the official destination marketing body for the Ironbridge Gorge. The Gorge is the best-known and most popular destination in Shropshire. Ironbridge Gorge is also promoted by Discover Telford.

Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID) is a company tasked with making Shrewsbury ‘a better town to do business, visit, work, and spend time in’.

From 2013-2018 £1.6 million will be invested to improve the town’s commercial environment for over 500 businesses and organisations in Shrewsbury town centre. Priorities and projects range from marketing and promoting the town, access and car parking, as well as business support activities.

Discover Telford is the overarching marketing organisation for the Telford and Wrekin areas including Ironbridge Gorge

and the Wrekin. As the Wrekin is also part of the Shropshire Hills AONB, it is also part of the Shropshire Hills Destination.

Destination Ludlow Partnership was set up in 2016 in response to the availability of RDPE⁸ funding. Ludlow itself is an established destination with a national reputation for fine food.

Appendix 3. Policy context

National Policy Visit Britain is working (as at autumn 2017) to secure the Tourism Sector Deal under the government’s new Industrial Strategy⁹.

The Strategic Framework for Tourism in England 2010-2020¹⁰ still stands, along with the Rural Tourism Action Plan¹¹ coming under this.

The National Association for AONBs has an Accord on tourism with Defra and Visit England¹².

Local Policy The Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy 2017-2021¹³ sees the importance of the tourism economy for short and medium term action.

⁷ www.shropshiretourism.co.uk

⁸ Rural Development Programme England – Development Fund

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/industrial-strategy>

¹⁰ http://www.visitengland.com/sites/default/files/downloads/strategic_framework_for_tourism_document_1.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.stmem.com/downloads/company-documents/Rural-Tourism-Action-Plan-2010-2020.pdf>

¹² <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/images/NAAONB-Defra-VisitEngland-Working-Towards-Sustainable-Tourism-in-England-July-2012.pdf>

¹³ <https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/media/6087/economic-growth-strategy-for-shropshire-2017-2021.pdf>

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'Assist the tourism and visitor economy sector partners to promote Shropshire as a destination and maximise the built and natural heritage assets throughout the county.'

It sets out the intention to invest in the growth potential of the visitor economy (and heritage-based businesses) especially with respect to innovation and technology.

'There will be a strategic view of the visitor economy for Shropshire and the wider Marches area; this will be an opportunity to develop strategic linkages and a coherent approach to marketing the County on a national and international scale.'

The Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-19¹⁴ has a priority for "Supporting enjoyment and a visitor economy in harmony with the AONB".

Appendix 4. Review of last 5 years

The following describes some of the changes we have seen in the Shropshire Hills in the last five years.

Increasing use of digital media: There has been a considerable boom in the use of handheld 'smart' devices in the last five years. The increase has been supported by Google who are now prioritising websites that are 'optimised' for mobile use. Mobile web enquiries outstripped desk-based enquires for the first time in October 2016¹⁵. This is excluding views of Facebook and

other social media that have all seen a significant increase on use in the last five years. This presents many challenges and opportunities for our tourism industry. Mobile technology has become essential to visitors throughout the decision and buying process as well as during their visits.

The use of Google devices for real-time navigation, and massive growth in social media driven by recorded and real-time audio video footage has also affected visitor needs and expectations. Virtual media has also become more mainstream with applications in both social media and promotion. Discover Telford developed a VR tour of the Ironbridge Gorge in 2016.

Austerity: The Coalition Government initiated its Comprehensive Spending Review in July 2010. This included significant reductions in public spending. At a local level, this led to cuts in the last 5 years, affecting many services that support the tourism industry. Many council facilities have been transferred to other bodies. For example: Some tourist information and library services have been transferred to local trusts, Town and Parish Councils have taken responsibility for public toilets and countryside sites have been handed over to voluntary sector bodies.

There has been a significant reduction in officer support for tourism at Shropshire Council. This has led to a loss of experience as well as coordination at a county level.

¹⁴ <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/a-special-place/management-plan/>

¹⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2016/11/01/mobile-web-usage-overtakes-desktop-for-first-time/>

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In terms of the market, the recession, Brexit, increases in aviation fuel costs and taxation on flights as well as global security concerns led to an increase in domestic tourism visits. This trend started before 2012. Since Brexit in 2016, the value of the pound has decreased significantly fuelling increases in both staycation and inbound tourism.

Changes in regional support:

Local Enterprise Partnerships were set up in 2010 to replace Regional Development Agencies. They aim to promote local economic growth and jobs through investment of Government and European funds in strategic activity. The Marches LEP covers Hereford, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin.

Funding has been available for capital development in tourism through LEADER and European Structural Funds. The majority of this funding has been for projects where the level of matched investment required is beyond the capacity of their small scale. The lack of funding for revenue projects to build value, develop and market products has been keenly felt at a local level. There has been considerable free support for developing small and start-up businesses skills through the Marches Growth Hub.

'The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership aims to build on the area's unique features and create the conditions for enterprise and business to flourish. By leading co-ordinated action to stimulate the drivers of economic development,

*including housing, transport, infrastructure, broadband availability, inward investment and skills, the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership aims to improve the economic prosperity of the Marches area and create sustainable private-sector employment.'*¹⁶

Difference between the actual relationship of Ludlow to the wider destination and that set out in the previous Strategy. Ludlow has not been as integral a partner within the Destination Partnership as the Strategy anticipated. While there is a desire on both sides to maintain and indeed strengthen links, there is a feeling that moving to just 'Shropshire Hills' in the destination name and logo may be better, and as using connections to Ludlow as and when appropriate.

Change in role of Shropshire Hills Tourism, including separation from reciprocal membership agreement with Shropshire Tourism and actively seeking membership from tourism businesses. Shropshire Hills Tourism is also now recognised as a DMO, with oversight of the Destination Partnership.

Continuing evolution of countywide tourism structures – co-ordination bodies (the Tourism Strategy Board, and subsequently Visit Shropshire) have not been sustained and there is therefore a gap. A group formed as an offshoot of the Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Partnership has been looking at the links between tourism and the natural environment (plus heritage and other

¹⁶ <http://www.lepnetwork.org.uk/leps/>

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attractions). Shropshire Tourism retains a role as the lead body for marketing Shropshire as a whole, and is currently undergoing organisational change.

Increase in planning pressures affecting the Shropshire Hills AONB and surrounding area, including large-scale poultry units, solar farms and housing.

Increases in general visitor numbers to key countryside sites, e.g. the Long Mynd, along with increases in walking, challenge events and active pursuits, e.g. mountain biking, fell running.

Consequences include reaching full capacity at Carding Mill Valley more often and more quickly on peak days, and increased localised pressures on some sensitive sites, e.g. footpath erosion.

Reduction in profile given to sustainability and environmental issues in commercial markets. At one level, this is due to some aspects of good practice becoming mainstreamed. There appears however to be less of a market advantage in businesses describing themselves as sustainable, with the opposite phenomenon of 'green hushing' (i.e. doing environmental things but keeping quiet about them).

Continued and consolidated role for the AONB Partnership to support sustainable tourism. This is reflected in employment of a Sustainable Tourism Officer. If it goes ahead, an AONB Conservation Board would bring an additional statutory duty to promote enjoyment and understanding, strengthening further the role in tourism.

The destination identity has been developed through agreement of a visual identity and associated values/messages. Uptake has been reasonable but not as wide as it could be.

The Destination Partnership has continued to function providing a forum for exchange of information and co-ordination. Several progress updates and a mid-term review of the Strategy have been published. Information about the Partnership and its meetings has been made fully public on the web, helping transparency. A good collaboration has developed between Shropshire Hills Tourism and the AONB Partnership over running of the Partnership, publications such as the 'Great Days' leaflet, and jointly-run events such as the Leaflet Swap and networking event.

The destination has a good profile and visibility on Google listings (and maps), TripAdvisor, Facebook and Twitter. Websites are closely linked and direct people to visitshropshirehills as the main source of information.

Cross-border links with Wales and with Telford & Wrekin are generally good.

In 2017, the Destination Partnership agreed in principle to move towards an area identity of just 'Shropshire Hills'. It was agreed that the previous aim to present the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow within the same brand had been unrealistic. Ludlow has its brand and marketing, which is not wholly linked with the Shropshire Hills. It is agreed that both partners would continue to support each other and work together.

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This strategy recognises Shropshire Hills Tourism's influential role in promoting the area and informing its visitors. In addition, any activity we undertake also needs to take account of the wider county. Recent work has suggested that awareness of Shropshire among key audience segments is still low.

The 2012-17 Tourism strategy also recognised two further market segments described as Discoverers and Cosmopolitans. These two audience segments are have similar life profiles to Traditionals but with a bias towards more active experiences.

Appendix 5. A snapshot of our visitors

We believe that a core market for the Shropshire Hills offer has in the past been described as 'rest and relaxation Traditionals'. Research over the last 12 years consistently shows our visitor profile is consistent with this description. They are typically post family, couples, aging 46-64 in the ABC1 socio-economic brackets. However, the raise in activity holidays and day trip also shows the Shropshire Hills as relevant to what was described as the 'Discoverer' market profile. These were ABC1 adults who were as likely to visit a museum as a wildlife attraction, enjoy outdoor leisure activities and are attracted to the countryside and small towns.

In 2016, Visit England's Project Lion redefined their domestic visitor segmentation into five groups. These were based on gender, age, lifestyle, social class and region.

Using this updated approach our core audience segment can be described as

'Regular short breakers, day walkers, cyclists and outdoor enthusiasts, cultural tourists, skill, crafts and new experience seekers, nature enthusiasts, foodies'

Appendix 6. The role of the Shropshire Hills

Destination Partnership

The Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Partnership brings together tourism businesses, public bodies and community representatives. This forum supports sustainable development in tourism and a higher quality experience for visitors.

The Destination Partnership's roles include:

- coordinating visitor information
- influencing marketing and promotion
- coordinating services and facilities
- sharing best practice
- supporting visitor information centres
- developing the area's sense of place and identity
- identifying and addressing issues concerning visitor management
- researching and gathering information
- maintain links to other Destination Management Organisations and tourism partners within the county and beyond.

In addition, the Partnership is the forum for the area's participation in the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The 2011-17 Sustainable Tourism Strategy put the Destination Partnership on a very strong footing. It enabled the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership to secure the European Charter.

In addition it:

- Established the destination as a new geographical unit, with a business association linked to the AONB
- Developed the area's branding
- Promoted recognition for walking and landscape as a driver for tourism in the area
- Created interest and activity among businesses on working sustainably

The Destination Partnership Members

Bishop's Castle & Clun Tourism CIC
Bishop's Castle Town Council
Bridgnorth & District Tourism Association
Church Stretton Tourism Group
Church Stretton Town Council
Cleobury Country Tourism Group
Destination Ludlow Partnership
English Heritage
Herefordshire Tourism
Ludlow Assembly Rooms
Ludlow Town Council
Much Wenlock Town Council
National Trust
Offa's Dyke Path National Trail
Shropshire Churches Tourism Group
Shropshire Council
Shropshire Gold
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre
Shropshire Hills Tourism
Shropshire Tourism
The Bog Visitor Centre
Upper Norton Holiday Property Bond

Appendix 7. Destination SWOT analysis

Strengths

1. Quality of our landscape and its designation
2. Local produce and small producers
3. Established DMO¹⁷
4. Dedicated local tourism business membership organisation¹⁸
5. High quality local food and drink offer
6. Established variety of festivals and events
7. Rich cultural heritage assets and stories
8. Talented and diverse range of local artists, crafts people and writers
9. Easy access from the West Midlands
10. Central rail and bus links connection to main many main settlements
11. High visitor loyalty
12. Diverse offer of characterful landscapes & market towns and villages
13. Excellent location for outdoor recreation
14. Comprehensive, well managed Rights of Way network
15. Large areas of Open Access
16. Large areas of landscape managed for conservation and recreation
17. Strength of neighbouring destinations – Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Ironbridge, Severn Valley
18. Underdeveloped and unspoiled by commercialism
19. Established and well understood short-break and day visitor market
20. Excellent track record of cooperation & promotion of sustainable tourism activity

Weaknesses

1. Destination relatively unknown
2. Awareness of Shropshire low
3. Integration with other DPs
4. Limited promotion of Shropshire
5. Limited coordination of the county as a destination
6. Very competitive domestic tourism market
7. Strong competition from similar destinations
8. Available support strongly weighted towards capital investment and 'hard' outputs
9. Very limited funding available for destination marketing activity
10. Investment directed towards individual businesses but not collaborative activity by DMOs
11. Rural car dependence
12. Poor mobile coverage for data traffic
13. Patchy free Wi-Fi provision
14. Relatively poor Wi-Fi speeds
15. Uncoordinated online offer – too much 'noise'
16. distribution network for printed media relying on good will
17. Small business owners perceive a lack of strategic coordination and support
18. Lack of high-end accommodation provision
19. Lack of local research into visitor's needs and visiting trends

¹⁷ Destination Management Organisation – Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership

¹⁸ Shropshire Hills Tourism

Promoting environmentally positive tourism in the Shropshire Hills

Opportunities

1. Staycation market, glamping and caravanning boom
2. Continued popularity of good quality local food, gastro-experiences and small producers
3. Engagement through social media campaigns, blogging, review sites and bespoke printed media
4. Working Council and LEP through the 'Shropshire Economic Strategy'
5. Increasing small business confidence in the use of social media for promotion and engagement
6. Fuel tax on air flights, Brexit and other issues effecting domestic overseas travel & resulting in increased inbound tourism
7. Funding for carbon-friendly businesses development
8. Revitalised will for cooperation across the County
9. Recognition of visitor economy as important part of Shropshire economy by the LEP¹⁹ and Council
10. Replacement of EU funding with more bespoke UK Government funding
11. Greater recognition of landscape benefit to public health and wellbeing
12. Growth in wellbeing and 'new skills' markets
13. Growth in cycling and other activity markets
14. Collaborated marketing and knowledge sharing within National Association of AONBs
15. Links to a wider network of protected landscapes through European Charter
16. Increasing use of electric, driverless and self-drive transport

Threats

1. Increasing pressure on honey-pot sites
2. Road and rail infrastructure developments along the A49 corridor
3. Aging market
4. Drive for economic growth at the expense of the resource
5. Loss of EU funding
6. Lack of investment and support for public transport
7. Brexit diverting investment away from tourism
8. Rising costs for small businesses
9. Competition from stronger destinations
10. Domestic and industrial development eroding landscape quality and rural nature
11. Creeping commercialism
12. Limited engagement with the LEP
13. Small Business transience

¹⁹ Local Enterprise Partnership