



Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board

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TITLE: *Shropshire's Great outdoors Strategy progress*

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1.0 Summary

This paper summarised the progress to date with the SGO Strategy and shows the timelines necessary or the draft document to be finalised by April 2018.

2.0 Progress to date

A thorough **review of the Countryside Access Strategy 2008-2018** has been completed and has been published on the Council's website:

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/6802/countryside-access-strategy-for-shropshire-2008-review-draft.pdf>

A **Working Group** has been formed:

- Alex Carson Taylor- Chair of Strategy Board
- Deb Hughes- Ex Head of Outdoor Partnerships
- Peter Carr- Ramblers
- Zia Robins- Riding and Carriage Driving Forum
- Trevor Allison- Ramblers and planning expertise

As part of the consultation, representatives from partner organisations have been asked to join this group, including:

- Patrick Edwards, National Trust
- Chris Mansell, Forestry Commission

If anyone else would like to be included on that group please let me know.

A draft plan and Rights of Way Network Assessment were circulated at the last Strategy Board meeting.

A set of **initial consultation questions** have been devised (appendix 1) and **one to one meetings or phone calls** have been conducted with:

- Ani Sutton, Canal and River Trust
- Colin Preston, Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- Pete Carty, National Trust
- Historic England
- Chris Mansell, Forestry Commission
- Phil Holden, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
- Stewart Pickering, GLAS

Online responses have been submitted by:

- Peter Carr, Ramblers
- Jack Tavenor, Strutt Parker
- Patrick Edwards, National Trust
- Simon Cooter, Natural England
- Sarah Faulkner, NFU
- Stewart Pickering, GLAS

I am expecting a more detailed response from Natural England and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership before Christmas.

Consultation January to March 2018:

A partner workshop is planned for 23rd January to discuss the responses to this initial consultation and to draft vision, objectives and priorities.

The next meetings of the Walking Forums and the Riding and Carriage Driving Forum will all have a workshop session on the initial consultation questions.

As a result of this consultation and meetings with the Working Group a draft SGO Strategy will be drawn up to be published on line in April 2018. There will then be a 3 month public consultation period and three public events around the county.

A revised final draft will then be submitted to Cabinet to approve.

A summary of the timelines can be seen in appendix 2.

3.0 Priorities

The priorities identified through the review of the Countryside Access Strategy and the initial consultation are to:

Improve the physical provision of the outdoor network, where there is identified need. This may include;

- Master planning of new areas of housing allocation and commercial development to ensure the maximum benefits to the wider area- encouraging planned walking and multi-user routes into market towns along desire lines and the provision of new greenspace that is of benefit to people and wildlife
- Development of new Country Parks associated with disadvantaged areas, towns with significantly increased populations or to encourage visitors away from environmentally sensitive sites
- Development of more multi-user routes, including through publically owned sites
- Interlinking circular routes
- Better off-road cycling provision and marketing
- Increasing access around working farms e.g. fenced off 'rides' that enable people to experience the changing seasons and connect with farming
- Development of greenspace associated with visitor attractions and farm shops
- Improvements to the Definitive Map, including identifying Historic Routes for the 2026 deadline

Increasing the use of the outdoor network for health and wellbeing, embedding activities that help rehabilitate people with long-term health conditions as well as encouraging prevention. This could include:

- Increasing awareness of the benefits of outdoor space and activities to health and wellbeing and finding practical ways of delivering benefits for those most in need
- Support encouragement of active outdoor volunteering
- Walking for Health
- Outdoor activities
- Events and festivals

Developing better understanding between users and between users and landowners, to ensure people really enjoy a high quality outdoor network. Including:

- A public awareness campaign on the Countryside Code, legal responsibilities and multi-user respect
- Facilitating temporary closures where necessary for farming businesses and the diversion of Rights of Way where it benefits all parties
- Increasing understanding of farming and food production, heritage and habitat management
- Working with schools to increase outdoor education

Encouraging visitors to explore beyond the obvious- marketing less-used sites and activities away from ‘honey-pots’ to reduce visitor pressure on popular sites.

Taking an active role in influencing political agendas and implementing new laws, strategies and plans, through the Shropshire’s Great Outdoors Strategy Board.

Exploring fresh approaches to joined-up community based volunteering, including micro-volunteering and online opportunities to ‘chip-in’.

Securing more income generation through:

- Car parking fees introduced on Shropshire Council, National Trust and Natural England sites
- Development of new visitor facilities, events and activities
- Engagement with private sector and development of the principle of ‘Social Investors’

There were a number of specific projects mentioned, these include:

- Dudmaston Activity hub- National Trust
- Stepping Stones, habitat restoration project for Stiperstones, Long Mynd and Stretton Hills- Natural England and National Trust
- Verge management for wildlife
- Refurbishment of Cardingmill Valley tea rooms
- Development of old railway from Telford to Craven Arms

4.0 Issues and Barriers

The issues and barriers identified through the Countryside Access Strategy review and initial consultations fall into a few key categories. These are:

- Lack of funding and capacity to address the growing demand for outdoor recreation and the quality expectations of those people using our outdoor network. Austerity measures in the public sector are putting increasing pressure on voluntary sector organisations to fill some of the gaps.
- Inconsistent provision of the outdoor network and anomalies due to the historic registration of routes on the Definitive Map and to the location of publically accessible greenspace, resulting in the outdoor network not necessarily corresponding to need, areas of disadvantage or significant centres of population.
- Whilst health organisations and research bodies are aware of the benefits of being active outdoors, this is not translating into funding for core prevention and rehabilitation activities that maximise health benefits for those most in need.
- Impact of increased visitor numbers on environmentally sensitive sites. The fact that many of our most popular sites are also the most important for biodiversity can lead to damage to high quality habitats. This is likely to be exacerbated by increases in housing and population and if changes to Countryside Stewardship result in higher stocking rates, for example, on open access commons.
- Not enough joined up thinking. Whether this is in planning new commercial and housing developments, marketing the outdoors, key interpretation themes for Shropshire, educating a wide range of users or upskilling and co-orientating volunteers, opportunities are being missed and work is being duplicated between partner organisations and within different departments of the Council.
- Political uncertainty making forward planning more difficult. Whether this is the impact of Brexit on Local Authority funding, access and greenspace provision and rural development, the likely introduction of the Deregulation Bill or Government intervention through the 25 year Environment and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans, future politician interventions are likely to have a significant impact over the next five years.
- Antisocial behaviour and the attitude of a minority of landowners and users of our outdoor network. Conflicts can occur between different types of users and between users and landowners where there is a lack of understanding and awareness of the law, the Countryside Code and the need for mutual respect.

5.0 Approach to writing the strategy

Shropshire's Great Outdoors will be developed to be a straight forward, easy to understand document. Following a review of the existing ROW Network and Country Parks and Heritage Sites each objective will set out as demonstrated in appendix 2B.

5.0 Recommendations

The Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board is asked to discuss progress to date, agree the general approach and make suggestions about future priorities for consultation.

6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1- Initial discussion with partners

The Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy will focus on the health, social, economic and environmental benefits of the publically accessible countryside network in Shropshire:

- Country Parks, heritage sites, nature reserves, other publically accessible countryside sites, forest with public access (excluding sports fields and local play areas)
- Public Rights of Way, permissive paths, open access land (including commons), cycleways not alongside roads, canal towpaths

This is a 10 year Strategy, a draft of which will be available for public consultation in April 2018.

At this stage we need to understand the work and aspirations of our partner organisations and networks. Could you please fill in a brief questionnaire about your current work and priorities for the future to help inform the development of the strategy?

1. What are your current priorities?
2. What's going well?
3. What barriers are you having to overcome?
4. What key areas of development/ priorities will you be working on in the next 5-10 years?
5. What major barriers/ challenges do you foresee?
6. What opportunities are there for partners to work better together?
7. Are there any key access/ site issues you are aware of?
8. Do you have or know of any evidence/ research we could include?
9. Any other comments?

Appendix 2: Shropshire's Great Outdoors 2018-2028 Timescales

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18
Countryside Access Strategy 2008-2018	Draft review document circulate to ROW Improvement Plan Working Group	CF	Done															
	Consultation on review and priorities for next plan	CF		Done														
	Review document published	CF			Done													
Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28	Assessment of the RoW network and strategic review	CF/ SB			Done													
	Review outline plan with SGO Strategy Board	CF				Done												
	Initial consultation with key partners- meetings and survey monkey	CF						Done										
	Analysis of findings	CF						Done										
	Mapping	RH																
	Data analysis	Insight team																
	Draft plan for workshop	CF																
	Working Group meeting	CF																
	Stakeholder workshop	CF																
	Consultation with User Groups- Walking Forums and Riding and Carriage Driving Forum	CF																
	Draft plan and statement of action	CF																
	Working Group meeting	CF																
	Publish draft Strategy	CF																
	Public consultation on draft Strategy	CF																
	Public consultation events	CF																
	Completion of final draft Strategy	CF																
	Sign off by full Council	GC																
	Publish Final Strategy	CF																
CF= Clare Fildes																		
SB= Shona Butter																		
RH= Richard Hammerton																		
GC= George Candler																		
CE= Chris Edwards																		

Appendix 3: Example approach to Shropshire's Great Outdoors vision and objectives

Shropshire's Great Outdoors 2018-2028

Inspiring action on countryside access and enjoyment of Shropshire's Great Outdoors

What difference will we make?

By the end of 2028, people will be happier, healthier and more prosperous by being better connected to Shropshire's Great Outdoors through a safe and cherished publically accessible outdoor network.

What are we trying to achieve?

- Happy- Encourage enjoyment of Shropshire's Great Outdoors by more people, of all ages and abilities.
- Healthy- Benefit the health of residents and visitors through increased physical activity and improved mental wellbeing.
- Prosperous- Promote opportunities to improve the local economy by sympathetic commercial use and development of the outdoor network.
- Connected- Bring people together within their communities to appreciate the potential and make decisions locally about their outdoor network and actively participate in its maintenance and improvement.
- Cherished- Conserve and enhance special places that are important for nature, heritage and people.
- Safe- Ensure Shropshire's outdoor network is safe and well maintained to meet statutory obligations and new opportunities now and in the future, within current financial restrictions.

How will we achieve this?

These will be achieved through effective:

- Management- maintaining and improving the natural and cultural assets of Shropshire's outdoor network of Right of Way, Country Parks and Heritage Sites
- Communication- providing information, interpretation and marketing
- Learning- improving education and skills
- Governance- ensuring strong and representative oversight, advisory bodies and monitoring

- External funding- bringing in income to increase the scope and impact of improvements to the outdoor network
- Partnership- working with landowners, users and other interested parties to achieve the best results
- Policy- ensuring other policies and strategies maximise the benefits of the outdoor network

Who will be involved?

Shropshire's Great Outdoors will be achieved by partnership working across a wide range of organisations and individuals, which includes:

- Statutory Authority- Shropshire Council
- Landowners- Shropshire Council, National Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, English Heritage, Natural England, Canal and River Trust, farmers and other landowners
- Users- British Driving Society, British Horse Society, Byways and Bridleways Trust, Cycling UK, outdoor activity and equipment providers, Ramblers Association, Walking Forums, Riding and Carriage Driving Forum, Green Lane Association Ltd. and other user groups
- Volunteers working on the outdoor network
- Other interested parties- Historic England, LEADER Local Action Group, Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, Marches Local Nature Partnership, Open Spaces Society, Public Health, Rural Community Council, Rural Services Network, Severn River Trust, Shropshire Council, Shropshire Disability Network, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Sustainable Transport Shropshire, Town and Parish Councils

Who will oversee delivery?

The Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board will oversee the delivery of activity and advise a wide range of organisations. The current membership of the Strategy Board can be seen in **appendix x**.

Where will we be working?

Shropshire's Great Outdoors applies to the Local Authority area of Shropshire, England:

- Public Rights of Way, permissive paths, open access land (including commons), cycleways not alongside roads, canal towpaths, verges where relevant and stretches of road and pavement which link the above together
- Country Parks, heritage sites, nature reserves, other publically accessible sites, forest with public access

It does not apply to paid-for visitor attractions, urban and small scale greenspace or play areas.

Partnership working with representatives from adjoining areas will be included where relevant to the achievement of Shropshire's Great Outdoors objectives.

How will we know we have succeeded?

The Shropshire's Great Outdoors Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed annually and there will be a major review of the strategy after five years. The output monitoring is outlined for each of the objectives in the Priority section below and in more detail in the attached Action Plan (Appendix x).

A new 10 year plan will be published following a full evaluation of Shropshire's Great Outdoors in 2027.

What are the priorities?

Objective

Happy- Encourage enjoyment of Shropshire's Great Outdoors by more people, of all ages and abilities.

Key messages

- Being outdoors is fun
- Everyone can get into the Great Outdoors
- There are opportunities to increase access for all users

Strategy	Priority
Management	Ensure high quality management of the outdoor network, within current financial restrictions, seeking to renew popular promoted routes and secure external funding for new activity.
Management	Support the development of the canal network, including the reopening of the Montgomery Canal.
Management	Development and promotion of multi-user routes, improving connectivity of off-road routes, linking roadside verges and considering 20mph schemes for linking routes.
Management	Investigate opportunities to increase access and recreation on existing sites and develop new ones where appropriate.

Management	Seek to develop new multi-user routes along disused railways and support the Canal and River Trust to develop canal towpaths for all users.
Communication	Improve information and awareness of all ability and easier access opportunities across the outdoor network, seeking to develop new projects where possible.
Communication	Support Walkers Are Welcome towns, festivals and events through user forums, websites and social media.
Communication	Develop and promote the Shropshire's Great Outdoors membership scheme.
Communication	Further develop the Shropshire's Great Outdoors website and social media outlets.
Engagement	Ensure better engagement with disability network and groups to identify opportunities and get feedback on current facilities.
Engagement	Engage more with the cycling community, including mountain biking, to identify opportunities and address issues.
Learning	Publish new guidance for users in easy to follow booklet, along with user awareness campaign.
Learning	Engagement better with schools to encourage more school visits to the outdoor network
Policy	Develop a new Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan that encourages active travel and identifies desire lines and links between communities.

Outcomes

- More people will be enjoying Shropshire's Great Outdoors
- Provision for different types of users will be identified and better promoted
- More schools will be visiting the outdoor network
- People will be better informed about the outdoor network
- There will be better understanding between different user groups and more responsible use by all users

Monitoring and evaluation

- Website usage
- Social media coverage
- Membership numbers
- Visitor numbers
- School visits
- Attendance at events and festivals