



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  19 <sup>th</sup> October 2021
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<u>Item</u>  <b>10</b>
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## **AONB TEAM WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

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### **Summary**

This paper updates members on recent activity of the AONB team. Appendix 1 is a single page summary of the team’s activity. Members less familiar with the work of the team may find this helpful to look at first.

### **Recommendation**

The Partnership is recommended to note and comment on the update.

## **Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme – updates on recent work**

<b>TAKING ACTION - on the ground and in our communities - to conserve and enhance natural beauty and to promote enjoyment and understanding.</b>
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### Farming in Protected Landscapes

The programme was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021. Enquiries were fairly slow to start with but have increased considerably. We have appointed the Panel, and held an induction and first full meeting approving three projects. The approach of involving a range of team members is working well, though there is a knock-on effect of reducing our capacity in other areas of work. There are some good potential projects in discussion, but levels of grant spend in this first Financial Year are likely to be relatively low. This is in common with other areas, and has been flagged up to Defra already on several occasions. The team continue to undertake Defra training and actively collaborate with other areas through the National Landscapes Forum. For further information see the paper for agenda item 5.

### Young Rangers and Green Leaders project

Good progress is being made with the project, with regular activities. Around 60+ young people are registered on the programme now through both our own direct delivery and through South Shropshire Youth Forum. Activities have included summer school activities for Bishop’s Castle Community College, a mine and bat walk at Snailbeach, campcraft, a canoe trip on the River Severn. An Advisory Group supports the project.

We have contracted and are working with Jess Laurie on what was being called the ‘Youth Voice for Nature’ now ‘Green Leaders’ leadership element of the project with an older cohort of young people. Uptake has been a bit slow and the programme has been adapted, with a number of young people now signed up. (This will be discussed in item 6 on the agenda)

### Water Environment Grant Teme-Onny-Clun project (in partnership with Severn Rivers Trust)

This project finished delivery at the end of September, after a six month extension, with a total of 152 farm water Feasibility Studies completed. There is some final admin on claims and reporting remaining.

### **Sustainable Tourism delivery:**

Shuttle Buses – The Long Mynd – Stiperstones service has been running again this year, with an adapted route to maximise impact in our most busy areas. The service offered free travel between the Bog Centre car park and Stiperstones Knolls car park to help reduce pressure on the Knolls and encourage people to walk and bus between the two locations.

We ran a much shorter than usual service (26 rather than 47 days) because of the reduction in funding from key partners. Church Stretton Town Council have become one of most significant funders of the service. The 2021 service ran at break even with all the contributions received.

'Fix the Fort' (Caer Caradoc) – the practical aspects are being reviewed for getting the right kind of stone up on to the hill for repairs to the eroded sections of hillfort ramparts. Further match funding is also needed to complement that raised by the AONB Trust appeal. We are hoping to work with the landowner to secure FiPL funding matched by a grant from HF holidays (and the £3K raised) to cover the significant costs of this project.

### 'Our Common Cause' Upland Commons project (national project)

The project is well under way now, with Renee Wallace in post as the Shropshire Hills area project officer for the Foundation for Common Land. Early progress has been made with the whinchat project, and purchase of equipment for bracken cutting and sheep handling. Members of the team have been providing support, promoting events and participating in the national project structures.

The Area Group met on 5<sup>th</sup> October for the first in person meeting in some time.

### Stepping Stones project

Cath has continued contracted work for the project facilitating the Upper Onny Farmers Group, with a programme of events including a recent successful one at Brow Farm on hay meadows. Cath also attended a visit by Hilary McGrady National Trust's CEO.

A bid has been made to Defra for a third round of Environmental Land Management (ELM) Test & Trial, focussing on the historic environment.

### River Clun catchment work

Due to starting the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, we had to turn down an Environment Agency funding agreement for this Financial Year for further work. Alison Jones has been liaising with contractors, landowners and Environment Agency staff to see the projects through to completion. We hope to continue an active role in Clun catchment work, after many years of engagement and activity here.

### John Muir Award

Cath is delivering a John Muir Award programme with the Blue Hills Federation of schools.

### Project development:

Peatlands – Our application for the Discovery grant (feasibility stage) of the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme was submitted on 31<sup>st</sup> August. This includes an 18 month full

time post and is intended to prepare works on a range of sites which would be implemented through a further stage of the capital grant.

Woodlands – A project proposal in partnership with Woodland Trust is in draft - to focus on restoration of ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations of ancient woodland sites. Tree planting is well covered by many other initiatives at the current time.

**INFLUENCING OTHERS - lead and champion the delivery of public benefits from the AONB, working strategically and collaboratively from policy to grassroots level.**

Climate and Ecological Emergency

We maintain strong input to both the South Shropshire Climate Action Group and the Shropshire Climate Action Partnership, especially through the Land & Biodiversity groups.

We are active in the NAAONB Climate Change collaboration programme – now involving 3 members of the team, in sub-groups including Nature-Based Solutions, Sustainable Tourism & Transport, and Renewable Energy. Phil led on an NAAONB submission to the House of Lords Science & Technology Select Committee enquiry on nature-based solutions for climate change, and a briefing on this topic for the NAAONB Chair for a national summit meeting.

We are taking part in a seminar on renewable energy in Shropshire to look at recent mapping of potential for different technologies.

Mike took part in a workshop on carbon in conservation land management at Stiperstones, with a follow on workshop planned for November to hone the methodology.

We completed a three month consultation period on the Nature Recovery Plan, which elicited some useful comments and responses. Some of these will benefit from further discussions. The Plan will be finalised over the coming months.

Phil gave a talk on our experience of the plan preparation to an NAAONB webinar in September.

AONB Management Plan

The 2020-2021 Annual Review is in preparation.

Sustainable tourism strategic work

Significant input to Shropshire Welcomes promotional campaign, as part of ongoing work towards a County Destination Strategy. Continued support to Shropshire Tourism and local groups within the Shropshire Hills.

Liaison with SC Visitor Economy Officer and Telford & Wrekin Council Tourism team.

Support to Halfway House visitor facilities at the Wrekin.

Working with Natural England to address damage by mountain bikes and powered bikes on Stiperstones NNR.

Planning

We submitted a number of responses on the Regulation 19 consultation on the Shropshire Draft Local Plan in February, and responses on a number of planning applications.

Other influencing

We have commented on or provided input to:

- Felling licence applications – including Henley Farm, Delbury Hall, Linley Estate, Nant
- Woodland design plans and tree planting proposals including Curney Bank (20 woodland consultations so far this year)
- Ordinary Watercourse Consents

- Proposed engineering works relating to Clun bridge

#### Promoting the special qualities of the AONB and AONB Partnership activity

Website and social media – we continue to update and improve the website and maintain output on various social media platforms including Instagram and Facebook. The E-newsletter was sent out to around 3,000 contacts.

We attended with an AONB stall at the Hay Meadow Festival and Minsterley Show. Alison Jones led a guided walk on wetlands for the Redlake Valley Community Benefit Society. We are liaising with Google maps to improve their representation of the AONB.

#### Local authorities and partnerships

We are involved with SC Culture, Leisure & Tourism meetings and Andy Begley Shropshire Council CEO recently met with Culture Leisure & Tourism Managers.

Mike sits on the Teme Partnership Steering Group and the Shropshire Invasive Non-Native Species Initiative Steering Group.

An online meeting of the Wrekin Forest Partnership was held on 13<sup>th</sup> September.

#### National Association for AONBs and Europarc Federation

We participated in the NAAONB online Conference in July, Lead Officers meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> October, a workshop on National Landscapes rebranding, and the Europarc Federation online Conference – Protected Areas in the Spotlight in October.

We supported Landscapes for Life Week in September.

#### AONB Trust, Conservation Fund and Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB

AONB Conservation Fund – Grants have been paid for completed projects in the current year. Preparations are in progress for inviting applications for 2022-23.

The Panel and trustees went to see the Marches Meadows Group's seed harvester in use.

Friends – A newsletter was sent out in September. There are 106 members at present. A promotion article has been written for the Malcolm Savile Society magazine.

AONB Trust and fund-raising – The AONB Trust held its AGM on 9<sup>th</sup> October. Reporting to the Garfield Weston Trust is being completed.

#### Supporting initiatives led by others

The team have also provided support for initiatives including:

CPRE Hedgerows project

Shropshire Good Food Partnership

Environment Agency natural flood management initiative for the Rea catchment

Offa's Dyke Path National Trail anniversary

New Walking in the Shropshire Hills book published

Defra Tree Health pilot

Middle Marches Community Land Trust management of Norbury Hill

AONB Conservation Fund projects

**MANAGING OUR BUSINESS - develop a robust, effective and financially sustainable AONB organisation.**

#### Hosting, governance and development

We are engaging with new managers following the Culture Leisure and Tourism restructure.

We have discussed the Ministerial Statement in response to the Glover Review, likely next steps by government and implications of the proposed National Landscapes Service.

#### AONB Partnership

The 14<sup>th</sup> July meeting again had to be held online, but the October meeting is to be in person, for the first time in two years. The biennial membership review was completed. The Strategy & Performance Committee met in person in September.

#### AONB Team

Weekly online team meetings held, with additional smaller regular casework meetings on Farming in Protected Landscapes.

#### Finance, office, IT, Health & Safety, legal requirements

The team are still working mainly from home. More use is gradually being made of the office but we remain limited for occupancy numbers due the limitations of ventilation.

The office furniture and layout has been reconfigured to suit hot-desking, mixed office and home working and greater focus on team collaboration when in the office.

We continue to make more use of online tools such as SharePoint and build the skills of team members on IT.

Staff are updating Data Protection training and procedures.

#### Reporting

Our annual Key Performance Indicator returns for 2020-21 are being finalised before submission to NAAONB with case studies, including on the headwater restoration project at Brook Vessons.

Mid-year reporting to Defra has been completed.

<b>List of Background Papers</b> None
<b>Human Rights Act Appraisal</b> The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.
<b>Environmental Appraisal</b> The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.
<b>Risk Management Appraisal</b> Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.
<b>Community / Consultations Appraisal</b> The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.
<b>Appendices</b> Appendix 1 Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme 2021-22 Summary

Area of work	Key actions
<b>TAKING ACTION - on the ground and in our communities - to conserve and enhance natural beauty and to promote enjoyment and understanding.</b>	
<b>Farming in Protected Landscapes</b>	Establish and implement Year 1 of new Defra funded programme offering grants for farmers and landowners, with advice and support.
<b>Young Rangers project and Green Leaders</b>	Deliver programme of practical activities including John Muir Award for 12-16 year olds, and Green Leaders activities for 17-21 year olds
<b>Water Environment Grant Teme - Onny – Clun project</b>	Complete extended project in partnership with Severn Rivers Trust, delivering farm advice on water environment plus soil sampling and learning events
<b>Sustainable tourism delivery</b>	Manage 2021 Long Mynd – Stiperstones <b>Shuttles bus</b> and plan 2022 service Support Covid recovery in conjunction with partner organisations Plan works to deliver the ' <b>Caering for Caradoc – Fix the Fort</b> ' project
<b>'Our Common Cause' upland commons project</b>	Support delivery of national project led by Foundation for Common Land, including support for Area Group and Area Project Officer
<b>Stepping Stones project</b>	Support delivery of 'Stepping Stones' project led by National Trust, especially farmer engagement for Environmental Land Management Tests & Trials
<b>River Clun catchment work</b>	Work with partners to plan and support new phases of Clun catchment work
<b>MOREWoods</b>	Liaise with applicants for woodland planting on behalf of Woodland Trust
<b>John Muir Award</b>	Lead John Muir Award programmes with selected participating schools
<b>Develop new projects</b>	Including peatlands, ancient woodland conservation and restoration, trees, catchment and river work, nature-based solutions, health, diversity
<b>INFLUENCING OTHERS - lead and champion the delivery of public benefits from the AONB, working strategically and collaboratively from policy to grassroots level</b>	
<b>Climate &amp; Ecological Emergency</b>	Active involvement in Shropshire and South Shropshire climate partnerships, NAAONB collaboration groups, Shropshire Council Officer group Consultation, completion and disseminate of <b>Nature Recovery Plan</b>
<b>AONB Management Plan</b>	Continue implementation of the AONB Management Plan for 2019-24, with delivery priorities for team and key partners, and publish progress report
<b>Sustainable tourism strategic work</b>	Support delivery of <b>Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy</b> and development of county Destination Management Plan working. Actively advocating for sustainable tourism at local, county & national levels
<b>Planning</b>	Comment on relevant policy documents and key planning applications Maintain and improve links with local authority planning staff and members
<b>Input to other strategies &amp; schemes</b>	Provide input to strategic consultations (non-planning) Comment on non-planning casework such as EIAs, watercourses and hedges
<b>Promote special qualities of the AONB and Partnership activity</b>	Maintain and update <b>website</b> and regular <b>social media</b> output Publish <b>E-newsletters and Annual Review</b> , give <b>talks</b>
<b>Local authorities and partnerships</b>	Maintain/strengthen links with relevant departments of each local authority Input to Marches Nature Partnership, Teme Partnership and other groups Facilitate the <b>Clun Catchment Partnership</b> and <b>Wrekin Forest Partnership</b>
<b>National Association for AONBs</b>	Active involvement with NAAONB and other relevant networks
<b>Shropshire Hills AONB Trust</b>	Support and work with the Trust to develop charitable fund-raising
<b>Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund</b>	Support the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust to administer and award grants, and provide advice and support for projects
<b>Friends of Shropshire Hills AONB</b>	Administer Friends scheme and expand membership, with the AONB Trust
<b>Support initiatives led by others</b>	Support projects and initiatives and respond to requests for information
<b>MANAGING OUR BUSINESS - develop a robust, effective and financially sustainable AONB organisation</b>	
<b>Hosting, governance and development</b>	Work with Shropshire Council to develop hosting relationship Adapt work to deliver Glover Review recommendations.
<b>AONB Partnership</b>	Facilitate and develop the AONB Partnership and Strategy & Performance Committee advisory structures, and undertake 2021 membership review
<b>AONB Team</b>	Hold team meetings, performance reviews, training and development
<b>Finance, office, IT, Health &amp; Safety, legal requirements</b>	Manage and administer AONB Partnership finances, develop income streams, continue to modernise working practices, ensure compliance in all areas
<b>Evidence base and GIS</b>	Collect data as part of Management Plan monitoring framework
<b>Volunteering</b>	Involve volunteers through AONB-led and supported activities