



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 12 th July 2022	<u>Item</u> 3
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CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION IN THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS

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Summary

This paper provides the structure and background to this main agenda item for the meeting, which will include a number of presentation and discussion sessions as well as break-out workshops.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the background information, to consider the issues and action priorities, and to participate in the discussion and workshop sessions.

Background

This agenda item will occupy the majority of the meeting and is intended to engage Partnership members and other key stakeholders through:

- looking at a variety of current activity related to climate change both within the area and within the strategic context of AONBs
- examining some of the issues in relation to climate change and the Shropshire Hills
- helping to identify actions and priorities for both the AONB Partnership and partners.

Climate change is a systemic and complex issue, requiring a holistic response. 'Focusing' on climate change should not lead us to ignore other critical environmental parameters. In October 2019 the Partnership made clear recommendations to the Councils that climate change should be looked at alongside and integrally with nature recovery. This is now becoming more widely accepted. The need also to integrate more closely actions for climate change mitigation and for adaptation is now better understood.

The elements which will provide the structure for this agenda item are set out below, with some background information which should help to stimulate ideas and discussion.

National Association for AONBs collaborative programme and Chairs' Statement

The NAAONB has been running a collaborative programme on climate change for around 18 months involving small working groups and wider engagement through the Lead Officers meetings and national conference. A Statement of commitment on Climate Change from AONB Chairs was recently agreed (this was shared with Partnership members at a draft stage)

and is now being signed by Chairs around the country. Alex Carson-Taylor our Chair was involved in the small group drawing this up, and with the Partnership's support, will sign the Statement publicly at the meeting. The Statement is included as appendix 1 to this paper, and contains various pledges and commitments as well as further information on the NAAONB collaborative programme. The Framework and Toolkit and supporting documents will be circulated separately to members and those attending the meeting.

Phil Holden the AONB Manager has been part of the central collaboration group and has facilitated the topic group on nature-based solutions. He will talk briefly about this work including the recent Framework and Toolkit developed, and about a carbon audit of soils and vegetation in all English AONBs which NAAONB commissioned from Cranfield University which is currently being finalised. Nigel McDonald from the AONB team has been active in the Sustainable Tourism & Transport topic group.

Local authorities

Shropshire Council – Cllr Ian Nellins, portfolio holder for Climate Change, Natural Assets & The Green Economy will be attending the meeting, along with Adrian Cooper the Climate Change Task Force Manager. There will be updates on relevant areas – e.g. renewable energy, EV charging, land management, trees, etc. and the opportunity for discussion.

Telford & Wrekin Council was recently ranked in the top 3% of 409 UK councils tackling climate change (<https://newsroom.telford.gov.uk/News/Details/16129>) and we hope to have relevant representatives to discuss their activity, especially with relevance to the AONB.

South Shropshire Climate Action have recently appointed Nick Read and Fiona Morgan to a job-share Project Co-ordinator role (funded by an anonymous donor), so will be significantly ramping up their activity. Following extensive stakeholder involvement through several conferences, South Shropshire Climate Action produced a Climate Action Plan for South Shropshire (the Ludlow parliamentary constituency). A number of topic groups have identified priority actions and are pursuing them. The AONB team have been closely involved, especially in the Land & Biodiversity group. South Shropshire Climate Action is closely linked to the Shropshire Climate Action Partnership (also known as Zero Carbon Shropshire).

For further information see <https://southshropshireclimateaction.org/>.

Break-out sessions

To enable greater participation, we will break into topic workshop sessions in three groups, looking at:

- Land, agriculture and nature-based solutions
- Planning including renewable energy
- Tourism and transport

The purpose of these break-outs will be broadly to share further information on what is currently going on in the Shropshire Hills on this topic, and establish future priorities and next stage actions are, and who might deliver these. Further details will be set out at the meeting.

Towards a Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Climate Action Plan

This is one of the commitments in the Chairs’ Statement, and some of the output of the day will feed into a draft plan for completion later this year. This will focus on actions that can be taken by the AONB Partnership (both the Partnership committee and the staff team) and won’t try to be a blueprint plan for the whole area. It will however address priorities facing the area in the context of what the Partnership can act on and influence. A strength of the Partnership is that member organisations have their own work programmes, which lie beyond the scope of this Plan, but will add up to considerable activity.

The five NAAONB workstreams will provide a useful structure for the Plan, enabling us to identify ambitious, tangible climate action across these adapted to our local area:

- Agriculture
- Nature-based Solutions
- Building Design and Planning
- Renewable Energy
- Sustainable Tourism and Transport

The priorities for this action plan will briefly be discussed to close the agenda item, with opportunities for further input by Partnership members.

<p>List of Background Papers NAAONB Climate Action in AONBs Framework and Toolkit, with supporting documents – Nature Based Solutions Supplementary Document, Farm Carbon Tools Guidance, How to Get Started for Farmers, Retrofitting Guidance (these will be circulated separately to members).</p>
<p>Human Rights Act Appraisal The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.</p>
<p>Environmental Appraisal The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.</p>
<p>Risk Management Appraisal Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.</p>
<p>Community / Consultations Appraisal The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.</p>
<p>Appendices Appendix 1 Statement of commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action</p>

Statement of commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated for the precious landscapes they enfold. As such they must make an important contribution to face climate change and its consequences. **AONB teams and partnerships must now more than ever confirm their leading role and ambition in addressing this challenge.**

Climate change mitigation and adaptation will **in part** be delivered by AONB teams, but they are small and cannot do everything. AONB partnerships bring many stakeholders together and this capacity must be harnessed. These stakeholders also extend their reach and activities beyond AONB partnerships thus multiplying this capacity and placing AONBs as **catalysts and trusted partners**. In parallel, AONB teams and partnerships must continue to support **land managers and communities** within AONBs to take their own action.

Rising to this challenge means **working collaboratively** across the national Family of AONB teams, their partners, and their communities, using the AONB designation to influence relevant stakeholders. This ambition will only be achieved if AONBs are supported both in terms of **funding and policy changes** to the levels recommended by the **Landscapes Review**.

This statement of commitment from AONB chairs is the evidence that **AONBs teams and partnerships are ready to act** but it is also a **call for more support** to help them achieve their ambition.

Context

Through 2021 a subset of AONB staff from across the country, with the support from the National Association for AONBs, has come together to create and take forward a **collaborative climate change action programme** (hereafter ‘the Collaborative Programme’) aiming to:

1. **Develop a greater, data-based understanding** of climate change and its impacts on AONBs and people, **enabling decision and action**;
2. **Generate a strong evidence base** for an AONB offer and narrative on the inter-connected climate and ecological emergencies;
3. **Generate tangible outputs** at a national and local level.

This Collaborative Programme brings focus on **five workstreams** to enhance the AONB teams’ and partnerships’ capacity to assess issues and deliver tangible solutions: **Agriculture, Nature-based Solutions, Building Design and Planning, Renewable Energy, Sustainable Tourism and Transport**. They are described in the **Climate Action Framework and Toolkit**.

This Collaborative Programme directly supports the pledge set out in the [Colchester Declaration](#): ‘by 2024, to ensure all AONB Management Plans include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero’.

The Collaborative Programme also acknowledges that it must carefully **align with the 25-Year Environment Plan** and **other relevant policies** developed by central government.

In November 2021 the National Association for AONBs signed the [Protected and Conserved Areas Joint Statement on Climate Change and Biodiversity Crises](#), asserting the crucial role designated landscapes must play in relation to the connected challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Finally, since January 2022, [AONB teams are working to articulate what a 21st century landscape designation looks like](#) and how to get there, in the context of the ongoing consultation on the Government response to the Landscapes Review. **Climate change is a major challenge** of this start of the century and has to be highlighted as **a key priority for national landscapes**, here and now.

Commitments

We, as chairs from AONB partnerships across England and Wales and in conjunction with our Lead Officers, **assert our support for the Climate Action Framework and Toolkit** emerging from the Collaborative Programme. We **reassert our support for the collaborative way of working** fostered by the National Association as a key mechanism to develop and deliver climate solutions urgently and at scale.

We abide by the global commitments set out in the Protected and Conserved Areas Joint Statement. We also acknowledge the imperative to **remain aligned with evolving national policies** connected to climate change issues.

As chairs we are **custodians of the AONB partnerships' power to convene** and are responsible for opening and maintaining space for debate and empowerment. **We support and encourage our Lead Officers and AONB teams to take action forward on climate change.**

We commit to:

- **Stimulate debate and generate engagement** across our partnerships for ambitious, tangible climate action across the five workstreams and adapted to our local areas,
- **Empower our partnerships** to explore their full potential in terms of climate action: what they can deliver directly and what they can influence,
- Each with our own capacity and ability and in alignment with emerging outputs from the Collaborative Programme, **support the creation of a collective, broad-level climate action plan** for all AONBs and **lead the development of a local action plan in our own AONB partnership** by the end of 2022.

To these ends, we will:

- **Bring climate action to our AONB partnerships as a top agenda item at our next partnership meeting and before the end of 2022,**
- **Promote and use the Climate Action Framework and Toolkit** and make it **immediately** accessible to partnership members, to enable them to take meaningful actions on climate change issues;
- **Facilitate ongoing conversations to include tangible climate action in AONB Management Plans** and associated business and delivery plans, in line with the present Statement, the Climate Action Framework and Toolkit and the Colchester Declaration;
- **Maintain awareness** of other parallel or relevant activities taking place in our local areas, co-ordinating with and supporting these as far as possible;
- **Support each other** in fulfilling these commitments through sharing learning and demonstrating collaborative behaviours across the AONB Family.

To support us in this process, the Collaboration Advisory Group leading on the Collaborative Programme commits to ensuring a mechanism is in place to provide information and a space for conversation and ongoing collaboration for AONB chairs.