



PROGRESS REPORT ON FIRST YEAR OF ENGAGEMENT RANGER WORK

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Summary

This paper provides a brief update on work of the new Engagement Ranger post within the Shropshire Hills National Landscape team. This will be supplemented by a short presentation by Joe Penfold.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to comment on the information provided.

Background

Since coming into post in the new Engagement Ranger role in January this year, Joe has focussed work on three main areas: continuation of Young Rangers beyond the completed three years of Heritage Lottery Funding; management of our Defra Access for All project funding; and new outreach and engagement work with underserved communities.

Young Rangers has been running since 2020 and continues to attract a small but loyal group of young people, including some new recruits referred recently through Social Prescribing. 13 sessions have been delivered this year to 26 young people. The nationwide Generation Green project, of which the Shropshire Hills National Landscape team is a delivery partner, targets young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Under the scheme, a further 24 young people from ethnic minorities and from areas of social deprivation have been provided with 'night under the stars' experiences, educational farm visits, and conservation work parties.

Defra Access for All funding has been used to provide greater physical and intellectual access to the Shropshire Hills, working with partners including Shropshire Council Outdoor Partnerships, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, a private landowner and two local charities. The £70k budget has been allocated across seven project sites and works are under way on footpath improvements, interpretation and the provision of improved signage and outdoor seating.

Outreach and engagement work with underserved communities has complemented these other activities. The Engagement Ranger has collaborated with groups including Telford Sight Loss, Shropshire Supports Refugees and Parkinson's UK providing

information, practical support and needs-led activities to facilitate access to the Shropshire Hills. 20 outreach and engagement events have been delivered to 185 attendees. These included walks and talks in the Shropshire Hills and countryside crafts such as willow weaving and coppice crafts. The latter were made possible via a small grant from Vibrant Shropshire: a Cultural Compact, a scheme to help deliver the Shropshire Cultural Strategy, and which addresses the 'community and place' priority of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The above work has enabled us to implement some of the recommendations from the 2022 report commissioned from Curious Birds consultants to promote greater equality, diversity and inclusion within the Shropshire Hills National Landscape. The scale of our direct provision of visits is modest, but through these we are gaining valuable first-hand insights into the needs of different groups. This will enable us to help and support people in various ways, and also to support our partners to do this, especially those organisations which are direct providers of countryside sites in the Shropshire Hills.

Joe is also working collaboratively with other team members to embed engagement and inclusion across other areas of our work including strategic work such as the Management Plan, plus our communications and sustainable tourism activity.

The cost of the part-time Engagement Ranger post is under-written for a further Financial Year 2025-26 by our reserves. To continue this important work, the aspiration is to make the post permanent through core funding, dependent of course on financial settlements and contributions from Defra and the local authorities.

List of Background Papers None
Human Rights Act Appraisal The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.
Environmental Appraisal The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.
Risk Management Appraisal Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.
Community / Consultations Appraisal The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.
Appendices None