



MODERNISING PARTNERSHIP WORKING – PROPOSED CHANGES TO PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Responsible Officer Phil Holden, National Landscape Team Manager
e-mail: phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 254741

Summary

This paper builds on earlier discussion of the proposed evolution of the current National Landscape group structure, principally to support more effective partnership working. These changes are intended to bring closer working with key delivery partners (especially those with the strengthened legal duty) as well as broadening engagement more generally. This links with the direction of the new Plan, and the proposed changes are outlined also in the draft Plan as part of the consultation.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to endorse the draft Terms of Reference for the Advisory Committee to go forward for formal approval by the two Councils.

Background

Following the presentation and discussion at the 18th March Partnership meeting, the Strategy & Performance Committee considered draft Terms of Reference on 10th June and made suggestions, resulting in refinement of the draft but were supportive of the principles and overall direction. The intention is that the new Terms of Reference for the Advisory Committee will go with the new Management Plan for approval to both the Council Cabinets in the autumn. We do not yet have a date for this. It is intended to run the appointment process to the new Committee after formal approval, to lead to meetings under the revised structure in 2026.

Summary of purpose of proposed changes

This is principally about a change in methods of partnership working, and not just a change to structure, but it is the structure changes that need to be formally approved. The aim is to give more people a greater stake and more role in the care of the landscape and help to harness their energy and motivation. The change could be described as helping to create a broader and deeper shared 'governance' among many stakeholders, including organisations and individuals, of the public benefits and special qualities of the Shropshire Hills landscape, which are very widely supported and valued. We could perhaps also describe it as attempting to answer the question:

How do we convene a broad range of people to co-create a regenerative culture to support the health of the Shropshire Hills as a living system?

There is no single organisational entity of 'the Shropshire Hills National Landscape', the architecture linked to the designation being already made up of a number of groups. So although the changes cross from partnership into the area of governance, they should not be seen in the narrow sense just of organisational governance.

Reasons for change:

- To modernise ways of partnership working, allowing a greater breadth and diversity of representation, and strengthening the pathways for greater involvement by organisations and individuals.
- To allow the Team more time to work with key delivery partners (including relevant authorities).
- To renew strong relationships with the two Councils and a secure structure.
- To align with national directions for National Landscape governance and partnership working.

Other drivers for the proposed updating of the structure, as previously discussed, include:

- Strengthened legal duty puts more emphasis on Relevant Authorities,
- Encourage especially greater engagement by Parish & Town Councils (which are Relevant Authorities),
- Directions for National Landscape committee and partnership structures indicated in the Glover Review and government response,
- More efficient use of staff team time and more useful value of meeting reports.

Main functions for a National Landscape structure which are needed:

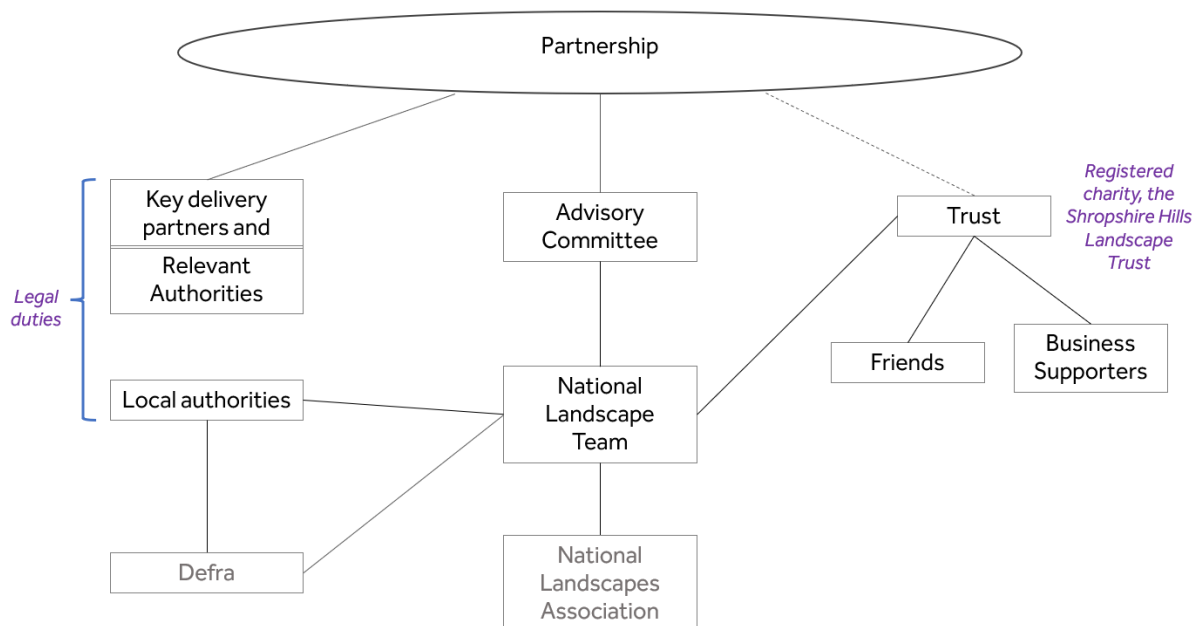
- Broad engagement of interested stakeholders and exploring topics and solutions,
- Co-ordinating delivery among key partners,
- Advisory oversight of work of the team and the National Landscape designation model,
- Partner and stakeholder input to Management Plan review.

Summary of proposed changes

- The Partnership to become a broader and more inclusive group, working through more informal meetings, twice a year, similar in form to the current Summer Forum.
 - No longer a 'committee'. More informal, a less 'official' body.
 - Innovative approaches, greater inclusivity, more voices heard.
 - An important meeting place for different stakeholders and viewpoints.
 - Retaining a valuable sense of membership and affiliation.
 - Relatively simple Terms of Reference are proposed (Appendix 2) to set broad parameters e.g. around membership but allow a good deal of flexibility. Future changes to the Terms of Reference would be agreed by the Advisory Committee.

- A new Advisory Committee to be formed, with status as a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) to the two Councils, taking on the current roles of the Strategy & Performance Committee, plus some current functions of the Partnership in advising the local authorities more generally regarding the National Landscape designated area.
 - Primary function is advisory oversight and scrutiny of work of the National Landscape team. This includes space to explore ideas, troubleshoot challenges, and gain insights/ fresh perspectives from members with diverse experiences.
 - Secondary function is where necessary to advocate for the Shropshire Hills as a National Landscape and represent its interests, including advice to the Councils, formal responses to consultations where appropriate, etc.
 - The proposed Terms of Reference (Appendix 1) incorporate some clauses from the Partnership's existing Terms of Reference, where these relate to the roles and status of a Joint Advisory Committee.
- Stronger links between key delivery partners and with the National Landscape team.
 - These will include (as piloted recently through the Management Plan review process) a Key Partner Delivery group including senior representatives, probably meeting mostly online, along with periodic topic groups. Details will be worked out and evolved as an operational matter between the team and partners.
 - A rule of thumb for defining Key Delivery Partners will be organisations operating at a scale of having paid employees. The many valuable community groups will be encouraged to engage principally through the Partnership group.

Summary diagram of proposed new structure:



List of Background Papers

Agenda item 3 paper to 18th March 2025 Partnership meeting, including the drivers for change.

Slides circulated to Partnership members 29th April 2025

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

Appendix 1 Draft Terms of Reference for new Shropshire Hills National Landscape Advisory Committee

Appendix 2 Draft Terms of Reference for the revised Shropshire Hills National Landscape Partnership

Appendix 1 Draft Terms of Reference for new Shropshire Hills National Landscape Advisory Committee

Purpose of the Committee – to provide advisory oversight and scrutiny of the work of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team, and of the local delivery system for the National Landscape designation more generally.

Status - formal status of a 'Joint Advisory Committee' under Section 102(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to the two local authorities of Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council ("the Councils").

Purpose of National Landscape (area of outstanding natural beauty) designation - the statutory purpose of the designation is "to conserve and enhance natural beauty" (1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act)

"It is important to remember that 'natural beauty' is holistic. 'Natural beauty' is not just the look of the landscape (or 'the view'), but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features, and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries. It comprises multiple aspects such as the landscape and scenic quality, natural heritage (geology, species and habitats), wildness (including sense of remoteness), tranquillity (including dark skies), and cultural heritage (including the built environment and cultural traditions and associations)8 which taken together justify an area's designation. Historic England make clear that the historic environment is fundamental to the distinctive character, sense of place and natural beauty of each National Landscape."

National Landscapes Association briefing on S85 duty, May 2025

Secondary purposes were defined in 2001 by the Countryside Agency and remain in place as guidance:

"In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves, conserve and enhance the environment.

Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses."

(Note that Defra are now looking at review of the statutory purpose as a follow up to the Landscapes Review).

Legal duties and powers - Local authorities have a legal obligation under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to prepare and review a Management Plan for the National Landscape, and to 'act jointly' in doing this.

The local authorities also have powers to take 'all such action as appears expedient' for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area.

Under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 all relevant authorities have a duty to 'seek to further the purpose', and Regulations under the Act covering implementation of Management Plans are also expected.

Values - The National Landscape structure and groups seek to add value, and to engage people in support of the purposes of designation. They aim to help to reduce fragmentation and improve local accountability. The National Landscape remit is broad and complex, and the structures will strive to raise understanding and give a high priority to clear communication and openness.

Relationship to other groups – the Committee will operate in a complementary way to the revised Partnership and the new Key Partner Delivery Group, which together will provide the main means for partner engagement and involvement. The Advisory Committee will have the most formal structure and legal status of the groups, and will provide an important advisory governance 'anchor' to the broader combined structure. All three groups will have valuable input into the Management Plan review process.

Roles and responsibilities of the committee:

The Committee will provide advisory oversight of :

- Work of the National Landscape Team, including strategic direction and monitoring progress with the annual work programme, providing guidance and making recommendations to optimise the effectiveness and performance of the Team.
- Scrutinise budgets, accounts and the deployment of resources at the disposal of the Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team.
- Implementation of the Management Plan, and monitoring progress in achieving its vision, policies and recommendations.
- Fulfilment by relevant authorities of their legal duty to 'seek to further the purpose' of designation.

The Committee will champion the interests of and vision for, the Shropshire Hills National Landscape, as contained in the statutory Management Plan, and promote a coherent and strong identity for the area.

Membership

Membership of the Committee will consist of a maximum of 12 people comprising the following:

- Two elected Members and one officer appointed by Shropshire Council (representatives should be relevant portfolio holders or local ward members);
- One elected member and one officer appointed by Telford and Wrekin Council;
- Seven members appointed on the basis of skills relevant to the work of the committee. These may include: understanding of protected landscape issues, strategic planning and financial management appropriate to the scale of work of the National Landscape Team, knowledge of the public sector and multi-sector partnerships, understanding of both delivery and influencing roles, ambassadorial qualities. People appointed could be organisation representatives, individuals, or elected members of parish or town councils.

Though the make-up of the committee is intended to encompass a range of interests, it is intended that all members 'represent' principally the collective interests of the National Landscape rather than representing certain organisations or interest groups.

The Committee may assign certain members to advise on particular topics to provide additional support to the Chair and National Landscape Team Manager. If assigned, the scope and responsibilities for any such roles will be defined in writing.

Members will be encouraged to undergo relevant training and development to the role and to participate in the network of the National Landscapes Association.

Appointment process

The two local authorities will appoint to their allocated member and officer seats through their own processes.

The National Landscape Team will operate an application process for the remaining seats. The process will be transparent and non-discriminatory. Appointments will normally be for three years, but at creation two seats will be appointed for one year and two seats for two years to create a stagger to avoid too much turnover at once in future years. Members may serve a maximum of three consecutive terms.

Appointments will be made by a Panel consisting of the appointed Councillors, the current Chair, and the National Landscape Team Manager. As a principle, the Committee is not an independent entity, it is an advisory committee to the Councils, who therefore play the principal roles in appointing its members.

Appointment of applicants will be based on the following criteria:

- Resident in the National Landscape or very nearby;
- Proven commitment to National Landscape purposes and relevant areas of interest;
- Ability to make a valuable contribution to the Committee based on the skills defined.

Procedure of meetings

All parties recognise that the Committee is likely to be most effective if its recommendations can be reached by consensus rather than by confrontation but, if it is necessary to regulate any debate, then the Chair shall have the power to order that the Council Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of the Constitution of Shropshire Council shall apply. Consensus will be taken as the majority of the members present and the Chair will have the casting vote where needed.

The Committee will normally meet three times per year. Additional meetings may be called (or cancelled) as necessary by the Chair.

The Committee will elect its own Chair on a biennial basis, or as necessary. The Chair will be a non-local authority member. The Chair will not serve for more than three consecutive terms (i.e. six years maximum).

Two Vice Chair posts will also be elected biennially by the Committee, or as necessary. One Vice Chair post will be an elected member of Shropshire Council and the other Vice Chair post will be open to any Committee member.

Nominations for Chair and Vice Chairs will be invited in advance of the meeting at which the elections take place.

The Chair will also act as Chair for the wider Partnership group, and may on occasions need to make public statements of position on behalf of the Advisory Committee.

Declaration of interests

Members of the Committee shall declare an interest in a meeting where a matter to be discussed may affect:

- their own wellbeing or financial position, or
- the wellbeing or financial position of a family member or close associate, or
- the financial position of an employer/business of the member, their family member or close associate, or
- the financial position of a charitable body, association or other group with which they are closely associated

and shall leave the meeting room whilst that matter is being debated and voted upon.

Councillor members of the Committee shall, when acting as a member of the Committee, comply with the code of conduct of their local authority.

Non-Councillor members of the Committee shall, when acting as a member of the Committee, comply with the code of conduct of Shropshire Council.

In the event of conduct or alleged conduct of a member which is not consistent with the Committee's Terms of Reference, every effort will be made to resolve the issue by informal negotiation. The Committee may however resolve to withdraw membership, or, in the case of a Councillor, resolve to ask the relevant Council to provide a different representative.

[Terms of Reference for the Advisory Committee as a JAC need to approved by the two local authorities at Cabinet level].

Appendix 2 Draft Terms of Reference for the revised Shropshire Hills National Landscape Partnership

Purpose of the Partnership – to provide a vehicle for broad and inclusive engagement and a forum for exploring topics and solutions for the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.

Status – the Partnership will not have formal status but is a recognised part of the composite structures for the National Landscape. The Partnership's brief Terms of Reference will be included in the Council Cabinet reports for completeness, but can be amended by the Advisory Committee.

Membership – will be open to any organisation or individual who signs up to support the purpose of the designation and to contribute positively to partnership working.

All Parish and Town Councils, along with all relevant Ward Councillors and Portfolio Holders from Shropshire Council, and Telford & Wrekin Council will be kept on an 'associate' mailing list for the Partnership and will receive some mailings, but all will also be encouraged to sign up as supporters and members of the Partnership.

The Chair of the Advisory Committee will act as a Chair and figurehead for the Partnership, though meetings will be informal rather than in agenda business meeting format. Membership will be administered by the National Landscape Team and there are no appointments or decisions for the Partnership to make, so there will be no requirement for AGMs or any voting.

Values – the Partnership will support values appropriate to its work, and seek to embody these in its processes, including:

- Developing relationships, respect and listening
- Honesty and assertiveness
- Co-creating, collaborating not competing, mutuality and reciprocal benefits
- Valuing diversity and being sensitive to cultural differences
- Considering whose voices aren't heard

Meetings - will be held twice a year in a relatively informal format based on recent summer forum events – i.e. presentations, informal networking time, workshops, field visits. The format will be developed by innovation and trialling new methods.

The Partnership will also be used as a group for regular communications and engagement. Reporting and information prepared for the Partnership will provide useful awareness raising material, information, topic papers, etc.

[The endorsement of the current Partnership is sought for these Terms of Reference, and advice will be sought on whether they should be included in the Cabinet reports with the new Committee Terms of Reference. Future changes to the Partnership's Terms of Reference would however be agreed by the Advisory Committee].