



LANDSCAPE CONNECTIONS UPDATE

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Summary

This paper presents an update on the Shropshire Hills Landscape Connections project in development, to support a verbal update to be given at the meeting.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the information provided and contribute to discussion.

Background

Following approval of an Expression of Interest by National Lottery Heritage Fund, a full Stage 1 application is being developed with a target submission date of February.

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
Appendix 1 Landscape Connections project update

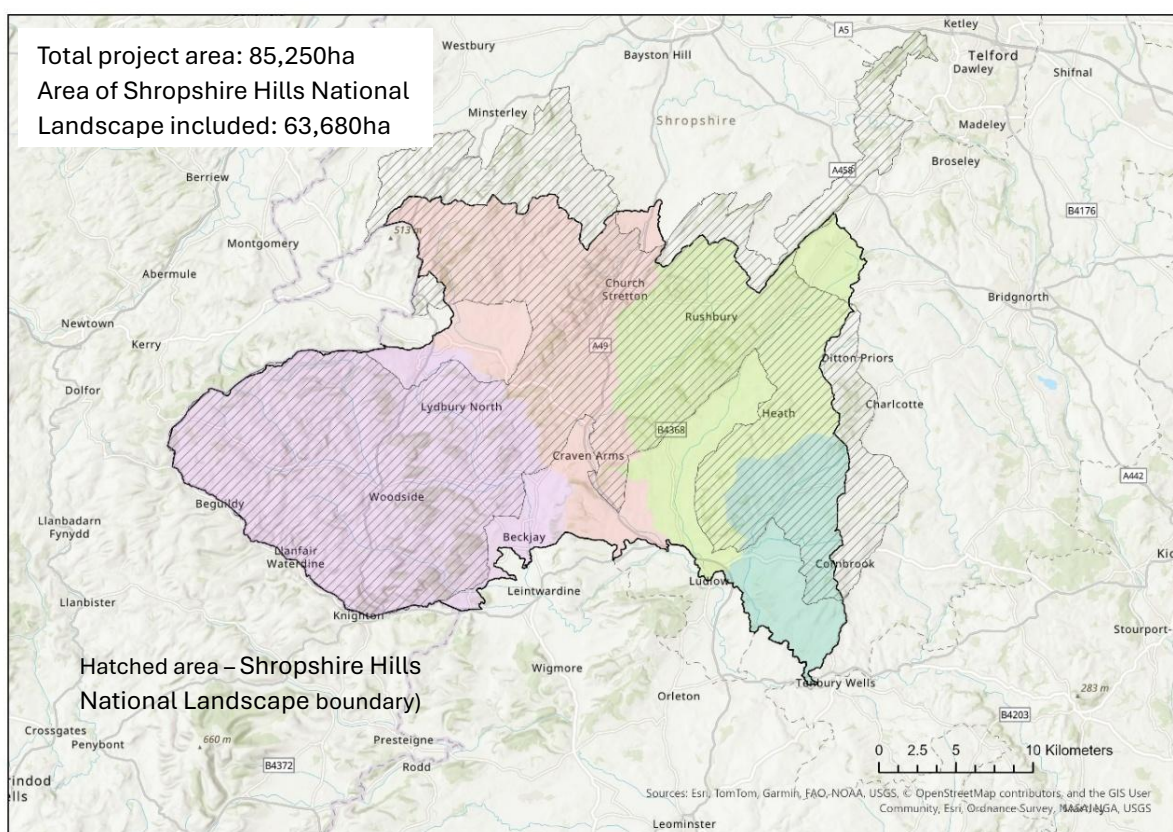
Landscape Connections Project Summary

Our vision

To deliver **transformative change** across the Shropshire Hills by empowering farmers, land managers, volunteers, young people and community groups to come together to address the pressing issues of **climate change**, **nature recovery**, **economic instability**, **social isolation**, and **unequal access to nature**.

Or, to put it another way, it's about **building resilience** – in the landscape, in its communities who live, work and play here, and in the organisations who are active here. Resilience to the impacts of climate change and nature loss, to mental and physical health challenges, and to economic uncertainty.

Project area for capital works (mainly via the Water theme; other themes will span a wider area)



Rationale for project area:

- Four sub-catchments (headwaters): Clun, Upper Onny, Corvedale/Apedale, and Clee Hills.
- Catchment boundaries clipped to exclude Wales and counties which are not Shropshire

Development stage - general

The initial Round 1 bid is for funding to trial/plan/pilot our project. It is for developing our thinking from where we are now. We have quite a bit of knowledge already – but we will use the development phase to develop this knowledge over a wider area, or deepen it where we need some focused information. We need to evidence the assumptions we've made in our R1 bid and where necessary test or ground-truth those.

There is lots to discover, trial and test out – which is why we have two years for this phase.

Some themes will need more development than others in the development phase – for some themes, e.g. Water, we have more of an idea of what we would like to do during the delivery phase. But for the People theme, we will need to do a lot more work during the development phase to refine our plans. The Hub theme sits somewhere between the two – we have an idea of what we are going to do, but the pilots undertaken in development will have a substantial influence on the final project delivery. We also need to undertake training and capacity building on techniques and tools for achieving transformative change, both for wider stakeholders and for project partners as part of their organisational sustainability.

We will need to undertake comprehensive baselining in the development phase so we can measure impact later stages of the project. This will be a mixture of gathering information that is already being collected by long-term/routine monitoring or citizen science, and where necessary commissioning our own baseline surveys.

The development stage work will be pulled together into our Round 2 application. This will include things like our Area Action Plan, full Evaluation Plan for the delivery phase, and of course our detailed Activity Plans and final budgets.

Delivery stage - general

We already have some idea of what we would like to do in delivery stage, but this will evolve as we progress through the development stage - many of the development stage activities will influence our ideas for delivery.

Benefits, outcomes and impact the project will achieve

These were developed in the Benefits & Outcomes workshop attended by the wider partnership group in March 2025. All the activities described in the rest of the document are mapped against at least one of these benefits or outcomes; some will map against several.

Theme delivering: Water.

- Landscape, nature and people have more resilience to climate change
- Water is clean and aquatic ecosystems are healthy
- Landowners and communities are working together to improve water management

- Rivers and Wetlands are restored and the nature that thrives in them is protected
 - Stronger two-way communication and understanding between communities (e.g., farmers and residents).
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Theme delivering: Hub.

- Support for nature friendly farming is coordinated and easy to access.
 - Farmers have increased connectivity with each other and their local community
 - Landscape, nature and farm businesses have more resilience to climate change
 - Connectivity and expansion of habitats and species.
 - Multiple opportunities to develop skills, knowledge, and confidence to engage.
 - Greater understanding of heritage and how to care for it.
 - Stronger two-way communication and understanding between communities (e.g., farmers and residents).
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Theme delivering: People

- Stronger two-way communication and understanding between communities (e.g., farmers and residents).
 - Under-served audiences feel welcome, supported and confident to connect with nature on their own terms.
 - People from diverse backgrounds see land-based industries as relevant to them.
 - Multiple opportunities to develop skills, knowledge, and confidence to engage.
 - More children and young people have a deeper connection with nature through a greater range of opportunities
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Water theme

Overview

As catchment headwaters the area is critical for water management. We know that flooding and drought are already affecting the landscape, from farm businesses to habitats and species. Water quality is also an issue for the area, with no river within the project area classified as of 'good ecological status'.

The Water theme aims to bring together landowners and communities who are impacted by flooding, drought and poor water quality. This project aims to work with 200 landowners across the project area to identify projects that could use nature-based solutions to build resilience to flooding and drought, reduce pollution, connect people and benefit species and habitats. The project will directly fund the implementation of some of these, but we hope that landowners will use the Farming & Nature Hub provided by the project to access additional advice and funding which will allow them to undertake many more.

In the development phase

Four catchment officers will be appointed, one for each catchment. Those based in the Clun and Upper Onny will be employed by Severn Rivers Trust, and those based in the Corvedale and Clee Hills will be employed by Shropshire Wildlife Trust. They will also be supported by a Farmer Engagement post based with the Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team.

There will be two desk studies undertaken during the first part of the development stage. The first of these will be the production of a NFM and water quality improvement strategy for the project area, based on sub-catchment NFM assessment, pulling together all the existing data and evidence and prioritising action. This will help guide the location of the other pieces of work described in this theme. SRT will lead this piece of work.

The second desk study will be undertaking two Feasibility Studies on how connectivity could be restored for two habitats and/or species within the project area. SWT will lead this piece of work.

The Farm Water Audit methodology will be refined, in consultation with landowners who have already received one during the piloting of this over the last 2 years. We will consider combining it with elements of Whole Farm Plans where appropriate, and talk to farmers and delivery partners about their experience of FWAs to date.

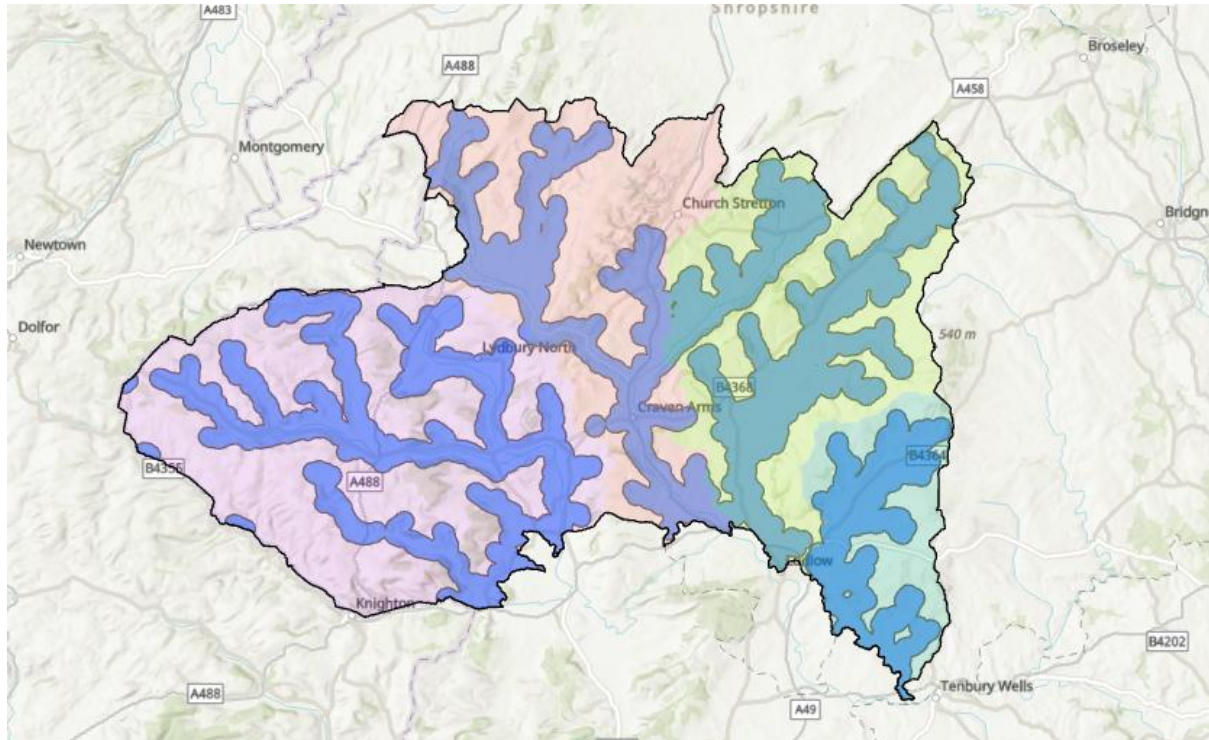
The catchment officers will undertake a programme of targeted landowner engagement via a variety of mechanisms, including working with existing farmer groups, attending events and meetings and contacting farmers directly. The outcome of this engagement by the end of the development phase will be to secure agreement from minimum 100 farmers (aiming for 25 in each catchment) to have Farm Water Audits undertaken on their land.

The landowner engagement will be targeted based on the following rationale:

1. Clipped the four catchments to England and Shropshire
2. Overlaid the LNRS Water & Wetland Opportunities layer with a layer showing Flood Zones 2 & 3 (with a projection for climate change).

3. Created a new layer showing all the LNRS wetland opportunities which occur within 250m of these Flood Zones.
4. Created a 500m buffer around the layer created in step 3.

This results in the below map, showing the catchments and the buffer created in step 4.



The blue buffer area will be used to initially target landowners.

In addition, the catchment officers will work with landowners and consultants to develop plans for the delivery of at least eight capital river/wetland restoration projects. These will be designed to implement water management recommendations from existing Water Audits or based on existing knowledge of partners' potential projects. The outcome of this will be eight shovel-ready projects which could be delivered in the first few years of the delivery phase.

Catchment officers will also work with partners and consultants to identify and work up for delivery four Pioneer projects. These are larger, more complex wetland/river restoration projects which would be delivered over the eight-year delivery stage.

In the delivery stage

The eight smaller river restoration projects and the four large Pioneer projects will be delivered.

Both the eight smaller projects and the four Pioneer projects will act as exemplar sites showcasing river restoration techniques, and will form part of the suite of demonstration sites showcased by the Farming & Nature Hub.

We will also develop the existing network of citizen science volunteer monitors to help with our project monitoring.

Shropshire Hills Farming and Nature Hub theme

The model for this theme is to identify, create and promote demonstration sites which illustrate success stories relating to adoption of sustainable farming systems and approaches which co-benefit nature and farm businesses. Landowners will then be supported to share knowledge and access the advice and funding they need to adopt those practices on their own land. It is about encouraging landowners to be 'more than the sum of their parts', helping them think about the role their land can play in the future of the entire landscape.

There are two elements to this theme. One is the identification and development of a suite of case study sites illustrating various techniques and approaches; the other is the development of a knowledge sharing hub which will act as a one-stop shop for farmer advice and support, as well as a place where innovation can flourish and new approaches can be trialled and discussed.

In the development phase

A Hub Manager, an independent person employed on a contract, will be appointed to deliver this theme's activities in the development phase. They will also be supported by a Farmer Engagement post based with the Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team. Both these roles will need to be familiar with up-to-date environmental grants and other opportunities, and the best techniques for farmer engagement, advice and peer to peer learning. They will use the development stage to build a network of people who could provide info/support/funding/collaboration/catering for the Hub.

The Hub Manager will work alongside local farmers to identify the themes for which case studies/exemplar sites are needed. They will then identify where such sites already exist in the project area, and where the gaps are. They will engage local farmers to identify those people who wish to fill those gaps by becoming case study sites, and work with them to develop the proposals for how they will do this. The result will be a list of current example sites, and a list of potential example sites along with the actions which will be needed for these potential sites to reach the required standard.

The Hub Manager will develop and deliver a pilot programme of pop-up drop-in sessions for the hub, working with local farmer to ensure it meets their needs. The aim will be to run 12 sessions, three in each of the four catchments, using a variety of different venues and times of day, and evaluating their success. They will ensure relevant professionals are present to offer support/advice, and consult with farmers as to whether they want to focus on particular themes.

The Hub Manager will also develop and deliver a pilot programme of farm visits to case study sites, events and workshops, working alongside existing farmer groups to ensure complementarity and to avoid duplication. The aim will be to run eight such events and evaluate their success and popularity with local farmers.

Ongoing liaison will be undertaken with local farmers to get feedback as the pilot progresses and adapt to their needs. Keep statistics will be recorded (e.g. number of attendees at each event/drop-in session), and evaluation will be undertaken with attendees after each event to gather feedback. This will allow an overall evaluation of what worked/didn't work, and alongside farmers a proposal for the Hub's activity during the delivery stage will be developed.

The Hub Manager will promote the Hub by giving talks/having stands/networking at farmer groups/rural events. They will use these opportunities to request feedback. They will also trial and evaluate a variety of methods of publicising hub events, and develop ideas for content for a future online presence.

The Hub Manager will also explore options and develop a recommended governance model for the future delivery of the Hub, for example, an advisory board or steering group of local farmers.

Finally the Hub Manager will appoint a contractor who will deliver a piece of work evaluating the opportunities for the project to engage with green finance opportunities via the Hub.

In the delivery stage

Based on the evaluation of the pilot stage in the development phase, the Hub will continue its activities.

It's governance structure will be set up e.g. farmer-led steering group, and its terms of reference agreed.

A website and potentially social media account for Hub will be created and the uptake and usage trialled and evaluated.

A rolling calendar of activities set up, delivered and evaluated on annual basis

The work of the Hub in the delivery stage will evolve in response to changing needs and changing external factors within/outside sector over the eight years.

People theme

The overall aim of this theme is to tackle unequal access to nature, specifically unequal access to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape for under-served communities and children & young people. It will do this by working with under-served audiences to identify and remove barriers to their accessing the Shropshire Hills.

In the development stage the focus will be on a small community which contains several under-served audiences (i.e. Craven Arms), to use as a model which will have wider benefits to audiences outside this location throughout the delivery stage.

The focused work in Craven Arms will follow the Community Organizing Framework – an innovative way of engaging communities by working directly with members of those communities to understand their needs and the barriers they face in detail, and develop activities and projects which would help remove those barriers and meet their needs. This moves away from the traditional model of creating an offer (e.g. a programme of activities and events) and expecting people to engage.

Craven Arms has been chosen as the target for this piece of work, to use as a model as it is representative of a number of different under-served audiences. The Project may extend this approach to other areas in the delivery phase.

In addition, the development phase will also undertake work around the other target audience – children and young people (see below).

In the development phase

There are four main elements:

1. Targeted work with under-served communities in Craven Arms using a Community Organising framework. This will be led by Shropshire Wildlife Trust who will appoint the Community Organiser, working with other project partners.
2. Exploring how the provision for Children & Young People (CYP) in the project area can be expanded. This will be undertaken as a piece of funded work by either a consultant or one of the partner organisations.
3. Identifying the current gaps in the 'pyramid' for what is on offer in the Shropshire Hills in terms of a pathway from initial engagement through to potentially early career roles, and what role the project could plan in the delivery stage to fill those gaps. Work up any resulting activities e.g. apprenticeships, work placements etc so they are ready to be rolled out in delivery. This will be undertaken by the Community Officer role, based with the National Landscape team.
4. Identify and explore other areas work may expand into in delivery phase, e.g. Telford, Minsterley etc. This will be undertaken by the Community Officer role, based with the National Landscape team.

In the delivery phase

Deliver the programme of activities and barrier removal steps identified by the Community Organiser in the development stage.

Potentially expand this approach to other geographic areas within/close to the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.

Any work placements, apprenticeships & training identified as a need in the development stage will go live.

As organisations, the delivery partners will commit to taking on & developing early career roles e.g. learning from SRT's Pathways Programme, essentially ensuring they are creating skilled staff for the future.

CYP offer is expanded and linked to the other themes.

Volunteering opportunities from Water & Hub theme integrated