



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  18 November 2014	<u>Item</u>  <b>4</b>
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## AONB PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY UPDATE

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### Summary

This paper provides members with a summary update of recent activity of the AONB Partnership staff team, and a staffing update.

### Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the information provided and offer comments.

### KEY AREAS OF PROGRESS IN 2014-15 (July 2014 - present)

**Take and co-ordinate action to conserve and enhance natural beauty, to promote wellbeing, enjoyment and understanding and to further sustainable development.**

- **Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme**  
Over the summer months the team has been focusing on seasonal activity around meadow creation and management with meadow demonstration and training events including scything and green hay spreading. There has been a lot of activity within our 'Open hills, old ways & commons' project to complete training on the LIDAR data and introduce the team of volunteers to archaeological fieldwork and recording, and the two new Community Wildlife Group volunteer surveyors have completed their first season of surveys. A number of engagement events have been completed for 'Down to Earth' in the Churchstoke area and community-based project ideas are starting to take shape. A programme of practical conservation task days to conserve and manage a number of hillfort and castle sites and on our six WREN-funded 'Rescuing rocks' sites has also started this autumn. Restoration work, being managed by Shropshire Council, has commenced at Snailbeach mine site during September 2014 and capital works continue to be negotiated with the landowners at Cothercott barytes mine and the 1784 Engine House in Pontesbury.  
Since July the LPS team has organised and delivered 24 events and training activities - some examples include Open hills fieldwork week, Down to Earth heritage bus tour, Callow Hill dormouse survey, Castle Pulverbatch event and a series of 'Working with lime' taster days at Snailbeach mine site as part of the restoration work. See <http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/>
- **LEADER** Local Development Strategy submitted to Defra on 5 September (see item 5).

- £22,703 allocated in **Sustainable Development Fund** grants to 9 projects (listed in paper for 1 July meeting) for 2014-15 with additional funding from Jean Jackson Charitable Trust and Millichope Foundation. Some projects from 2013-14 continuing.
- **Rivers.** Three year SITA funded River Clun Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project completed August 2014, along with additional Natural England funded activity. Capital work programme well supported by volunteer involvement to undertake riparian tree planting and river monitoring. Final project delivery elements included removal of a woody debris dam on the Clun SAC, installation of solar pasture pump on Clun SAC, hydraulic ram livestock watering system upper Clun, installation of sediment traps and upland re-wetting project supported by SWT. Meeting of Clun Catchment Partnership held, and input to Teme Partnership, Severn Uplands Partnership, Clun Steering Group, Clun Field Officers Group and Clun Nutrient Management Plan Group. Clun Himalayan Balsam strategy published.

Preparation under way for start in April 2015 of four year project (with £216k of WREN (landfill tax) funding) focussing on freshwater pearl mussel recovery sites, runoff pathways and a lower Clun rural SuDS project. Bid also made for a NERC funded research project working with the University of Worcester investigating resistance in alder to *Phytophthora* disease. £5k secured from Natural England innovation fund for small project modelling economics of on-farm environmental measures.

<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/>

- **Shuttles** services for 2014 completed, including second season of Castle Connect service from Ludlow. The Long Mynd and Stiperstones bus carried 4,342 passengers in the 2014 season (very similar to last year but from slightly more operating days), and Castle Connect carried 2,512 passengers (up from 1,976 last year). Ticket and concessionary fare income, along with partner contributions, covered the cost of running and publicising the service, and similar funds are available to run the same services again next year. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund contributions remain crucial to the viability of the service.
- SDF funded **Buy Local** project has supported recruitment of new members and renewals of membership of the **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme**, now at 77 members.
- **Walking with Offa co-operation project** Proposals being developed for second phase of project to include business engagement and volunteer development. Key themes will be heritage, wildlife and culture. <https://www.facebook.com/WalkingWithOffa>
- **Proposed Cleve Hill Heritage Project.** Stage 1 application has had to be abandoned due to Shropshire Council decision not to take on leases for the heritage sites.
- **Promotion** activity. 9 press releases issued and continued output on social media. Joint Shropshire Hills 2014 Events programme and visitor guide well distributed. Website updated. AONB display at a number of events. 2015 Visitor Guide in preparation jointly with Shropshire Hills Tourism.

- **Advice and support** to a range of activities and projects, including Walkers are Welcome group, joint work with CPRE and Norbury School, Bishop's Castle Town Hall, Stiperstones Bioblitz event, Long Mynd Dark Skies initiative, Rectory Wood & Field.
- Proposed **Marches Uplands project** Discussions ongoing with Bulmer Foundation and Herefordshire Rural Hub on development of a project along the lines of the earlier Shropshire Hills Farming project.
- Meeting of **Wrekin Forest Partnership**, and survey prepared to inform a new Management Plan for the Wrekin Forest area.

**Develop policy and strategy for the area through the AONB Management Plan, and influence the policies and strategies of others.**

- Text version of approved **AONB Management Plan 2014-19** published on website.
- **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan** Mid-term review of Strategy completed with Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership. <http://www.shropshirehillstourismpartnership.org.uk/>
- **Planning.** Submissions on six planning applications – residential development at Bentlawnt, 3 dwellings at Norbury, solar farms at Acton Scott and Whitton, poultry sheds at Hopton Heath, and further comments on Garregy Lwyd windfarm in Powys for the public inquiry. (see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/planning/planning-consultations/>).
- Meeting with new Natural England North Mercia Area Manager.
- Input to Ordinary Watercourse consents and other **non-planning casework**.

**Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.**

- Input to **National Association for AONBs**, through frequent information sharing and consultations. <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>
- Updates discussed to Partnership Terms of Reference.
- Participation in team away day with Shropshire Council Outdoor Partnerships staff.
- Discussions continue about possible alternative **office premises**, with consultations now under way by Shropshire Council on reorganisation of services at Church Stretton which may make the current library building available to us.

**Support the involvement of the community in the management of the AONB (also a cross-cutting theme in some items above).**

- Support and advice for a wide range of **community projects**.
- New programme of **volunteer-led guided walks**, with support for six walk leaders.
- John Muir Award programme with **schools** (education/activity programme themed on wild places), currently working with Newcastle and Clun primary schools.
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** currently has 80 members (with some renewals pending). Friends social event held on 13 July, bus tour on LPS Rescuing Rocks &

Overgrown Relics project. Andrew Wood has been helping as a volunteer with member recruitment.

• Attendance at AONB Partnership led **events** (excluding Landscape Partnership Scheme):

2 Jul	Norbury School John Muir Award (JMA) at Stiperstones	30
3 Jul	Clee Hill School JMA, visit 3 to the Novers - Wildlife Day	28
7 Jul	Sustainable Business Scheme event with Bobby Britnell	6
7 Jul	Clee Hill School JMA, visit 4 to The Novers	24
9 Jul	Bishop's Castle School JMA Sharing event	60
10 Jul	Clee Hill School JMA Sharing event	60
11 Jul	Norbury School JMA Sharing Day at Stiperstones	65
13 Jul	Rescuing Rocks Bus Tour for Friends of Shropshire Hills AONB	12
14 Jul	AONB Talk to Hope Bowdler WI	45
2 Aug	Preparing for War - in the Air and on the Rails	14
3 Aug	Preparing for War - in the Air and on the Rails	19
20 Aug	Dormice and Archangels in the Hope Valley guided walk	cancelled
30 Aug	Close to the Edge at the Munslovs guided walk	14
17 Sep	JMA Intro session with Clun Primary School	20
18 Sep	JMA Intro session with Newcastle Primary School	17
19 Sep	Parish Planning session with Norbury Primary School and CPRE	40
20 Sep	The Kaiser gate-crashed my 21 <sup>st</sup> guided walk	22
24 Sep	JMA visit 1 to Brynmawr with Clun Primary School	23
19 Oct	Bogs, Frogs, Bridges and Knolls guided walk	cancelled
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>499</b>

## STAFFING

As part of the team restructure set out in papers for the 1 July meeting, recruitment was undertaken for the new Sustainable Business Officer post, with interviews on 8 September. Nigel McDonald was appointed and is due to start on 17 November. Nigel worked for the team ten years ago, and has most recently been running his own company in the field of interpretation.

### List of Background Papers

Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-19.

The full 2014-15 Team work programme can be made available to members on request.

### 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