



Committee and Date Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 17 March 2015	Item 3
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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 (Nov 2014 – present, N.B. not full Financial Year)

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**

The autumn and winter months have seen a lot of practical conservation activity at the hillfort and castle sites and on our six WREN-funded 'Rescuing rocks' sites with an excellent turnout from our 'Tuesday task' team of volunteers. In particular, sterling work has been completed at Callow Hill fort in Minsterley to clear the scheduled ancient monument of very dense vegetation. Between Sept and December 2014, 117 volunteers contributed £10,000 worth of work to the Scheme – the volunteers represent a fantastic resource and a significant effort for which we are very grateful.

Our two new Community Wildlife Groups have delivered their first year's survey reports as part of the first series of Annual General Meetings during February, and survey work for this Spring/Summer season is being planned now and will begin again in April.

Capital works have also been progressed with completion of our first access improvement works at Cothercott barytes mine and submission of a long awaited grant application to English Heritage which should mean that repairs to the nationally significant 1784 Nag's Head Engine House (Pontesbury) will go ahead later this year.

Since November the LPS team has organised and delivered 24 events and training activities - some examples include 'Working with cleft oak' 4-day course, Veteran tree tour, LIDAR seminar for professional partners, Earl's Hill horse logging, farmers evening with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and Vanishing Buildings visit to Bishop's Castle Heritage Resource Centre.

See <http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/>

- **LEADER** Local Development Strategy approved and budget allocated (see item 5).
- **Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund** launched to replace SDF. New guidance and support to applicants. 14 applications received for 2015-16 grants, with £25,300 to

distribute, including contributions from Jean Jackson Charitable Trust and Millichope Foundation. Conservation Fund Panel meets on 19 March to allocate grants.

Rivers Four year WREN-funded **River Clun Recovery Project** ready to start April 2015 (WREN is one of the Landfill Tax funds). Part time project officer post recruited. External contract (funded by Natural England) nearing completion for preparatory work for WREN project - including preparation of site management plans and engagement work. <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/>

Small project for **FARMSCOPER application in the Clun catchment** nearing completion, funded by Natural England area innovation fund. Six farm visits undertaken by ADAS to apply FARMSCOPER modelling tool to identify top farming practice measures to reduce loss of sediment, nitrate and phosphate into the river. Reports being prepared. This project supports actions and recommendations arising from the River Clun Nutrient Management Plan.

Meeting of Clun Catchment Partnership held, and input to Teme Partnership, Clun Steering Group, and Clun Field Officers Group.

- **Shuttles** services for 2015 commissioned, including third season of Castle Connect service from Ludlow. (Further information in agenda item 6).
- **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme** stands at 82 members. Evaluation carried out of last year's events, and 2015 events are being planned. Jacky Harrison has been helping on a voluntary basis to support the scheme.
- **Promotion** activity. 10 press releases issued (year to date) and increased output on social media. Joint Shropshire Hills 2015 Events and accommodation guide published (support to Shropshire Hills Tourism led publication). Website updated.
- **Advice and support** to a range of activities and projects, including joint work with CPRE and Norbury School, Bishop's Castle Town Hall, Long Mynd Dark Skies initiative, Rectory Wood & Field.
- Meetings held of **Wrekin Forest Partnership**. Opinion survey undertaken to inform new Wrekin Forest Plan, and draft plan in preparation.

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** available on website.
 - **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan** Ongoing support to Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership. <http://www.shropshirehillstourismpartnership.org.uk/>
 - **Planning**. Submissions on six planning applications – residential and tourism development at New House Farm, Church Stretton; solar farm at Henley, Acton Scott; poultry sheds at Hopton Heath and at Walcot; residential development at Cemetery Road, Church Stretton, and at Pontesford Hill. (see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/planning/planning-consultations/>).
- Input to draft of new Natural Environment Supplementary Planning Document.
- Input to 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**.
- Development work continuing on establishing the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund as a **charity**.

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**.
- Review of 2014 **volunteer-led guided walks programme**, and preparations for 2015.
- John Muir Award programme with **schools** (education/activity programme themed on wild places), currently working with Newcastle and Clun primary schools. Training day for leaders on John Muir Award planned for late March.
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** currently has 130 members (including joint couple/family memberships). Andrew Wood has been helping as a volunteer with member recruitment.

STAFFING

Alison Jones has been appointed to the four year, part-time post of Clun Catchment Officer (WREN project), starting 7 April subject to contract. Alison previously worked for the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) in Shropshire and most recently as a freelance farm conservation adviser.

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