

## Item 5. Project development

### 1. Summary

This paper describes briefly the current situation with project development in a number of areas.

### 2. Background

- 2.1. Previous work reported has mostly focussed on the development of one large project related to local products. As it has appeared less likely that such an approach will be able to secure funding, recent development is exploring a number of different possible projects, which are described below.
- 2.2. 'Sense of Place' proposed Heritage Lottery Fund bid. Good progress has been made in defining areas of project activity suitable for a Heritage Lottery Fund bid. A day's creative workshop with around 20 key stakeholders was held at Cardingmill Valley in February. The emphasis of the proposed work is on strengthening the connections between people and the landscape through volunteering, events, training, etc. An outline of the current proposals is at Appendix 1.
- 2.3. Local Products work and Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2007-13. There is a very close fit between the economic and social axes of this programme and our own local priorities relating to food and drink, tourism, energy, etc. This has justified close attention to the emerging proposals for implementation of the programme in the Region by Advantage West Midlands. It now seems clear that AWM do not want to use the AONB Partnership as a local delivery mechanism for the programme, but our interest is also to ensure that the Shropshire Hills area benefits from the programme whatever the implementation mechanism chosen.
- 2.4. After delays in the start of the programme, the government has now reached agreement with the EU over voluntary modulation, and the programme's budget has recently been announced. The majority of the money is allocated to agri-environment schemes (in particular the Entry Level Scheme – the large overall budget does not seem likely significantly to ease pressure on the Higher Level Scheme). There is more money available than expected for the social and economic strands delivered by Advantage West Midlands. There is a real concern however that AWM's preferred approach to implementation will disadvantage more peripheral rural areas such as the Shropshire Hills. The Partnership is making a concerted effort at lobbying AWM in this respect. We have attended local workshops on both RDPE and the Regional Economic Strategy, hosted a visit by Sue Prince (AWM Board member) in conjunction with the Clun Forest Land, Life & Livelihoods group, and the Chair has recently organised a visit by AWM's senior manager responsible for rural affairs.
- 2.5. The ability of the AONB Partnership to demonstrate social capacity building in its work and links with networks of land managers seems to be a key point to focus on. This may help to satisfy the requirements of the 'Leader' element of the programme, which emphasises a bottom-up approach and community involvement. The possibility that the AONB Partnership could be a Leader Local Action Group needs to be actively pursued. The fact that our work is strongly influenced by the regional Environmental Economy model, to which AWM are committed, is also a strength. The case will need to be made that this is especially relevant to areas like the Shropshire Hills, where there is very little else other than the 'environmental economy' (including land based industries, tourism, etc), in comparison with other parts of the region which have a much broader economic base.

- 2.6. The AONB Partnership will be able to influence and progress the local products model we have proposed with or without specific project funding, albeit to different levels. We can continue with strategic work to identify priorities, with co-ordination and communication between other partners and enabling through funding such as SDF. Over the last two years or so these mechanisms have enabled considerable progress to be made. There are an increasing number of others working in this area who can bring or access resources, and are usually grateful of assistance and some steering to fit with strategic priorities. This does not however mean that aspirations for project work by the AONB Partnership in this area are shelved. One angle we are looking at in relation to funding from Advantage West Midlands is whether by co-operating with other deliverers, a scale of activity can be achieved which meets AWM's need for 'transformational projects'. An obvious geographical focus is the Rural Regeneration Zone (defined by AWM) which covers Herefordshire, South Shropshire and areas around Oswestry and east of Telford. Opportunities for collaboration are being explored with Ruralscapes (who are very active in local food around Oswestry), with the Shropshire and Herefordshire Rural Hubs, and with a local products Leader project in Powys, bringing in cross-border dimensions.
- 2.7. Regional Woodfuel project proposal. Following this idea of regional collaboration, a meeting was recently held with the West Midlands AONBs and others in the region with an interest in woodfuel. The potential applicability of a model used in the South West region was explored. In this, a number of AONBs have each committed a sum from their Sustainable Development Funds, which has been matched by funding from the Regional Development Agency, to support the commissioning of medium scale log boilers. Following the meeting a project proposal is to be put together to present to Advantage West Midlands.
- 2.8. Possible geological project. Shropshire Geological Society have made a bid to the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund towards a project officer to progress further work on interpretation of geological sites and geotourism. The preferred arrangement is for the officer to be integrated as part of the AONB Team.
- 2.9. Food & drink development. Collaboration is continuing with the Ludlow 21 Food & Farming Group and the South Shropshire Food events group regarding future development of Farmers Markets and related proposals for a local food hub. A funding bid is being drafted to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for a project officer, again with the preferred delivery arrangement being through the AONB Team.

### 3. RECOMMENDATION:

**The Management Board is requested to note progress and comment on the issues raised.**

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## **Appendix 1 Sense of Place, Heritage Grant Application.**

### **Rationale.**

The Shropshire Hills was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958 in recognition of the special landscape. This 'special-ness' comes from the mosaic of different features; hills, valleys, rivers, woodlands, built heritage and towns and villages. All of these have been shaped by human activity over the centuries. The impact humans have had on the landscape is not generally appreciated however, and arguably the biggest threats to the natural beauty of the area are changes in farming and land management.

By developing a "Friends of the Shropshire Hills" group, this project would help local people and visitors understand the heritage of the area, the impact of man's activity and teach them how to recognise clues that help to read the landscape. It would encourage local people to define what makes their part of the AONB distinctive. It would also teach people traditional skills and allow them to get involved in the conservation and enhancement of the landscape for future generations.

### **1. "Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB" Group and Volunteer Programme.**

The main output of the project would be to develop a "Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB" group. This would include a newsletter and website and a programme of volunteer sessions that will develop traditional skills and interpretation. Volunteers would work with farmers, woodland owners, schools and public open spaces to conserve and enhance heritage as well as developing the Sense of Place work mentioned below. The work of the volunteers would focus on sites that were open to the public and interpretation of the sites could include the practical skills that are utilised in their conservation.

### **2. "Sense of Place".**

The project would encourage volunteers to work with local communities to identify what makes their area of the Shropshire Hills special and distinctive. This would include local traditions, cultural associations, myths and legends, BAP habitats and species and landscape features as well as what the area produces and how it is looked after.

It would include a 'generic' explanation of:

- Why the Shropshire Hills is an AONB,
- Importance of human activity in the hills- farming, forestry, mining etc on how it looks today,
- Importance of conserving and enhancing the landscape, how people can get involved and what they can do to help

The community would be taken on tours of their area to help increase awareness.

Outputs might include:

- A directory of open farms, activities, visitor facilities, and training courses and where to buy products associated with traditional land management in each area, which would build up a comprehensive guide to the Shropshire Hills as a whole.
- A DVD and website that could be used to create personalised visitor guides or to organise Shropshire Hills tours for tourism businesses and for general use.
- "Discover the Shropshire Hills" web pages could be used to collate all the information gathered. This would then be developed as part of the Discover Shropshire website.

The information would be targeted at tourism businesses, schools and local groups and could be used to help inform parish plans and planning policies. They should also be used as tools to connect urban communities (either from local town and villages or from further a field) with the countryside and heritage of the Shropshire Hills.

Development of this programme would be in partnership with SCC Archives, the National Trust, local history groups, other community groups and parish councils.

### **3. Programme of Training in Traditional Skills, Wildlife and Interpretation.**

The project would develop a programme of training for landowners, volunteers, small holders, tourism businesses, residents and visitors. This would include courses on:

- Countryside management- Coppicing, pollarding, hedge laying, stonewalling, stone masonry, orchard management, livestock management
- Farming- producing food, changes over the years, different approaches.
- Industrial processes- Quarrying, brick making, charcoal making and woodland crafts. Use of local materials and how to find/ make your own.
- Traditional living- Cooking and local recipes, cider making, harvesting and using wild foods, traditional breeds and cuts of meat, living on a medieval farm.
- Interpretation of the landscape- Impact of man's activities on the landscape, how to read the landscape to understand how it has been managed (farming and forestry, hedgerows, trees, field patterns, mining). Importance of buying choices in landscape conservation.
- Biodiversity training- wildlife surveying and mapping, understanding ecosystems
- Arts and the environment- using the landscape to inspire art, poetry and creative writing.
- New media recording equipment- to record oral history and develop interpretation.
- Walks leader training- to encourage volunteers to lead walks and interpret the countryside.

The training would be delivered in partnership with existing providers and act as an umbrella to cover all the groups providing landscape base training. NVQs could be offered in partnership with BTCV and local colleges.

### **4. Education Programme.**

A resource pack would be created about the Shropshire Hills AONB, which could be used for the Sense of Place work as well.

Farming, woodland management and water protection resource boxes would be created for use by schools, looking at traditional management, impact on the landscape, comparing different approaches to management and highlighting some of the issues with modern techniques.

Other resources could look at key features, e.g. bridges, drovers' roads, orchards, traditional breeds or Biodiversity Action Plan species such as curlew, salmon or pearl mussel.

The resource boxes would be tied in with farms, woodland and river education sites and the schools would be encouraged to 'adopt' these sites for ongoing educational work.

Friends of the Shropshire Hills could help manage education visits and develop the materials, catalogue other resources in the area and help promote them to schools.

The education work would be delivered in partnership with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust and the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and should be fully integrated to make the best of the resources that are currently available.

## **5. Increased Access to Farms, Rivers and Woodlands.**

New and existing routes and interesting sites would be developed and interpreted to explain the heritage of the area. Volunteers would help develop the sites and would be trained as guides. Where possible the interpretation of the sites should be influenced by older people who remember the area and are happy to talk about it.

The sites and routes would build upon those developed in the Blue Remembered Hills project amongst others, including farm sites. In particular, tracks that have special historical significance such as drovers' roads should be interpreted as should any important features along the route, e.g. bridges, smithies, orchards etc.

Farm, river and woodland tours and promoted walks that explain the impact of the farming and woodland management on the landscape and the importance of historic features should be highlighted as part of this process.

## **6. Interpretation.**

A series of downloadable audio visual interpretation would be developed. It would consider the impact of man's activity, why the landscape looks like it does today, cultural traditions, myths and legends and issues for the future. The interpretation should compare different land management and farming methods and consider the impact those have on the environment. It could touch on bigger issues such as global warming and resource protection as well.

These would be developed by the Friends of the Shropshire Hills volunteers in collaboration with other local people, alongside the "Sense of Place" work.

## **7. Events, Festivals and Community Activities**

A programme of events would be developed by the volunteers, in collaboration with local communities to celebrate local traditions and products identified through the "Sense of Place" work. E.g. a wassail, apple day, pie making festival, village fete, farmers markets, food and wood fairs. . Link traditional producers with the public.

## **8. Shropshire Hills Branding.**

The project would also research a Shropshire Hills brand for the products of traditional land management to guarantee the environmental benefits of the products, thus enabling consumers to make an informed choice about purchasing products that help conserve and enhance the Shropshire Hills.

Key symbols of the landscape could be used to act as an emotional hook to engage people. For example, a Shropshire Hills otter could be used to 'brand' river sites, resources, interpretation and products.