

Item 6. A strategic approach to engaging with communities

1. Summary

This paper proposes a rationale and priorities for community engagement by the AONB Partnership, and seeks endorsement of the approach outlined.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Team's capacity in this area of work has been significantly boosted by the creation of the Community Officer post, and a structured approach is required, showing how the work of this post links with other activities. Appendix 1 proposes a very simple strategy for community engagement by the AONB Partnership, with target groups and actions.

3. RECOMMENDATION:

The Management Board is requested to comment on the comments suggested and options recommended, and to endorse the Partnership's response to the consultation.

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Appendix 1 A strategic approach to engaging with communities

Why?

- Involving local people is fundamental to the AONB's approach, and needs to act as a theme across all of our work.
- Social inclusion is a priority for our funders, including local authorities and Natural England. (Defra's Diversity review of 2006 seeks to broaden involvement in enjoyment of the countryside).
- We can learn from 'indigenous' knowledge of the Shropshire Hills.
- We need to raise awareness of the AONB and its special qualities.
- It will strengthen the AONB Management Plan – by better representing community views in its content, and by gaining greater support for it.
- We can help to build capacity of the community to act for conservation.

Who?

Within the community, key target groups for the AONB are:

- Farmers and landowners
- Parish Councils and Parish Plan groups
- Other community groups, voluntary groups, etc
- Community structures, such as Local Strategic Partnerships and Market Towns Initiatives
- Under-represented groups, including young people, older people, the less able, minority ethnic and low income groups.
- General public in and around the AONB (activity to engage with this group is perhaps better described as 'promotion' rather than 'community work').

How?

- AONB Partnership – representation includes community members. Members act as advocates for the AONB within the wider community.
- AONB Team.
 - Blue Remembered Hills staff have an important role – lots of contact with landowners, Down to Earth, etc. Issues of continuity after project.
 - Community Officer – key role.
 - Promotions & Access Officer – promotion work is an important means of engagement.
 - Planning & Policy Officer – support e.g. for Village/Parish Design Statements.
 - Landscape Conservation Officer – providing information, events.
- Work with and through partners.

What?

(Subheadings show areas of activity in approximate order of scale and importance. Actions are shown in italics with high priority actions on bold).

Blue Remembered Hills project

Project mechanisms are well established.

- ***Consider continuity issues as part of exit strategy.***
- *Seek linkages and co-ordination with other work.*
- ***Establish final area for Down to Earth in 2007.***

AONB Management Plan review

- *Develop appropriate consultation process for Management Plan review, drawing where possible on existing sources of information.*

Other work with farmers and landowners

- ***Continue support for Clun Forest Group.***
- ***Establish Upper Onny Area Working Group as development of LongStones project.***
- ***Direct engagement with farmers and landowners in Upper Onny area in support of Working Group and area-focused activity.***
- ***Consultation related to future project development, e.g. local products, sustainable grazing.***
- *Seek to improve landowner representation on AONB Partnership.*
- *Offer talks to local NFU branch.*

Sustainable Development Fund

Mechanisms established. Pre- application advice, support and monitoring during implementation of projects.

- *Establish simple carbon footprinting method to use with applicants.*

Parish Plans

Limited involvement to date, several talks given at Community Council parish planning seminars. Clear rationale for involvement needed.

The AONB extends into 82 parishes, some of which are administered jointly, with only 60 parish councils. A large majority are only partly within the AONB - only 16 parishes (9 parish council areas) are wholly within the AONB. At April 2006, 9 Parish Plans were complete and a further 7 in progress. The Community Council of Shropshire support the general process of preparing a parish plan. The AONB's involvement should aim to complement other sources of support, and will have value at all stages of the Parish Planning cycle.

- *Prepare a factsheet about the AONB specifically aimed at Parish Plan Steering Groups.*
- ***Offer talks about the AONB to groups preparing a plan, to encourage well informed consideration of landscape issues.***
- *Seek information from Parish Plan questionnaires as valuable evidence on community views, e.g. for Management Plan review.*
- ***Make contact with all Parishes which have completed plans, offering support and advice in relation to actions proposed.***
- *Support the development of Village Design Statements.*
- *Offer talks about the AONB to parishes not currently involved with Parish Planning.*

Advice on grants and projects – other community groups

- *Work with South Shropshire Partnership on a guide to funding sources for environmental projects.*
- *Offer support and advice to general community groups on a reactive basis.*

Volunteering

- *Complete simple directory of environmental volunteering opportunities in the AONB and make available through website. Update as necessary.*
- *Over time, establish contact with volunteering providers, to gain a clearer picture of what they do, what factors influence their development and whether the AONB can help.*

Local Strategic Partnerships and Market Town Initiatives

The AONB Partnership is represented on the South Shropshire Partnership Board, Shropshire Partnership Standing Conference and Shropshire Environment Forum (AONB Manager), Chair of South Shropshire Environment Ambition Group (Planning & Policy Officer).

- *Continue input into Shropshire and South Shropshire Partnerships.*
- *Establish contact with Bridgnorth, Telford & Wrekin and Shrewsbury & Atcham Partnerships.*
- *Hold liaison meeting with relevant Market Town Initiatives to update each way on current issues and activity.*

Events and talks. Includes our own events and attending events of others.

- *Support volunteer leaders for events to boost programme, especially post BRH.*
- *Target events at broadening involvement.*

Education and training

The Shropshire Hills Lifelong Learning Network has been dormant for a year, and it is not practical for the Team to continue to support this. Education and training is not an area of strength for the Team currently.

- ***Prepare awareness strategy linking interpretation, lifelong learning and promotion activity and consult with stakeholders.***
- *Wind up Shropshire Hills Lifelong Learning network.*
- *Produce factsheet(s) about the AONB for schools.*
- *Develop manageable programme of schools activity post BRH.*
- *Research the topic of skills and training related to the AONB, and identify actions.*
- *Maintain contact with Acton Scott skills centre development.*

Diversity/ outreach work

- *Map activity in the area by others and identify opportunities to support or develop our own activities targeted e.g. at the young, the elderly, minority ethnic groups, the less able and low income groups.*