

**Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership**  
**Access, Recreation & Tourism Working Group**  
**Note of meeting 22nd September 2009**



**Present:**

Zoe Griffin	Shropshire Council (Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre)
Alison Patrick	Shropshire Council (Tourism Development Officer)
Ian Kemsley	South Shropshire Tourism Limited (SST)
Sue Lee	Long Mynd & District Bridleways Association
Bob Welch	Church Stretton Town Council
Phil Holden	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (AONB Partnership Manager)
Stephanie Hayes	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (Promotions Officer)
Stewart Minton-Beddoes	Country Land & Business Association
David Shelley	Ramblers Association
Anna Morris	Shropshire Council (Cycling Officer, Highways)

Nick Holden and Chris Endecott - Gfleet Services Ltd, Sustainable Transport Consultants, Shrewsbury, representing Rea Valley Environmental Network (ReaVEN)

**Apologies:**

Tim King	Shropshire Council (Tourism Development Officer)
Emma Smith	Shropshire Council (Tourism Research Unit)
Deb Hughes	Shropshire Council (Countryside Access Manager)
Jim Stabler	Shropshire Council (Access Development Officer)
Clare Fildes	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (Development Officer)

**1. Note of last meeting (17 March 2009) and matters arising**

The notes were agreed as accurate.

Actions – Summary of SDF projects had been circulated. Destination Management Partnership (DMP) funding guidelines had not yet been circulated. Alison agreed to do this and explained that grants were available for a range of things including marketing, skills and training, networking, etc. Gary Spence at Shropshire Council administering this funding.

**2. Presentation by Nick Holden on behalf of the Rea Valley Environmental Network – Turning the old Minsterley branch line into the Rea Valley Cycle Way**

Nick explained the background to the project – it is an idea that has been around for some years. The disused Minsterley branch line runs from Shrewsbury through Hanwood, Pontesbury and Minsterley, and connects to the former mineral line to Snailbeach. The proposal is to turn the disused railway line into the Rea Valley Cycle Way, which could attract visitors and economic benefit to the area, in a sustainable, low carbon way.

The tracks were lifted in 1969/70, but the trackbed and infrastructure remains in place and much of the land is owned by the Council (Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council (SABC) had it in their plans as a 'protected route'). ReaVEN had identified three landowners along the route who would need to be consulted. Stewart reminded the group that infrastructure and ownership were the two big issues which came up in the feasibility study on a possible Craven Arms to Bishop's Castle cycle way a number of years ago.

The proposal is to start the cycle trail in Shrewsbury at the old Abbey Station which has recently received £150,000 from SABC to develop the site. This would be an ideal starting point with the car park facilities and historic railway links.

Anna told the group that the Council was looking to develop a cycling hub and hire facility at Shrewsbury railway station, and was doubtful that the town could support two 'hubs'. Discussion followed around the potential to link the two sites and the benefit of one and the other.

ReaVEN has commissioned Les Lumsdon, from the University of Central Lancashire to undertake a feasibility study on development of the cycle route, and this is ongoing at the moment. Some funding still needs to be secured to complete the study. Phil said the AONB Partnership may be able to help with some of this and suggested that the Council might be approached too in order to get all relevant parties involved.

Nick explained that Shropshire Council owned a section of the former railway line and that the Countryside Access Team had restored 1km of it from Pontesbury to Pontesford at a cost of £14k, with funding from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund.

Anna explained that Shrewsbury has been designated a 'Cycling Town 2008-11' with £3.6 million to invest in utility cycling in and around Shrewsbury (5 mile radius). The majority of that funding would be spent on journeys to schools, the work place and accessing services. Leisure cycling was not a priority. She also highlighted that the Council were already looking at a roadside cycleway between Minsterley and Pontesbury and discussion followed around this proposed route and the route along the disused railway line. Nick said that the roadside route had been proposed over 20 years ago and needed to be reconsidered due to a number of issues. These included that fact that it would involve removing a long section of ancient hedge and the route would still be next to the road, with traffic and fumes, etc. He explained that the disused railway route goes along the back of the Minsterley creamery and is a shorter route, just under one mile. David asked whether the AONB Partnership should have a position on this and Phil said the feasibility study would assess both routes and we should wait until the findings were published.

Alison commented on the attractiveness of the cycle way proposal and could see the benefits from starting the trail at the old Abbey station with easy access to the car park for visitors enjoying a day cycle into the Shropshire Hills. Phil thanked Nick and Chris for coming, concluding that it was indeed an exciting project and potentially an excellent access point into the AONB and that he was looking forward to reading the feasibility study.

### **3. 2009-10 Sustainable Development Fund projects linked to access and tourism [Mgt Plan Action 0.1]**

21 projects have received grants, totalling over £59,000, from this year's Sustainable Development Fund (a list of the projects was sent to the working group with the agenda for October meeting). Not many of the projects are access or tourism related this year. Phil said that the concept of a cycle route using the disused railway along Wenlock Edge had come up a number of times, and that the National Trust were keen on the idea. He felt that a feasibility study of this might make a good future SDF project.

### **4. LEADER in the Shropshire Hills [Action 0.2]**

The formal contract for LEADER in the Shropshire Hills was signed by AWM on 17 September 2009, after nearly two years of preparation work by the AONB Partnership. LEADER brings funding of c£1 million from now to 2013, and Pete Banford, LEADER Co-ordinator, has been working with applicants to get a number of projects up to full application so they can be appraised and approved as soon as possible.

### **5. Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme [Action 5]**

This scheme has been running for about a year and a half and currently has 60 members. A Sustainability Toolkit has been developed for business members, and a Shropshire Hills

'Sense of Place' collection enables businesses (especially in tourism) to use images and text about the special qualities of the AONB for use in promotion. A number of Business Scheme 'Champions' are encouraging others in their local area to join up, and a series of marketing workshops have been organised. The Southern Shropshire Partnership has agreed to fund a graduate placement post with the AONB Partnership to encourage uptake of membership, especially into the former Bridgnorth District area – this post will be filled in the next month or so.

## **6. Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Strategy Implementation [Action 77]**

Bob Welch explained that the Church Stretton Marketing Plan has been completed and is a big step forward for the town and its aim to promote itself as an activity centre in the Shropshire Hills. The 'Better Welcome' programme is under way in the town, and includes historic town plaques, benches, new road signs, etc. To strengthen the town's sustainability credentials, the Town Council is working with Stretton Climate Care to calculate Church Stretton's carbon footprint and hoping to sign up to the national 10:10 campaign, which encourages individuals, businesses, etc. to pledge a 10% reduction in emissions during 2010 (<http://www.1010uk.org>). Bob stressed that sustainability needs to be much more integrated within the Shropshire Council Core Strategy and Community Strategy as it is in the AONB Management Plan.

## **7. 'Offa's Dyke Country' project [Action 79]**

The AONB Partnership managed the contract for production of a 'Welsh – English Border Regeneration Strategy' by Resources for Change, a Welshpool based consultancy, and this is available at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/partnership/Welsh-EnglishBorder.htm>.

The Strategy investigated the potential to use Offa's Dyke as a thread to link regeneration along the Welsh – English border, and looked at the opportunities and issues surrounding this idea. Implementation of the Strategy has been picked up by the Central Wales – West Midlands cross-border working Memorandum structure, and they are intending to appoint an officer to take the work forward. Clare was now using the Strategy as evidence to support development of a cross-border tourism project centred on Offa's Dyke, and working with other protected landscapes. The issue was raised about the potential impact on this work of a change of government, and it was agreed there could be an effect but this was uncertain.

## **8. Shropshire Hills Shuttles and other public transport news [Action 88]**

Since this meeting, Shuttle passenger numbers have been corrected and the 2009 Shuttle season has in fact had record passenger numbers with over 8,000 people using the buses. Feedback has been generally good from passengers and planning is under way for next season. The Southern Shropshire Partnership turned down the application to support a new Wenlock Wanderer route due to concerns over the future sustainability of the service. The AONB Partnership is looking for funding from other sources, but hopes to run the new route as a trial over the 2010 summer holidays.

## **9. The Shropshire Way project [Action 94]**

No-one from the Shropshire Council Access Team was available to join the meeting. Phil noted that it was unfortunate that the Shropshire Way promotion and new guide does not particularly highlight the AONB, and felt that there was a missed opportunity in terms of promoting a key walking route in a nationally important landscape.

## **10. Events booklet 2009 [Action 101]**

The success of the 2009 Shropshire Hills events booklet means that this will be produced for 2010 in a similar format. The booklet will be produced by the end of January and Steph is collating events, news, images and articles at the moment.

**Action: Any confirmed events to Steph by 14th January.**

## **11. Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre [Action 27.7] – incl. walks leaflets reprint**

Zoe commented that the summer season had been busy at the Centre, with a lot of people using it as a base for walking. The circular walks leaflets from the Discovery Centre have been updated and reprinted. There are discussions with other groups in Craven Arms to make the River Onny more of a feature in the town with better interpretation.

## **12. Countryside Access Strategy and Implementation**

No-one from the Shropshire Council Access Team was present to provide an update. It was noted that Jim Stabler has taken up the role of Access Development Officer in the Access Team, replacing Karen Wilson who left the Council in spring. David Shelley commented that the Ramblers Association had contacted all the new councillors and had received some replies.

## **13. Other Funding**

- Destination Management Partnership (DMP) allocations 2009-10

**Action: Alison Patrick would circulate details of the DMP funding.**

- Advantage West Midlands 'Natural Assets' funding

Phil updated that this AWM funding would shortly become available through a grant scheme run by Natural England. The West Midlands AONBs had been involved in its development, and hoped to develop projects with complementary themes. It was Clare's intention to pursue the Offa's Dyke tourism work under this funding stream.

## **14. AOB and date of next meeting**

Zoe mentioned that Sue Goodwin, Arts Officer at Shropshire Council was co-ordinating review of the Cultural Strategy for Shropshire. Phil noted that the AONB Partnership had made some comments on the consultation draft.

David mentioned that recent work on the Sheinton Brook bridge on the A458 (Much Wenlock – Bridgnorth road) is a blot on the landscape, and asked if the AONB Partnership was consulted by Highways? Phil said that there was no consultation procedure in place with Highways and that the Management Plan had highlighted a need to establish this. He said that work to build a better link would be pursued when the new Planning Officer was in post.

Anna said that Shropshire Council were reviewing cycle parking outside Shrewsbury and that suggestions for new provision could be made to James Purkiss in the Highways team. Anna also invited the AONB Partnership to speak at their Cycle Forum at Cardingmill Valley on 16th June 2010 during national bike week (13 – 21 June 2010).

**Date of the next meeting is Tuesday 9th March 2010, 10am at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms.**