



Shropshire Hills

Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Strategy



2008 - 2013

Church Stretton and Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy

April 2008

Prepared for:

Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Initiative Steering Group

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Church Stretton Town Council, the National Trust, Church Stretton Area Tourism Group, South Shropshire District Council and other local organisations, businesses and individuals.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan has been developed by a new partnership of local organisations, drawing together the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and the National Trust with the South Shropshire District Council, the Church Stretton Town Council, the Area Tourism Group, the Church Stretton Visitor Centre and the Stretton Climate Care Group, in consultation with local businesses and community organisations.

It is a blueprint for collaborative action over the next five years for all those involved in tourism and the visitor economy in Church Stretton and the surrounding Shropshire Hills. It is grounded in an understanding that we can all be more effective if we work together in implementing a common vision for sustainable tourism. It is designed to be a working document that can be updated as the town and its partners identify new opportunities for development. It will be the responsibility of the Sustainable Tourism Action Group, comprised of representatives of all the participating organisations, to oversee the implementation of this Action Plan.

Tourism has long been recognised as an important sector in the town. The Church Stretton Area Tourism Group, in particular, has been working to raise tourism's profile and improve the welcome for visitors over many years with its enthusiastic volunteers leading many initiatives. However, up to now, tourism businesses have been operating largely in isolation from one another. The aim of the Strategy is to strengthen the local economy, while enhancing the quality of life of both residents and visitors, as well as conserving the beautiful local landscape.

Sustainable Tourism - a definition

A sustainable approach to tourism can be defined as one which seeks to achieve less impact on the environment, more understanding and enjoyment, and more benefit to the local economy and community.

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Position Statement on Sustainable Tourism Feb 2006

Local residents have already shown a commitment to making a contribution to the challenge of global warming by the initiatives prompted by the Climate Care Group and the starting campaign to reduce the use of plastic bags. This Strategy seeks to build on that commitment. Our local economy depends upon increasing the footfall in our town throughout the year but we need to achieve that goal while reducing our carbon footprint. By setting an example, residents can influence visitors to follow suit.

By co-ordinating our efforts, we can place ourselves in the forefront of the developing movement of sustainable tourism. Such an approach also means that we will be attracting the type of visitors who will share our commitment to conserving our Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Traditional agriculture, which has shaped the varied landscape of the area, is now more closely integrated with tourism, the sustainability of the landscape now depending upon them working in tandem with one another, as farmers diversify to attract visitor income.

It is worth underlining that tourism is a major contributor to the local economy of South Shropshire:

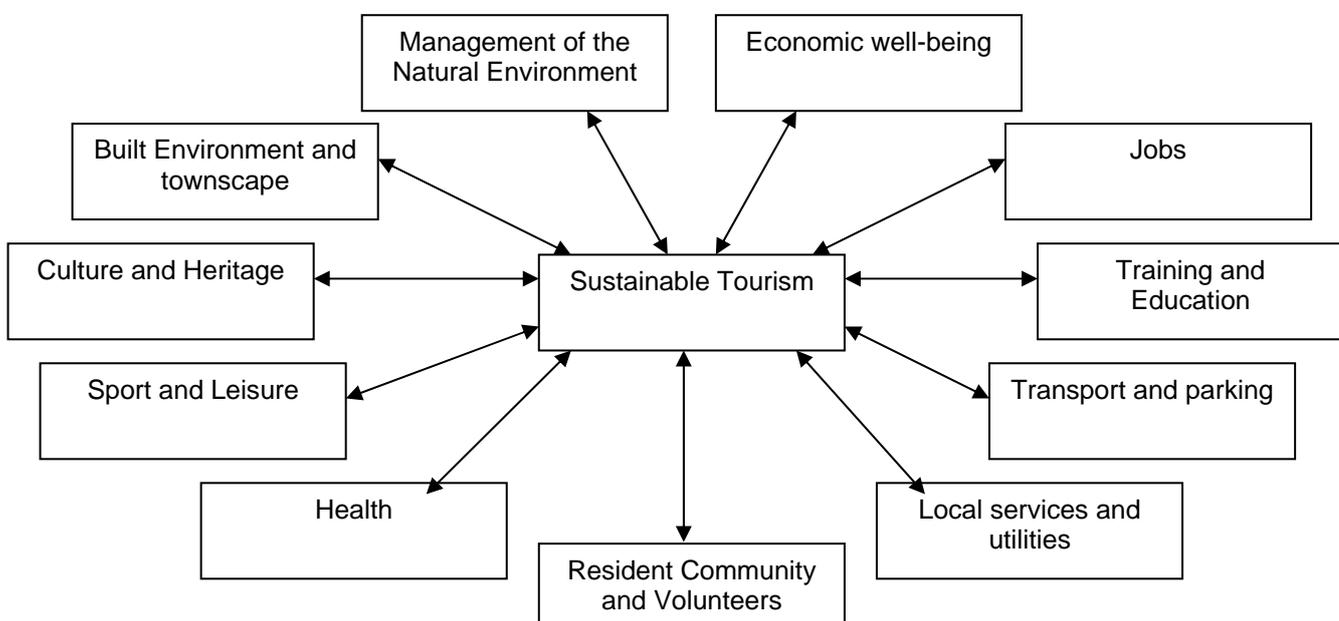
Tourism in South Shropshire was worth £116.7million in 2005
 It supports approximately 3,500 jobs in total
Volume and Value of Tourism In South Shropshire, STRU, 2005

1.2 Context

This Strategy is designed to fit with a range of other strategies and policy documents. These include the South Shropshire Tourism Strategy (2008), the Shropshire Destination Management Plan (2008) and the West Midland Visitor Economy Strategy (reviewed 2007/8). All support the need for a sustainable approach to tourism, the importance of conserving special landscapes and the potential for heritage and outdoor activities to appeal to visitors. The West Midlands Rural Development Plan (2008) provides the broader regional context.

The Strategy will be implemented in co-ordination with the Management Plans of the National Trust and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership - particularly its policies on leisure, recreation, tourism and landscape and the position statement on Sustainable Tourism - see Annex 1. Church Stretton has a recently agreed Town Design Statement and the Town Council is developing a new town plan. This Strategy can be used to inform and drive forward tourism related actions in all of these agendas. Annex 2 includes a list of relevant policy and research documents.

The diagram below illustrates how sustainable tourism relates to a wide range of other local factors and has a contribution to make to them all. Tourism may either help sustain the other elements and/or create a justification for investment in them.



1.3 Process

The Sustainable Tourism Initiative Steering Group commissioned Alison Caffyn, as a free-lance tourism consultant, to research and facilitate this project. Funding for the work was received through the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Development Fund and the South Shropshire Opportunities Fund. The work started in September 2007 and is being completed in April 2008.

Phase One involved a range of research and consultation:

1. Liaison with the Better Welcome Market Town Tourism Programme in which Church Stretton has participated along with 27 other West Midlands market towns.
2. A survey of businesses in the Church Stretton hinterland to complement the recent Better Welcome survey of town based businesses.
3. Research and presentation of four case studies of good practice in other similar parts of the UK.
4. Compilation of other recent relevant research, such as the Shropshire Sustainable Tourism Survey.
5. A workshop in November 2007 to discuss issues and priority topics and to raise awareness of existing help and advice for tourism businesses.

Phase Two built on the outcomes of the workshop when five key themes were identified for further events:

- **Heritage** - A meeting of local heritage interests in January 2008 to discuss developing the interpretation of local heritage.
- **Walking** - A 'Welcoming Walkers' workshop in February 2008 to promote the town's bid to become a Walkers are Welcome town and encourage more businesses to market themselves to walking enthusiasts.
- **Promoting the Shropshire Hills and Local Food and Drink** - The launch of the 'Buy Local Be Sustainable' scheme by the AONB in March - encouraging local businesses to source local food, drink and other products and sign up for a new website and pledge allowing them to use the AONB logo and promote the Shropshire Hills more strongly.
- **Outdoor activities** - An outdoor activity familiarisation trip in April visiting local outdoor activity operators to help improve local knowledge of what's on offer and discuss ideas for more co-ordination and promotion.

The Strategy and Action Plan bring together all the ideas generated during these events and organises them into a set of objectives and actions. A list of all those who attended at least one of the events is included in Annex 3.

Collaboration and learning from best practice

The process has involved learning from best practice elsewhere and also linking in with other market towns in Shropshire and the rest of the region through the Better Welcome Programme. There will be opportunities to continue this in future - learning how other areas develop and promote sustainable tourism in the UK and across Europe.

2. Vision and aims

2.1 Tourism Vision for Church Stretton

This statement, drafted collaboratively, provides the vision or goals for this Strategy.

Vision Statement:

In 5-10 years' time, the town of Church Stretton will be renowned as the 'Heart of the Shropshire Hills' - a town offering a unique combination of attractive and interesting townscape set within a tranquil and unspoilt landscape - the service centre for the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The town will be known nationally as a centre of excellence for all levels of walking and a variety of exciting outdoor activities for all ages. It will offer a diverse range of good quality shops and eating places, a thriving market and will work in close co-operation with surrounding rural communities.

The town and its tourism businesses will promote themselves as green and sustainable and will use quality local food, drink and other products, with the full backing of local residents. Public transport will be developed and co-ordinated to enable visitors to access the surrounding hills and attractions, making less use of their cars.

The Shropshire Hills will be conserved and appreciated as a mosaic of managed and wild landscapes and special habitats. Visitors will be impressed by the friendliness of their welcome, the quality of service and the general care taken to help them relax, explore and enjoy a variety of activities in the Shropshire Hills.

All of these activities will be marketed in a co-ordinated way, taking maximum advantage of e-marketing and on-line booking, making it easy for visitors to customise programmes of activity to suit their individual interests.

2.2 Strategy Aims

The Introduction spelled out why tourism is important and why this strategy is taking a sustainable approach. The process has built on the principles of the 'VICE model' for local destination management. This model was developed by the national tourism agencies and the Tourism Management Institute to encourage the development of sustainable tourism. It aims to ensure positive outcomes for Visitors, the tourism Industry, local Communities and the built and natural Environment. So, the destination plans aim to develop tourism which:

- Welcomes, involves and satisfies **V**isitors
- Achieves a prosperous and profitable **I**ndustry
- Engages and benefits host **C**ommunities
- Protects and enhances the local **E**nvironment

The Strategy's aims are:

- To help develop the tourism potential of Church Stretton and strengthen its identity for visitors.
- To develop, manage and market tourism in a sustainable way, ensuring benefits for the local economy, community and environment.
- To improve visitor satisfaction by enhancing the quality of the experience and thus encouraging more repeat visits and recommendations.
- To increase revenue from tourism and support rewarding jobs in the visitor economy throughout the year.
- To encourage the cross fertilisation of ideas, joint working, identifying the top priorities for action.

3. Our visitors

Current visitors

The profile of current visitors to Church Stretton town has been well analysed in the survey carried out in summer 2007 as part of the Better Welcome Programme for Action for Market Towns. The key data from this survey is given in Annex 4.

Current visitors are dominated by adult couples, about a quarter of which are staying overnight in the town. The main age range is 55-64, certainly the bulk of visitors are over 45. Church Stretton attracts a higher proportion of visitors from higher socio-economic groups than most market towns. Over 90% of visitors are on holiday or leisure trips with 8% visiting friends or relatives.

The average length of stay for day visits was quite low at 2 hours 57 minutes, compared to a county average of 3 hours 21 mins. There are some days such as Bank Holidays when very large numbers of day visitors drive to locations such as Cardingmill Valley which faces temporary management problems due to the numbers.

Staying visitors remained in the town longer than average - 5 nights, compared to the county average of 4.3 nights. Most visitors travel by car with over 86% arriving in town by car. This presents a challenge for a sustainable tourism strategy to encourage more people to use sustainable forms of transport to arrive and also during their stay.

Walking is a popular activity with visitors. Some specific research was carried out into walkers in 2005.

Future visitors

This strategy aims to guide tourism in Church Stretton and the Shropshire Hills over the next five years and improve its sustainability for the longer term. So, it must consider who future visitors will be and how they may differ from the current visitor profile. Annex 4 also includes a detailed assessment of future trends affecting tourism and what visitors will be looking for.

The main markets which Church Stretton should collectively and pro-actively target at the moment are:

- **Traditionals**
- **Discoverers**
- **Walkers**

Particularly those in each group whose main motivation is seeking activities and/or rest and relaxation. Traditionals and Discoverers are defined in terms of their values and attitudes as well as the types of holidays and activities they enjoy - see details in Annex 4.

Accordingly, this Strategy promotes the targeting of older and more affluent visitors, increasingly attuned to issues of sustainability, but with wide-ranging interests in countryside, heritage and culture, including the food and drink specialities of the area. These visitors have the means to take multiple short breaks. However, as the area expands the range of outdoor activities on offer, so it will increase its appeal to families and younger people, using camping and caravanning facilities, who, by reason of cost and growing environmental concern, are becoming less inclined to holiday abroad. There is also scope to specifically target under-represented types of visitors such as black and ethnic minority groups from the Midlands conurbation who may not have regular access to the countryside.

4. Church Stretton and the Shropshire Hills - The tourism offer

4.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

This section summarises what Church Stretton and the local Shropshire Hills area has to offer visitors. This helps identify what the main strengths of the town are and also what needs improving. A more detailed analysis, including data from the Better Welcome surveys and our own survey of local businesses, is included in Annex 5, including the issues of most importance to visitors and businesses and how visitors rated their experience.

At our workshop in November 2007, many suggestions were made for improvements, new ideas and proposals. The full list is given in Annex 6. The overall priorities on which there was general agreement were:

Overall priorities

- Better co-ordination of communication and effort
- Make better use of cultural heritage
- One overall strategy
- More visible children's activities for poor weather days
- Marketing - co-ordination of many different activities and strengths
- Linkages between attractions and events e.g. weekly activity bulletin

A full SWOT Analysis of Church Stretton's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats is set out in Annex 5. A summary is given here:

Strengths

Location and landscape
Range of outdoor activities and walking
Variety of accommodation
Community commitment
Environmental aspirations

Opportunities

Enhance townscape, market square
Interpret town's heritage
Strengthen partnerships
Promote local food and drink
Promote walking, activities and public transport

Weaknesses

Lack of specific visitor attractions
Poor market
Weak evening eating options
Lack of collective marketing

Threats

Competition from other towns or cheap holidays abroad
Failure to take opportunities and work together

The full list of opportunities has identified many ideas for action points, picked up in the Action Plan in section 6.

4.2 Church Stretton's Unique Selling Points

It is useful to focus on the area's greatest strengths. What is most special or unique about the town and area and, therefore, what will motivate people to visit.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. The Shropshire Hills</p> | <p>The Shropshire Hills are a protected landscape consisting of a mosaic of managed and wild land. Church Stretton is the only town within the AONB boundary. Its position, flanked by dramatic hills, reveals the fascinating geology and this special landscape provides fantastic walking and relaxing opportunities. The area is officially one of the only three remaining tranquil areas in England.</p> |
| <p>2. Walking and Outdoor Activities</p> | <p>The Hills and valleys offer varied and challenging walking. Church Stretton has been designated the first Walkers are Welcome Town in the Midlands. There is also a very wide range of exciting outdoor activities on offer in the local area - certainly more than anywhere else in Shropshire.</p> |
| <p>3. Local Food and Drink</p> | <p>Church Stretton has excellent cafes and an established Food Fayre. The area produces quality food and drink which would appeal to visitors - particularly if it is strongly linked to the landscape and agricultural heritage of the Shropshire Hills. This theme is still under developed at the moment and not well served through the poor market and lack of many good (evening) eating places.</p> |
| <p>4. Environmental/green agenda</p> | <p>The town promotes the Shropshire Hills shuttle buses, and through its Climate Care Group and others is pursuing several sustainable agendas such as offering energy audits and becoming a plastic bag free town.</p> |
| <p>5. Church Stretton's Heritage</p> | <p>Most towns have an interesting history. The unique story in Church Stretton is how the town grew up in the route through the hills, particularly after the arrival of the railway and the relationship of the railway and town to the landscape. The way the town was promoted as Little Switzerland attracting many Victorian tourists to visit.</p> |

Numbers 1 and 2 are currently considerably stronger than 3, 4 and 5 but there is good potential to develop these further.

5. Objectives

The Strategy outlines how the Church Stretton area can play to its strengths and unique selling points, shaping what it has to offer to meet the expectations of clearly identified target visitor groups. These will be mainly comprised of more affluent and established, independent-minded individuals and couples, interested in exploring the countryside, the wild life, the heritage and the food specialities of the area. These same individuals are increasingly sensitive to environmental issues and to all the components of a healthy life-style, as are families attracted to the expanding range of outdoor activities on offer in the area, suitable for children and young people of all ages. These are the other main target group. Reflecting on the town's Unique Selling Points and the Vision Statement, the following five main **priorities** stand out as the core elements of a sustainable tourism strategy:

Sustainable Tourism Priorities:

- 1. The Shropshire Hills**
- 2. Walking and Outdoor Activities**
- 3. Food and Drink and Local Sourcing**
- 4. Green Tourism**
- 5. Church Stretton's Heritage and Townscape**

In addition, to progress these priorities, two other elements are needed:

- 6. Marketing and Promotion**
- 7. Collaboration and Joint Working**

These seven priorities have been translated into seven objectives within the Action Plan:

Sustainable Tourism Objectives:

1. To strengthen and promote the identity of the Shropshire Hills, conserve its special landscape and tranquillity and increase understanding and appreciation of its wildlife and habitats.
2. To improve and promote opportunities for walking and other outdoor activities and use activities to strengthen and promote the identity of Church Stretton and the Shropshire Hills.
3. To improve the local food offer, by encouraging the local sourcing of food, drink and other products and to promote local food, drink and dishes to visitors.
4. To encourage businesses and visitors to act more sustainably, reducing the carbon footprint of tourism in and around Church Stretton and using cars less frequently.
5. To make more of Church Stretton's heritage telling its stories to visitors in a variety of ways and improving the townscape to make the whole town more welcoming.
6. To better co-ordinate and strengthen marketing and promotion activities using the above core priorities to attract visitors who will appreciate what the area has to offer.
7. To work together collaboratively to implement this strategy and improve communications to benefit the local visitor economy.

Most effort needs to be focused on areas where there will be most impact. There is a need to build confidence that things can be changed and improved in order for individuals and organisations to invest in their businesses and properties. All partners need to work together to make it happen - it will require effort and investment from private, public and voluntary sectors to make a step change over the next few years.

These priorities and objectives are broken down into a series of more specific actions in the next section in the form of an Action Plan.

6. Action Plan

This list of actions has been assembled from the many ideas and proposals that have been suggested during the course of this project, particularly during the events when discussion was wide ranging and stimulating. It is designed to be flexible with items being added or removed as appropriate - particularly when they have been achieved or perhaps dismissed as not possible. Shading reflects priority level.

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|--|--|-----------|-----------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. The Shropshire Hills - identity, landscape, wildlife | | | | | |
| 1.1 Shropshire Hills Buy Local be Sustainable scheme | Launched March 2008. Businesses can join and use the Shropshire Hills logo in return for pledging to implement sustainable practices in their business. Plans for several events or workshop to help businesses go green and market the area. Scope for more support through 'sense of place toolkit' to help provide text and imagery of the Shropshire hills for wider use. See also 3.1 and 4.1. | Ongoing | Very High | AONB, Chamber of Trade | No. of businesses using logo |
| 1.2 Promote 50th Anniversary of AONB designation | 2008 - opportunity to promote Shropshire Hills AONB identity. | Quick win | High | AONB | |
| 1.3 Wild Mynd briefing | There is some interest in promoting the local wildlife both improving local people's knowledge and for visitors. A wildlife themed familiarisation trip could be organised at an appropriate time of year for tourism staff and businesses to visit sites in the local area to enthuse them about wildlife and help them inform and enthuse their visitors. This could link with the recently published and popular Wild Mynd book - e.g. meeting the authors. | Quick Win | Very High | NT/SWT/AONB | No. of people attending |
| 1.4 Promote Shropshire Hills Events Leaflet | Promote leaflet and encourage visitors to attend events | Ongoing | Medium | AONB/ | Increased numbers on events |
| 1.5 Sense of place slide show | Film/DVD of the Shropshire Hills featuring images of local landscape and wildlife. It could play automatically at Cardingmill Valley, hotels and other locations or businesses could make it available for their visitors. Costs in region of £2,000, potential for sale to visitors and businesses. Amend current NT version or make more widely available? Versions on outdoor activities | Quick Win | Very High | National Trust/AONB | |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|--|---|-------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | and history of the town also possible see 2.12 and 5.8. Scope to work up proposal for funding | | | | |
| 1.6 Business-conservation partnerships | Local businesses could (independently or through a co-ordinated scheme) join a local conservation organisation such as the SWT, NT, Woodland Trust or link to a local authority conservation project such as Rectory Woods. By promoting these links to visitors and encouraging donations or others to join they can highlight local sites of interest and conservation work underway. | Medium Term | Medium | AONB | No. of businesses who are members |
| 1.7 Join Europarc and the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas | The AONB has investigated applying to join this international grouping of protected areas. Only a few other UK AONBs are members. It would require commissioning a sustainable tourism strategy for the whole AONB. | Long term | Medium | AONB | |
| 1.8 Photo competition | There are many amateur photographers locally and photography groups. By holding a competition or establishing an annual competition with a different theme each year PR would be generated and more quality shots of the Shropshire Hills could be sourced for further use. Current AONB competition. | Medium Term | Medium | Photographic Society/SSTA/AONB | |
| 1.9 Red Kites | There is a current proposal for a red kite feeding station to be established. This would help promote interest on local wildlife and be another opportunity for interpretation. | Medium Term | Medium | Private sector | |
| 2. Walking and Outdoor Activities | | | | | |
| 2.1 Walkers are Welcome Town | Church Stretton is now officially a WAW town. Four paths to be waymarked and new leaflets and publicity generated. Full launch 4 June at walking festival | Quick Win/Ongoing | Very High | CS walking group/CSATG | |
| 2.2 Walks info at station | Tourism and Walking group organising with new noticeboards with Arriva. | Quick Win | High | CS walking group/CSATG | |
| 2.3 Walking festival | Promote as flagship walking event. Scope to expand/extend or have a mini version in spring, autumn or winter. | Quick Win/Ongoing | Very High | CS walking group/CSATG | No of participants |
| 2.4 More walkers (and cyclists) welcome businesses | Encourage more accommodation businesses to apply for walkers and cyclists welcome accreditation when having their grading inspection. They can then use the | Short Term | High | | No. of businesses in the schemes |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|--|---|-----------------|-----------|---|--------------------|
| | logos in their promotion and be featured on the Shropshire walking, cycling (and riding) websites. Other businesses can link to Walkers are Welcome Town scheme. Encourage more meals targeted at walkers - hearty, warming, themed? | | | | |
| 2.5 Promote guided walks | Ensure information on guided walks both in the town and countryside is co-ordinated and well distributed. | Ongoing | High | VIC, Walking for Health, businesses | |
| 2.6 Support walking group | Monitor rights of way conditions, identify any key missing links and put pressure on Highways Authority to re-open/create. Train more guided walks leaders. | Ongoing | High | PPP, Alan Garner, National Trust, AONB, SCC | |
| 2.7 Host WAW annual conference | Proposed to host conference in 2009. Brings in visitors and promotes the town as a walking destination. | Short Term 2009 | High | CS walking group | No. attending |
| 2.8 Walkers special trains | Discuss scope for running special trains -eg during walking festival - with train operators. | Medium | Low | | |
| 2.9 Website pages | Set up web pages on walking, cycling and other activities on the town website. | Quick Win | Very High | Website volunteers? | |
| 2.10 Outdoor Activities Co-ordination | Visitors can fish, try archery, glide, paraglide, cycle, mountain bike, shoot, ride, go ballooning, geo-caching, fell running and play golf in or around Church Stretton However few of the operators work with each other or with accommodation/catering businesses. Much potential for joint promotion/packages, info on websites, possibly a passport scheme - targeted workshop/training? | Medium Term | High | | |
| 2.11 Promote activity events | Work collectively to have advance information of events and help promote to visitors and through PR eg Long Mynd Hike, International Archery competition, international groups visiting gliding club. More co-ordinated welcome for such groups, special offers. | Quick Win | High | | |
| 2.12 Outdoor activity DVD | Develop a DVD to showcase the range of activities - with film provided by operators. Similar to 1.5 and 5.8 could be for sale/show in relevant locations. | Short Term | High | | |
| 2.13 Promote cycling/mountain biking | Encourage cycling/biking businesses to promote the Church Stretton area more strongly and to link with accommodation and attractions Promote the attractive cycle rides leaflet produced in 2006/7, feature rides on website. Promote existing/new cycle hire facilities. Encourage businesses to provide secure cycle | Medium Term | Very High | SCC, Wheely Wonderful, Beyond Extreme, Terry Jones, John Waredale, Phil Harris, Polymer | |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|--|--|--------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | storage. Install cycle storage at station. Try out electric bicycles and use for PR see 4.9. | | | Cyclists | |
| 2.14 Develop closer links with budget accommodation providers | Some outdoor activity enthusiasts use bunkhouses, youth hostels, adventure camp, camp sites. Links with these are not strong - scope to encourage them to become more proactive working with other local businesses and initiatives and feature/links on website | Medium Term | Medium | VIC/CSATG | |
| 2.15 Innovative, high profile activity events | Such as a kite flying festival or model aircraft flying, to raise profile of area, particularly for outdoor activities Discussions about kite flying festival to be taken forward for 2009. | Short Term | Medium | ? | |
| 2.16 New leisure centre | Can be promoted to visitors. Scope to feature information on outdoor activities, health walks etc for use by locals and visitors. Playing fields and pavilion also being upgraded, plus skate park and BMX track. | Short Term/Ongoing | Medium | Town Council, new management | |
| 3. Food, drink and local sourcing | | | | | |
| 3.1 Buy Local Be sustainable scheme | See 1.1 and 4.1. The food and drink element of the scheme is to encourage local businesses to source local food, drink and other products locally. The www.shropshirehills-buylocal.co.uk website helps businesses find local suppliers and features accommodation which serves local food. Ensure businesses highlight the local food on menus and give menus some local distinctiveness. Scope to run meet the producer events and promote the scheme with more PR. Encourage sharing of information about sourcing, joint ordering etc via tourism group/e-network. | Short - Long Term | Very High | AONB, Chamber of Trade | No. of businesses on website |
| 3.2 Church Stretton Market | Local and visitors' views of the market are poor in the main. Discussions are ongoing about consolidating on certain days, improving the market square environment (see 5.13) and trying to attract more stalls. Other options may include relocating to a larger site such as a car park. | Medium | Very High | Town Council, Food Fayre Ctte | No of producers attending |
| 3.3 Capitalise on Food Fayre | The Food Fayre is now well established. It needs to be sustained on an annual basis, well linked into the town and there may be opportunities to link in with other | Short Term | High | Food Fayre Ctte | Attendance |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|-----------|--|-------------------------------------|
| | activities in this plan. | | | | |
| 3.4 New webpages | Town website to feature local food and recipes and link to new Shropshire hills site. | Short Term | Medium | Town Council | No. of new upgraded pages. |
| 3.5 Improve the evening food offer | Encourage several pubs and restaurants to offer a more upmarket and distinctive food choice in the evening. | Medium Term | Medium | Businesses, Chamber of Trade | |
| 3.6 Cafes opening late | Local cafes to discuss how to collaborate to extend opening hours, especially for the benefit of walkers coming off the hills in late afternoon. Perhaps on a rota basis. | Short Term | Medium | Businesses, chamber of trade | No. of hours/days extended to cover |
| 3.7 Make more of farming heritage | Gather research/information on local traditional crops and breeds, research local recipes and encourage more businesses or attractions to feature them or information on the traditions. Especially for family/ school markets. | Medium Term | Medium | YFC, Acton Scott | |
| 3.8 Farming links | Increase visitor understanding of farming practices and links to food and drink. | Medium Term | Low | YFC | |
| 3.9 Where to eat/shop booklet | Reintroduce the where to eat and shop booklet for the local area - could be based on buy local website data. | Short Term | High | AONB? | |
| 4. Green Tourism | | | | | |
| 4.1 Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme | See 1.1 and 3.1. The pledge element of the scheme encourages businesses to identify sustainable actions they can implement in their own business and an annual review of progress. Visitors are informed of what each business is doing by a chart attached to the signed pledge. A folder of information is being developed for each business and stickers etc can be used to promote the green credentials to customers. Scope for further training, advice, case studies, top tips, news. | Quick win and long term development | Very High | AONB, Climate Care, Chamber of Trade, other agencies | No. of businesses signed up |
| 4.2 Shropshire Hills Shuttles | Profile now well established but struggle to secure funding every year. Need to develop a sustainable future for the buses, extend the days they operate and promote them as a stronger brand eg bus with landscape painted on it. Link with community bus and county network. | Long Term | Very High | SCC/NT/AONB | Passenger no.s |
| 4.3 Green Visits Information | Compile an information pack about how a visitor might travel here in an environmentally friendly way, green | Quick Win | Very High | AONB, CSATG, TC, SCC | No.s of info sheets distributed. |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|---|---|---------------------|-----------|---|---------------------------------|
| | businesses to stay with and what green activities they can do while here. This could be held at the VIC for reference and a summary sheet distributed to all enquirers and local businesses. Summary sheet could be regularly added to and featured on the town website. | | | | |
| 4.4 Encourage more visitors to travel by train and coach | Currently only 3% of visitors arrive in town by train despite hourly services, fewer by coach. All businesses should feature train details in their publicity and on websites. They could offer pick ups from the station. Visitors could be encouraged to take days out by train once here - by posting train timetables and places that are easily accessible by train eg Shrewsbury, Craven Arms, Ludlow, Hereford, Heart of Wales Line. Links to 4.2. | Long Term | High | | increase in % using train |
| 4.5 Green Tourism Business Scheme | Encourage more tourism businesses to join the scheme | Long Term | Medium | CSATG, SSTA | No. of businesses in the scheme |
| 4.6 Co-ordinate green advice for tourism businesses | Several local organisations offer advice on green issues for local businesses. These include Marches Energy Agency, Stretton Climate Care and the Sustainable Tourism Advice Network. Information on what each service offers, including grants, could be featured on the local tourism business webpages (see 7.2), along with case studies or briefing sessions. Links to 4.1. | Medium Term | High | AONB, Climate Care, SSTA, Business Link | No. of businesses advised. |
| 4.7 Local off-setting scheme | Off-set your travel to other areas by joining a local scheme which supports local community environmental schemes. | Long Term | Low | | |
| 4.8 Church Stretton Plastic Bag Free Town | Climate Care and CSATG taking forward with Co-op, Spar and local traders. A good PR story. Businesses could give visitors a CS bag as souvenir/promotional tool | Ongoing/Medium Term | Medium | Climate Care/CSATG | No. of businesses participating |
| 4.9 Electric bicycles for hire | A novel way for visitors to tour the town and a great PR story to promote the green and activity stories for the town. Climate Care investigating possibilities. | Short Term | Medium | Climate Care | |
| 5. Church Stretton's Heritage and Townscape | | | | | |
| 5.1 Interpretive | To tell the stories/history of key buildings around the | Short Term | Very High | | No. of panels |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|--|---|-------------------|-----------------|--|-----------------------------|
| panels/signs on key buildings | town. Could link to the town heritage trail. Potential funding through Better Welcome if apply by May 08. Careful design, attractive, vandal proof, simple text. | | | | installed. Survey response. |
| 5.2 Listing of guided walks leaders | Several people offer guided walks in and around the town, although regular walks do not attract enough visitors. A listing of the relevant contacts and their specialisms which could be held at the VIC and on the town website would enable interested visitors to book directly. | Quick Win | Medium | VIC, Ian Dormor? | Additional bookings |
| 5.3 Heritage/visitor centre | Having a central attraction in the town with information on the town's history, walking opportunities and perhaps other elements. Often raised as an important aspiration however sites and costs may be prohibitive. It would have a major positive impact on tourism in the town but would need to be established on a sustainable basis. | Long Term | Medium | TC, CSATG, local authority | |
| 5.4 Railway signal box | Discussions ongoing about future of redundant signal box and potential for use to interpret the railway heritage of the town. | Short-Medium term | Very High | local railway group | |
| 5.5 Children's Quiz Trail | A simple quiz based trail to be piloted in a low cost production taking children and parent around the town from the Visitor Info Centre. Potentially for more permanent production or downloadable from website. | Quick Win | High | Ian Dormor/Tony Crowe/VIC | No. distributed |
| 5.6 Audio trail/reminiscence project | Recording the tales and memories of older people in the town to help inform other interpretation but particularly to develop an audio trail, using cheap new technology such as downloadable podcasts on to ipods or memory sticks. Also good for those with visual disabilities. | Medium Term | Medium | AONB, Percy Tarbuck, Library, Civic Society | Sales/downloads |
| 5.7 Exhibitions using old photos of the town or artefacts | Tony Crowe has a collection of A4 photographs of the town over the last century. Scope for temporary exhibitions in suitable locations - or use in other forms of interpretation such as panels in 5.1. Some locally held artefacts could be used in a similar way. Feature old photos on new town heritage webpages | Medium Term | Medium | Tony Crowe, Joan Arnfield, Cafes, other venues | No. of displays, webpages |
| 5.8 Heritage video/DVD | Similarly to 1.5 and 2.12 above a complementary film about the town's heritage - for sale to visitors or for showing at suitable sites. | Medium | Medium | | |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|--|---|-------------------|-----------------|---|---------------------------|
| 5.9 Promote literary heritage more strongly | On website, VIC and businesses could have locally set books and films available for visitors or a list of them and where available. | Quick Win | High | Library, VIC, Burway Books, Accommodation | |
| 5.10 New heritage themed event | Consider running a Victorian Fair, possibly linked to steam train from London in autumn/winter. To tell the story of the period of town's growth after the coming of the railway. Perhaps run as initial pilot. Scope for visit to Llandridnod Wells to see their fair, railway links and signal box. | Long Term | Low | ? | |
| 5.11 Rectory Wood Your Heritage Project | Proposals to repair walls and install picnic benches and possibly interpretation of the wood. | Short Term | Very High | SCC | |
| 5.12 Visitor signposting improvements | Improve welcome signs and signing off A49 into town | Short Term | High | Better Welcome Action Planning Group | Signs erected |
| 5.13 Townscape improvements | Encourage improvements to make town more visitor/pedestrian friendly eg more outdoor seating, reduced/slower traffic. High priority to improve the market square (links to 3.2 above). Scope for integrating art or sculpture in improvements. | Long Term | Medium | Town Council, local authority | |
| 5.14 Improve visitor parking | Review timing and charging systems from a visitor perspective. Liaise with SSDC/new local authority. | Medium Term | High | Town Council | Longer length of stay |
| 5.15 Improve disabled access | Identify scope for improving disabled access in public and private spaces/buildings in the town. | Long Term | Medium | Town Council, local authority, businesses | |
| 6. Marketing and Promotion | | | | | |
| 6.1 Marketing strategy | Develop proposals in this strategy into simple and achievable marketing strategy linked to 6.2 and 6.3 below, plus other actions | Quick Win | Very High | STI Action Group | |
| 6.2 Work with tourism marketing organisations | Make good contacts with tourism organisations in Shropshire (DMP, Shropshire Tourism, new Shropshire Council) to ensure they promote the key messages/images to complement local efforts. Take expert advice on opportunities for targeting specific overseas markets eg Germany or Netherlands. | Ongoing | Very High | CSATG, Town Council, businesses | |
| 6.3 Collective marketing of Church Stretton locally | Improved longer term marketing of the town and wider area driven from a local level. Staff capacity to implement actions under this priority. To include | Short-Medium Term | High | Town Council, businesses, CSATG | |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|--|---|-------------|----------|--------------------------------|--|
| | regular review and reprinting of town leaflet and co-ordination between other existing publications. | | | | |
| 6.4 Training | Run some marketing training sessions for local organisations and businesses to generate ideas for collective promotions and improve knowledge and skills levels. | Medium | High | CSATG, DMP, Business Link | No of people trained |
| 6.5 Monthly events list | Compile regular pdf of local events for visitors on a monthly basis. Build on current Shropshire Hills list and Stretton Focus to extract simple summary targeted at visitors. For posting in VIC, accommodation, cafes and on website. | Medium Term | Medium | VIC/AONB/Focus | |
| 6.6 PR | Liaise with Shropshire Tourism and develop 4 stories a year to send through to target specific outlets. Develop list of outdoors magazines and send tailored press releases twice a year. | Medium Term | High | CSATG | No. of stories developed and published |
| 6.7 Review photos available | Review photos held locally by AONB, NT, website and local relevant organisation to ensure a good pool of quality, up to date images held. Identify gaps - in relation to USPs, marketing messages and target markets. Scope to encourage local groups to fill these gaps. - use on websites and make available to businesses. Also see 1.8. | Long Term | Low | CSATG, SSTA | |
| 6.8 New range of eye-catching postcards and calendars | Use good images themed round key messages - give/sell to visitors at businesses, on sustainable card. | Long Term | Low | Taste Shropshire, Burway Books | Sales |
| 7. Collaboration and Joint Working | | | | | |
| 7.1 Strengthen Church Stretton Area Tourism Group | The CSATG is long established and has carried out a wide range of work particularly with the Pride of Place campaign and producing town and area maps, environmental enhancements etc. Could it develop stronger links with a wider range of tourism businesses and lead on 7.2 and 7.3 below? Does there need to be a sub group which drives forward this strategy including fund raising and project management.? | Quick Win | High | CSATG, STI Action Group | Group established and meeting |
| 7.2 Church Stretton tourism business e-network | Use list of email addresses compiled to communicate regularly with local tourism businesses and invite discussion and collaboration. To improve | Quick Win | High | CSATG, | No. of businesses participating |

| Actions | Details | Timescale | Priority | Lead/partners | Targets/monitoring |
|---|---|-------------|-----------|--------------------|---|
| | communications and disseminate useful info for tourism businesses (eg events listings). Could start as simple distribution list with co-ordinator but develop into a more interactive system if popular. | | | | |
| 7.3 Tourism forum | Hold once or twice yearly forum to discuss issues and facilitate networking - spring or autumn best. Initial topics could include marketing or sustainability. It could link to a spring leaflet swap. If popular additional visits could be set up to visit other towns, pick up good ideas etc. Ensure continued links/liaison with Chamber of Trade. | Quick Win | High | CSATG | Attendance |
| 7.4 Website | Upgrade tourism pages on Church Stretton site, make more accessible and set up pages for tourism business network. Need to discuss overall structure, links and visitor requirements and business requirements before starting changes. Crucial to help support many other actions in this plan. | Medium Term | Very High | Visitor web master | No. of hits |
| 7.5 Business support | Compile and disseminate information on business support and training opportunities such as business development, funding opportunities, cost saving, staff management. | Long term | Medium | DMP, Business Link | |
| 7.6 Strengthen links with National Trust @ Cardingmill Valley | Build on good relations to encourage more of the 250,000 visitor to CMV to spend time in the town centre. Erect sign on leaving Cardingmill Valley to encourage visitors to stop off and explore the town. Sign the bridleway walk from CMV into town. Link to Better Welcome project funding. | Quick Win | High | NT | More visitors visiting both valley and town |
| 7.7 Improve communication with relaunched Discovery Centre and Acton Scott Historic Farm | Encourage both to offer free visits or host a trip by businesses and discuss opportunities for them to promote Church Stretton and area. Discuss opportunities with Michael Turner and Jo Bickerton. Link to 6.3. | Quick Win | High | SCC, VIC | |
| 7.8 European Links /best practice | Town Council pursuing possible EU Da Vinci bid for developing links with similar towns in other European countries. | Long Term | Low | Town Council | |
| 7.9 Monitoring | Set up monitoring of progress with implementation of this strategy and action plan. Could include repeat surveys or specific targeted info gathering on targets. | Ongoing | High | STI Action Group | |

Key

| Timescale | |
|------------------|-------------|
| Quick Win | < 12 months |
| Short Term | 1 – 2 years |
| Medium Term | 2 – 5 years |
| Long Term | > 5 years |

Acronyms:

AONB - Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CSATG - Church Stretton Area Tourism Group
NT - National Trust
SCC - Shropshire County Council
SSTA - South Shropshire Tourism Association
STI - Sustainable Tourism Initiative
SWT - Shropshire Wildlife Trust
VIC - Visitor Information Centre

Annexes

1. Shropshire Hills Position Statement on Sustainable Tourism
2. Related policy and research documents
3. People who have attended events and contributed to this strategy
4. Church Stretton's visitors - background
5. The tourism offer - background
6. Sustaining Tourism in Church Stretton and the Shropshire Hills - workshop feedback November 2007
7. Notes from Heritage meeting
8. Useful local contacts and schemes

Annex 1. AONB Position Statement on Sustainable Tourism



Working to conserve and enhance the landscape

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

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E:mail: SHAONBO@shropshire-cc.gov.uk

Position Statement on Sustainable Tourism

Background

This statement is one of a series, intended to complement the statutory AONB Management Plan, and outline in a more detailed or more up to date way the inter-relationship between a particular issue and the AONB's purposes (principally to conserve and enhance natural beauty).

Relationship to AONB purposes

The AONB does not have a purpose to attract greater numbers of people as an end in itself, or purely for economic development. Where it does have a legitimate role is in 'promoting forms of development which are sustainable'. It is appropriate for the AONB Partnership to be pro-active in promoting a sustainable approach to tourism, as others will continue to promote and develop the area for tourism, and this sometimes may encourage directions of development which are less compatible with the AONB. The public enjoyment and economic benefits of tourism create an extra reason for conserving the landscape, and justification for the public and private funding which goes towards this. Encouraging sustainable tourism within the UK can also contribute significantly to reducing CO2 emissions from overseas air travel and from car use.

Definitions and national context

Tourism. For this purpose, the focus will be on promotion and infrastructure (e.g. accommodation, car parks, attractions and catering) relating to staying and day visitors. The topic of countryside access and recreation is closely related, but has been addressed in a separate position statement, which should be read alongside this one.

Sustainable Tourism. Sustainable development seeks to balance environmental, social and economic benefits and not gain some of these at the expense of the others. A sustainable approach to tourism therefore can be defined as one which seeks to achieve less impact on the environment, more understanding and enjoyment, and more benefit to the local economy and community. The actual numbers of visitors are less important – the benefits described above may be achieved with either greater or fewer numbers. This is not a matter of black and white, that a certain form of tourism is sustainable or not, as there is a continuum of impacts and benefits. Neither is sustainability just about making tourism 'less harmful' to the environment – it can actually be beneficial to conserving the landscape, e.g. where boosting a market for local products (food and drink accounts for 46% of visitor spending in the countryside (Countryside Agency, 2001)).

The Countryside Agency (now subsumed within Natural England) outlined in 2005 the following principles for sustainable tourism in protected landscapes (AONBs and National Parks):

1. Sharing responsibility
2. Agreeing a strategy
3. Basing tourism on the area's special qualities
4. Providing a quality experience for all visitors
5. Reducing the environmental impact of tourism
6. Raising awareness and supporting conservation

7. Bringing more benefit to the local economy

8. Engaging with the local community

The AONB Partnership is well placed to take action on these principles, and in some cases a leading role, but the input of the private sector and other parts of the public sector will also be very important.

Other strategic links

A number of strategies and plans are relevant to this area, including:

West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy and Visitor Economy Strategy (Advantage West Midlands, 2004)

Tourism Strategy for Shropshire (Shropshire County Council, 2004)

South Shropshire Tourism Strategy (South Shropshire District Council, 2004)

Shropshire Interpretation Strategy (Shropshire County Council, 2006)

Shropshire Economic Strategy

Current patterns of tourism in the area

Detailed statistics on numbers of visitors and the economic value of tourism in the Shropshire Hills are not available, and a study is currently planned through the County Council's Tourism Research Unit. Though the area is not a major holiday destination like some AONBs and National Parks, tourism is nevertheless significant to the local economy, as illustrated during the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak. The landscape is a major attraction of Shropshire, and research shows that the Shropshire Hills are a recognisable destination to tourists, after Ironbridge, Shrewsbury and Ludlow. Though visitors of all kinds are found, the area has a particular draw for those interested in scenery, heritage and wildlife, those interested in moderately challenging walking and outdoor activities, and has a higher than average representation of retired couples. Tourism is especially important to Church Stretton, the main town within the AONB. District-based and more local tourism associations exist in the area, and the District and County Councils have a role in the promotion and management of tourism. Shropshire Tourism is the main private sector body, and a county Destination Management Partnership has been established. The focus of these networks is mainly on paying attractions and the accommodation and catering sectors, with relatively little input from countryside and landscape bodies responsible for the free 'attraction' which draws many visitors and benefits other businesses.

Policies for sustainable tourism in the Shropshire Hills AONB

1. Tourism activities which draw on the special qualities of the area, without harming them, should be especially encouraged. These include:
 - Development of access infrastructure (e.g. maintenance and improvement of rights of way, off road cycle routes, historic and natural sites),
 - appropriate interpretation to help aid understanding,
 - enterprises based specifically on the special qualities of the AONB (e.g. wildlife watching, landscape painting, walking festivals).
 - cultural events.
 - use of public transport.
2. The relative remoteness of the area and its tranquillity are valued by both residents and visitors alike, and tourism development must be very sensitive to avoid damaging these special qualities. Facilities for activities which are inherently noisy or intrusive should not be allowed.
3. For built development, the location, scale and design of development is often key to how sustainable a particular development is judged to be. Less direct impacts such as transport, and impacts on tranquillity and light pollution, are also important. Government policy is that most new building for accommodation should be in or adjacent to existing towns and villages. Tourism is important however for farm diversification, and for this a dispersed approach of smaller, low-key developments designed in sympathy with local character will blend better into the area and spread economic benefits more widely than larger facilities. Single developments of more than around ten accommodation units are less likely to be supported in small settlements and open countryside. Large static caravan parks are likely to be intrusive. Smaller sites with good landscaping are preferable, and facilities for touring caravans and camping generally have a low impact as there are fewer permanent structures.

4. The provision of any new public car parking should be in scale with the setting and capacity of roads used to reach the location. Larger car parks should generally be situated nearer to settlements or larger roads. Where informal roadside parking is improved to alleviate traffic problems on smaller roads, care should be taken to avoid adding to traffic levels. The linking of countryside attractions and walks to settlements where services and public transport facilities exist and can be promoted, will help to maximise economic benefits, especially from day visitors.
5. Provision of locally produced food, drink and craft products provides an excellent way of enhancing the visitor's experience at the same time as benefiting conservation of the landscape. The development of local food supply and culture within tourism is strongly encouraged.
6. There should be an emphasis in tourism provision on quality, and high environmental standards should be encouraged, such as energy and water consumption, waste and pollution, e.g. through national and regional green tourism accreditation schemes. Quality and sustainability should not however make provision socially exclusive - these standards can also apply to lower cost accommodation (e.g. campsites, bunk barns) and food.
7. Action is necessary to actively support tourism activities at the most sustainable end of the spectrum, e.g. the Shuttle bus service, the Heart of Wales railway line, niche green accommodation, walking/cycling/riding infrastructure, etc. There is also a need to influence 'mainstream' tourism activity towards sustainability, including discouraging less sustainable activities or developments. The opportunity for tourism to contribute directly to practical conservation activities, e.g. through a visitor payback scheme, should be explored.
8. Farm-based tourism has a special importance to the AONB because of the close connection to conserving the landscape. Tourism enterprises can help a farm to survive, enabling the continuation of vital conservation work. Connections between farm-based accommodation and the farm business, and an environmental approach to marketing should be encouraged. There is a need for better integration of business and conservation advice.
9. The economic connections between the value of the landscape and tourism, and the value of tourism in supporting the economy and conservation need to be more fully researched and promoted. Research on local supply and demand should be used to advise potential new businesses, especially farm diversification enterprises.
10. The community has an important role in sustainable tourism, and the work and development of local tourism groups should be supported.
11. The consistent use of the 'Shropshire Hills' identity will strengthen the area's sense of place, and support sustainable tourism by associating this with environmental quality and sensitivity. The 'Shropshire Hills' identity should be given greater prominence in tourism promotion, along with a consistent description of the special qualities of the AONB and opportunities for visitors to adopt a sustainable approach. The formal accreditation of the area for sustainable tourism, e.g. through the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, should be considered. Greater recognition of the Shropshire Hills should be sought in county and regional tourism organisations and strategies.
12. Promotion of the area for tourism should encourage direct experience of the countryside and aim to minimise travel. This can be a positive message, e.g. experiencing a slower pace of life, rather than being seen as a restriction. The web is an increasingly important source of information for visitors, especially for planning holidays, and co-ordinated marketing and information delivery is required.
13. The capacity of accommodation providers and other hosts in the industry to promote and interpret the special qualities of the AONB may be enhanced by provision of training courses and other material to help with promotion.

Annex 2. Related policy and research documents

- Better Welcome Benchmarking Visitor Survey Report The Research Solution for Action for Market Towns and Advantage West Midlands 2007/8
- Better Welcome signposting Audit The Research Solution for Action for Market Towns and Advantage West Midlands 2007/8
- Shropshire's Leisure Tourism Markets - especially working paper 7 market segmentation March 2005, TEAM Tourism for Shropshire Tourism and Partners
- Shropshire Tourism Research Unit, Volume and Value of Tourism In South Shropshire, 2005
- Shropshire Sustainable Tourism Survey, STRU 2007
- Church Stretton Town Design Statement
- Church Stretton Strategy and Action Plan 2003
- South Shropshire Tourism Strategy revised 2008
- Shropshire Tourism Strategy 2004
- West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy reviewed 2008
- West Midlands Rural Development Plan 2008

Annex 3. People who have attended events and contributed to this strategy

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Shayne Adams | Kaboodle |
| Claire Alford | Jessamine Cottage |
| Meg Bacon | Mayfair Centre |
| Dave Bailey | Oakbank B&B |
| Derek Bartlett | CS Walking Group |
| John Bennett | The Retreat |
| Chris Bland | Acorn Cafe |
| Sue Brown | Long Mynd Camping and Leisure |
| Mike Bugiel | Mid Counties Co-operative |
| Anne Carter | Middle Farm Cottages |
| Peter Carty | National Trust |
| Sheila Cashmore | Newsworld |
| Lee Chapman | Long Mynd Hotel |
| Jon Cooke | Church Stretton Climate Care Group |
| Joan Cowan | Secret Hills Walking |
| Tony Crowe | Historian |
| Amanda Cunningham | Advantage West Midlands |
| Lesley Davies | Tourism Business Adviser, Regional Centre for Tourism Business Support |
| Ian Dormor | AONB Landscape Officer/Railway Group |
| Linda Duffy | Earth Collection |
| Tim Dunn/Doreen | Church Stretton website |
| Ros Ephraim | Burway Books |
| Clare Fildes | Shropshire Hills AONB |
| Alan Garner | Secret Hills Walking |
| David Gibbon | RULIVSYS Ltd |
| James Gibson | Shropshire County Council |
| John Gott | Berry's Cafe |
| Kate Grubb | Sustainable Tourism Advisory Network |
| Ray Hall | White Horse Restaurant |
| Paul Harris | Leasowes Cottage |
| Margaret Harris | Leasowes Cottage |
| Stephanie Hayes | Shropshire Hills AONB |
| Tristan Haynes | Marches Energy Agency |
| Phil Holden | Shropshire Hills AONB Officer |
| Val Hotchkiss | Visitor Information Centre |
| Mary Jones | Acton Scott Farm |
| Rowena Jones | Long Mynd Hotel |
| Ian Kemsley | South Shropshire Tourism Assoc and Shropshire Destination Management Partnership |
| Angela Kennedy | Hamperley Campsite |
| Tim King | Tourism Officer, South Shropshire District Council |
| Cath Landles | Shropshire Hills AONB |
| Don Lovejoy | Belvedere Guest House |
| Ewa Lovejoy | Belvedere Guest House |
| Wendy Lewis | Caradoc self catering |
| Betty Manley | Westhope Country Retreats |
| Mathew Mead | Shropshire County Council - Shuttle Buses |
| Julie Mellors | Stretton Climate Care |
| Lesley McIntyre | Juniper Cottage |
| Sue Morris | Holly Grove Cottage |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Peter Norman | AONB Partnership Chair |
| Anne Oakes Jones | Thresholds Centre |
| Carys Palmer | Maltings Tearoom |
| Sue Pember | Mynd House |
| Dave Pember | Mynd House |
| Jill Perrin | Visitor Information Centre |
| Lavinia Ratcliffe | Chocolate Haven |
| Amy Regler | Transforming Telford - Green Tourism Business Scheme |
| Eileen Roberts | Tourism Group and Chamber of Trade |
| Lisa Ryan | Lower Wood, All Stretton |
| John Sankey | Farmer, Ratlinghope |
| Emma Sharian | Burway Books |
| Beryl Smith | Mayor Church Stretton |
| Linda Smith | Victoria House |
| Simon Smith | Quality at Heart, RCTBS |
| Sue Smith | Visitor Information Centre |
| Tony Smith | Town Councillor |
| Carol Stratton | Visitor Information Centre |
| Chris Stratton | National Trust Visitor Services Officer |
| Alison Symons | Visitor Information Centre |
| Marcus Themans | Wenlock Edge Farm |
| Michael Turner | Acton Scott Historic Working Farm |
| Ed Van Doesburg | Delicatessen |
| Jane Van Doesburg | Delicatessen |
| Barbara Vickery | CS Walking Group |
| Bob Welch | Chair - Sustainable Tourism Initiative, Town Council/Food Festival |
| John Woolmer | Church Stretton Area Tourism Group |
| David Wren | Highcliffe |
| Janet Wren | Highcliffe |

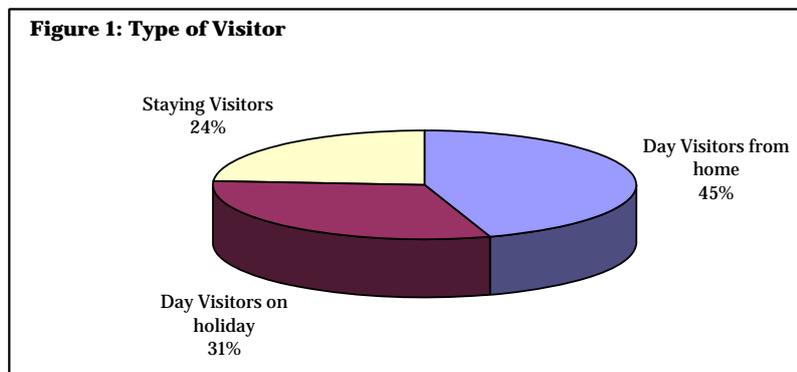
Annex 4. Church Stretton's Visitors - Background

A.4.1 Current visitors

The Better Welcome survey was carried out in 2007 across 28 towns in the West Midlands and thus also provides benchmarking data for Church Stretton which can compare its results with average figures for Shropshire and the whole West Midlands. The survey is relatively robust involving a sample of 200 visitors, interviewed over 17 days, between June and September, including weekdays, weekends and some days during events, at 5 locations around the town centre.

The full report of the survey makes interesting reading for those who wish to look at the detailed results. Here we just present a brief overview of the visitor characteristics. The following seven charts/tables are taken from the full report. Annex 5 includes some of the data on visitors' opinions of Church Stretton.

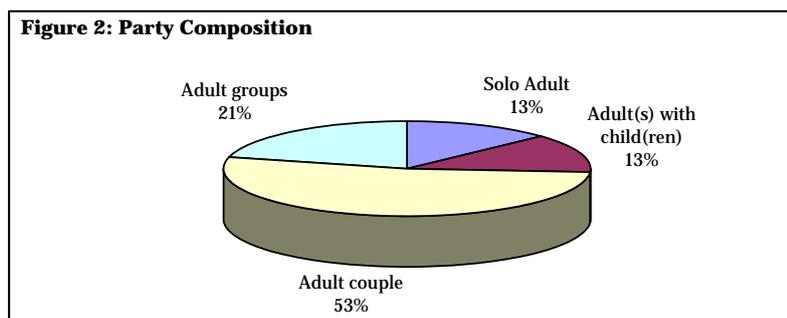
Church Stretton has a good proportion of visitors staying in accommodation in the town which is a strength as most of their spending will be retained within the town.



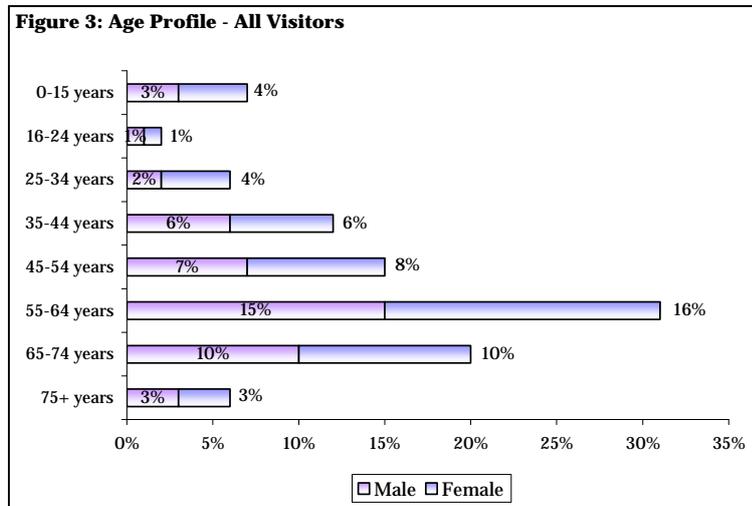
Better Welcome Destination Benchmarking Report, The Research Solution for Action for Market Towns 2008

The proportion of staying visitors (24%) is above both the county average of 18% and the all market towns average of 17%. As a result of the high proportion of staying visitors in Church Stretton, the percentage of day visitors from home (45%) is below the all market towns average of 55% and the county average of 51%. Nearly a third of all visitors (31%) are in the area on holiday but staying elsewhere. Only 5% (9 interviewees) of visitors to Church Stretton were from overseas and no separate analysis was done of their characteristics.

In terms of the types of group who visit, the average number of people per group was 2.4 - on a par with the average for all towns. Overall, over half 53% of individuals represented were adult couples, with a further 21% being adult groups. Only 13% of groups included children.



Church Stretton (as with many market towns) generally attracts higher proportions of older visitors. 72% of visitors are over 45. The peak age group is shown in the chart below as 55-64 with 31% of visitors in this age group.



Visitors were categorised into socio-economic groups based on their employment (or previous employment if retired). The table below shows a much higher proportion than average are in the higher socio-economic groups (AB) and much fewer than average in the lower groups (C2, DE). This should be a strength in that the higher groups are likely to have higher disposable income. However they may also be looking for higher quality products and services.

Table 2.3: Socio Economic Profile

| | Church Stretton | Shropshire | All Market Towns (Regional) | Day Visitors from home | Day Visitors on holiday | Staying Visitors |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Base</i> | <i>195</i> | <i>2078</i> | <i>5037</i> | <i>86</i> | <i>61</i> | <i>48</i> |
| AB | 42% | 29% | 29% | 35% | 48% | 46% |
| C1 | 33% | 34% | 32% | 36% | 35% | 27% |
| C2 | 17% | 24% | 22% | 19% | 15% | 17% |
| DE | 8% | 13% | 18% | 10% | 3% | 10% |

As would be expected nearly half of day visitors live in Shropshire, with most other from neighbouring counties. Staying visitors and those on holiday in the area show no specific pattern of origin - coming from a wide range of counties across England and Wales. Derbyshire had the highest figure of 13% of staying visitors.

Table 3.1 Origin of Visitors

| | All Visitors | Day Visitors from home | Day Visitors on holiday | Staying Visitors |
|---------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Base</i> | <i>200</i> | <i>90</i> | <i>62</i> | <i>48</i> |
| Shropshire | 23% | 48% | 2% | 2% |
| Staffordshire | 9% | 14% | 3% | 4% |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|----|-----|----|-----|
| West Midlands | 8% | 12% | 5% | 4% |
| Cheshire | 5% | 6% | 3% | 6% |
| Derbyshire | 4% | - | 2% | 13% |
| Kent | 4% | - | 6% | 6% |
| South Wales | 4% | 2% | 5% | 4% |
| North Wales | 3% | 2% | 6% | - |
| Worcestershire | 3% | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| Warwickshire | 3% | 3% | 2% | 2% |
| Norfolk | 3% | - | 5% | 4% |
| Lancashire | 2% | - | 3% | 4% |
| Herefordshire | 2% | 4% | - | - |
| Surrey | 2% | - | 3% | 4% |
| Nottinghamshire | 2% | - | 2% | 4% |

*NB: **The West Midlands Metropolitan Area refers to Birmingham, Solihull and the 4 boroughs of the Black Country: - Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton*

Almost all visitors (91%) were on a leisure or holiday trip with a further 8% saying they were visiting friends or relatives. There were no business visitors recorded. 77% of visitors had been to Church Stretton before - demonstrating a good level of repeat visitors.

Visitors were interviewed towards the end of their visit and asked how long they were staying in the town. The average length of stay for day visits was quite low at 2 hours 57 minutes, compared to a county average of 3 hours 21 mins. Reasons for this might include the lack of specific attractions in the town to keep people here longer and possibly the effect of a 3 hour parking limit in the car park. Staying visitors remained in the town longer than average - 5 nights, compared to the county average of 4.3 nights.

In terms of how visitors travel to Church Stretton 86% of them come by car. Despite having a railway station only 3% of visitors use this to reach the town. In fact the car dependence may be higher; the table below gives a figure of 31% of staying visitors walking to reach the town the day they were interviewed. However they will have arrived by a different form of transport originally. This presents a challenge for a sustainable tourism strategy to encourage more people to use sustainable forms of transport to arrive and also during their stay.

Table 4.2: Mode of Transport

| | Church Stretton | Shropshire | All Market Towns (Regional) | Day Visitors from home | Day Visitors on holiday | Staying Visitors |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Base</i> | <i>200</i> | <i>2101</i> | <i>5078</i> | <i>90</i> | <i>62</i> | <i>48</i> |
| Car/Van/Motorcycle/Motor home | 86% | 84% | 86% | 93% | 95% | 60% |
| Walked | 9% | 6% | 5% | 1% | 2% | 31% |
| Bus/Coach Service | 2% | 5% | 5% | 1% | - | 4% |
| Bicycle | 1% | 1% | 1% | - | 3% | - |
| Train | 3% | 1% | 1% | 3% | - | 4% |
| Coach tour | 1% | 2% | 1% | 1% | - | - |
| Other | - | 1% | 2% | - | - | - |

Of those visitors who stay overnight a wide range of accommodation is used including staying with friends and relatives, self catering, B&Bs and caravan and camping.

Table 4.5: Accommodation Used

| | Church Stretton | Shropshire | All Market Towns (Regional) |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Base</i> | <i>48</i> | <i>375</i> | <i>852</i> |
| Home of Friend/relative | 31% | 35% | 34% |
| Rented Self Catering | 23% | 8% | 7% |
| B&B/Guesthouse | 19% | 12% | 8% |
| Camping | 10% | 10% | 10% |
| Touring Caravan | 6% | 10% | 12% |
| Narrowboat | - | 6% | 7% |
| Hotel | 4% | 9% | 9% |
| Static Caravan – owned | 2% | 7% | 9% |
| Pub/Inn | - | 2% | 2% |
| Static Caravan – rented | - | 0% | 1% |
| Second home | - | 1% | 1% |
| Campervan | - | 1% | 0% |
| Motor-home | - | 1% | 1% |
| Youth Hostel | - | - | 0% |
| River Cruiser | - | - | 0% |

Visitors were asked to estimate how much they spent per person per day during their visit. The average was just over £40 (compared to the county average of £35.56). Staying visitors obviously spent more (£67.12 on average) and day visitors less (£17.15 on average).

Finally, visitors were asked a specific question in Church Stretton about whether they were taking part in any physical activities during their visit. Of those who responded to this

question, 45% stated they didn't intend to undertake any specific physical activity. Of those who did (92 respondents), the responses included:

- Walking/hiking 88%
- Cycling 2%
- Archery 2%

This demonstrates that outdoor activities, particularly walking, is an attraction for many visitors. A specific survey of walkers was carried out Church Stretton in 2005 by students working with the Shropshire Tourism Research Unit. Although modest in scale it had some interesting results including:

- Main age groups of walkers were: 45 – 55 (24%), 55 – 65 (23%)
- 45% of the walkers were repeat visitors
- Their main reasons for visiting were: scenery, walking, relaxing
- 85% knew about AONB designation
- Many (63%) were independent minded and didn't follow a published trail
- 68% said the footpaths were good, 18% footpaths excellent
- 78% travelled to Church Stretton by car
- 59% were day visitors, 23% locals, 18% stayed overnight
- The scenery exceeded visitors' expectations, also not too busy or overcrowded
- 100% walkers would visit again and recommend

It will be useful to survey visitors again in a few years time to see if there is a shift in any of the trends revealed above. Other factors could also be surveyed including visitors interest in being sustainable or in particular topics such as wildlife and heritage.

A.4.2 Future visitors

In terms of future visitors we have gathered information from various sources to help guide the choice of visitors to target in future.

National research suggests the following future trends:

- Continuing gradual decline in traditional holiday patterns
- More varied holidays and breaks e.g. using cheap flights abroad (or within UK)
- Increasing demand for more upmarket UK short breaks
- Continuing increase in expectations of quality and service
- Increased demand for local food, healthy options, local distinctiveness, green tourism
- Outdoor activities, especially walking, continuing to grow in popularity
- Visitors in search of peace and relaxation, de-stressing but also indulging themselves, pampering, fun and excitement

Tourism destinations will need to respond to these trends by:

- Targeting more upmarket visitors - with larger budgets but higher expectations
- Investing in quality and respond to environmental and health agendas
- Promoting local distinctiveness and activities
- Upskilling - employers and staff
- Working smarter with marketing messages - to target visitors who will appreciate what the area has to offer

The first Better Welcome workshop discussed which target markets Church Stretton should focus upon and identified the following groups:

- **Day Visitors**

- **Visiting Friends & Relatives**
- **SKI (Spending the Kids Inheritance)/ Empty Nesters** – Age 45 – 65+, affluent, social grade ABC1, cultural, like good eating and drinking, researching family history, high spend potential
- **Activity/Adventure Market** – under 50, good spend potential on food, drink & retail
- **Rural Enthusiasts** – All ages but likely to be 40+, rural interests, possible cyclists (recreational), walkers of all levels, ABC1 (low – mid spend potential)
- **Groups of Friends** – mixed groups and specifically a growth seen in women only groups. Seen to be a growing market, good spend potential
- **Families**
- **Event/Festival Goers**
- **Caravan & Camping Market**

Of these we should focus on some groups more than others. Day visitors bring less benefits and are often people who know the town. They may well visit to attend a particular event or take part in an activity and will often be visiting friends and relatives. In other words there is less return to be made marketing to this group. Similarly the visiting friends and relatives market will probably come anyway, may time visits to coincide with events and may include more family groups. But again it is a more difficult and less rewarding group to target. Both groups are valuable as part of the wider mix but not groups to focus marketing upon.

The next three or four categories listed are more likely to be good targets particularly those with interests in countryside, heritage and culture, good food and drink and outdoor activities. Focusing on more upmarket segments is a good strategy - attracting more affluent visitors who take multiple short breaks. However it needs to be supported by local businesses offering a good quality product and meeting visitor expectations.

Particular events and businesses such as caravan and camp sites will have their own marketing strategies. These will be complemented by the overall town messages when they overlap such as for food and cultural events and for caravanners who enjoy heritage and outdoor activities.

The approach of focusing on the area's strengths and targeting more affluent markets is supported in the marketing research undertaken in 2005 by Shropshire Tourism and partners. This used a national visitor segmentation model to identify which market segments are most relevant for Shropshire.

The two segments which they identified as having most relevance for Shropshire were **Traditionals and Discoverers**, particularly those in each group whose main motivation is seeking rest and relaxation. Also in the case of Discoverers the older part of this segment whose families have left home. The characteristics of these visitors and their values are summarised below.

| Visitor Group | Description |
|--|---|
| <p>Traditionals</p> <p>12.4% of population</p> <p>Particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest and relaxation • ABC1C2 • 50+ • Couples | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self reliant, internally referenced • Slow to adopt new options • Strong orientation towards traditional values • Value individual attention & service are prepared to pay for individual attention • live life at a relaxed pace • enjoy intellectual challenges, arts and culture, gardening, radio and socialising • familiar destinations have the strongest appeal to this segment, but bargain breaks and holidays off the beaten track have appeal • They like coach trips and may be members of caravan clubs. |
| <p>Discoverers</p> <p>12.8% of population</p> <p>Particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest and relaxation • ABC1 • 45+ • Couples • Post family | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent in mind and action, little influenced by style or brand but interested in new options • Buy on function and value to them but quite high spenders • Looking for new & educational experiences • Value new products and services as well as new experiences. • Live a relatively relaxed pace of life, enjoy intellectual challenges • They take bargain breaks and like to holiday off the beaten track. • They have some interest in activity holidays or holidays with a theme, and are less likely to go to familiar destinations. • Favoured destinations are Scotland, Wales and the Lakes. • They enjoy a mix of activities including attending sports events, eating out, wildlife, funfairs and museums. • This group is the most active in terms of internet use, |

Of the other groups highlighted in the Shropshire study those with most relevance to Church Stretton are likely to be **walkers**, (ideally staying visitors) plus day visitors coming for walks, educational visits (Cardingmill Valley), events and general sightseeing or pottering. In the longer term and if better child friendly facilities are developed 'Family Discoverers' - those in the Discoverer group with children - could be a growth market.

Walkers are not a homogeneous group. Some just come for a day, some come in groups specifically for walking trips, others have more casual plans. The priority should be those staying overnight, travelling in groups or independently and those falling into the Traditional and Discoverer segments.

To summarise the main markets which Church Stretton should collectively and pro-actively target at the moment are:

- **Traditionals**
- **Discoverers**
- **Walkers**

Other types of visitor will continue to come and be welcome. Some businesses will target families or younger people or less up-market groups or the coach market etc due to the nature of their business. But the overall focus for collective efforts should be these three groups.

Annex 5. The Tourism Offer - Background

A.5.1 Business views

The Better Welcome programme included an audit of the tourism related facilities in the town from attractions and accommodation stock to car parking spaces and toilet facilities. These figures are not detailed here but have fed into the SWOT analysis below. In addition a survey of tourism related businesses in the town centre. The sustainable tourism project repeated this survey but targeting businesses further afield in order to get a broader mix of views from businesses both in the town and around the hinterland. The overall sample was 37 businesses, 21 in the town and 16 from the hinterland, which represents about a quarter of tourism related businesses in the area - a good sample. The businesses included hotels, B&Bs, self-catering, activity providers, shops, cafes and attractions.

Businesses reported visitors likes and dislikes. The Dislikes look more numerous but most were only reported by a few people, whereas there was general agreement over the Likes.

Visitor Likes

- Beautiful countryside and nature
- Peace
- Space
- Rural feel
- Lack of traffic
- Walking
- Small town charm
- Good events and food
- Places of interest

Dislikes

- No good eating/drinking pubs in town centre
- Banks closed Saturdays
- Shops shut Sundays
- Lack of specialist shops
- Not enough public toilets
- Lack of parking
- Not enough taxis
- Take-aways don't deliver
- Traffic wardens
- The weather
- The A49

Businesses reported that they would welcome an increase in trade. They said there was scope to increase business across all days and months of the year, especially weekdays and during the winter months. They suggested a range of improvements for the tourism offer of the town.

Suggested improvements:

- Stronger promotion and marketing
- Opening hours of local businesses to be more visitor friendly
- More signage to Church Stretton from the A49
- More car parks
- Promote use of public transport more
- More leisure facilities e.g. swimming
- Better parking in town
- Better eating/drinking bars/pubs
- More activities for children

Many also said they would welcome training - either for owners or for their staff. The following topics were mentioned most often:

- Website development and internet marketing
- Customer care

- New legislation affecting business owners

A.5.2 Visitors' opinions

The Better Welcome survey asked visitors their opinions about the town's facilities and qualities. A wide range of factors were scored (on a scale of 1-5) for their satisfaction levels. The table below gives the full list of factors and Church Stretton's scores in comparison to other Shropshire towns and all 28 towns.

Church Stretton Better Welcome Benchmarking scores

| Table 6.1 | Church Stretton | Shropshire | All Market Town (Regional) |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Accommodation - quality of service | 4.61 | 4.50 | 4.55 |
| Accommodation – quality of accommodation | 4.44 | 4.30 | 4.43 |
| Accommodation - value for money | 4.56 | 4.39 | 4.50 |
| Market - range of stalls | <i>2.67</i> | 3.59 | 3.66 |
| Market - presentation of stalls | <i>3.35</i> | 3.81 | 3.91 |
| Market - quality of goods | <i>3.61</i> | 3.83 | 3.92 |
| Market - quality of service | <i>3.92</i> | 4.05 | 4.23 |
| Shops - range of shops | 3.98 | 3.87 | 3.87 |
| Shops - quality of goods | 4.03 | 3.98 | 4.02 |
| Shops - quality of service | 4.22 | 4.11 | 4.26 |
| Places to eat and drink - range | 4.04 | 4.02 | 4.09 |
| Places to eat and drink - quality of food | 4.26 | 4.15 | 4.25 |
| Places to eat and drink - quality of service | 4.36 | 4.16 | 4.31 |
| Places to eat and drink - value for money | 4.20 | 4.06 | 4.22 |
| Museums - Range | - | 4.06 | 4.01 |
| Museums - level of interest | - | 4.24 | 4.18 |
| Museums - quality of service | - | 4.34 | 4.38 |
| Museums - value for money | - | 4.39 | 4.47 |
| Ease of finding way around - road signs | 4.37 | 4.16 | 4.32 |
| Ease of finding way around - pedestrian signs | 4.18 | 4.06 | 4.22 |
| Ease of finding way around - display maps and info boards | 4.16 | 3.82 | 3.91 |
| Public Toilets - Availability | 4.40 | 3.64 | 3.87 |
| Public Toilets - Cleanliness | 4.38 | 3.66 | 3.79 |
| VIC - Ease of Finding | 4.55 | 4.20 | 4.35 |
| VIC - Quality of service | 5.00 | 4.38 | 4.59 |
| VIC - Usefulness of Information received | 4.95 | 4.36 | 4.59 |
| Cleanliness of streets | 4.44 | 4.14 | 4.28 |
| General atmosphere | 4.54 | 4.36 | 4.42 |
| Feeling of welcome | 4.51 | 4.36 | 4.43 |

| | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|------|------|
| General appearance | 4.58 | 4.31 | 4.36 |
| Overall enjoyment | 4.41 | 4.12 | 4.07 |
| Ease of parking | 4.60 | 4.16 | 4.36 |
| Cost of parking | <i>3.92</i> | 4.16 | 4.25 |

Figures in bold show good scores - above both comparators

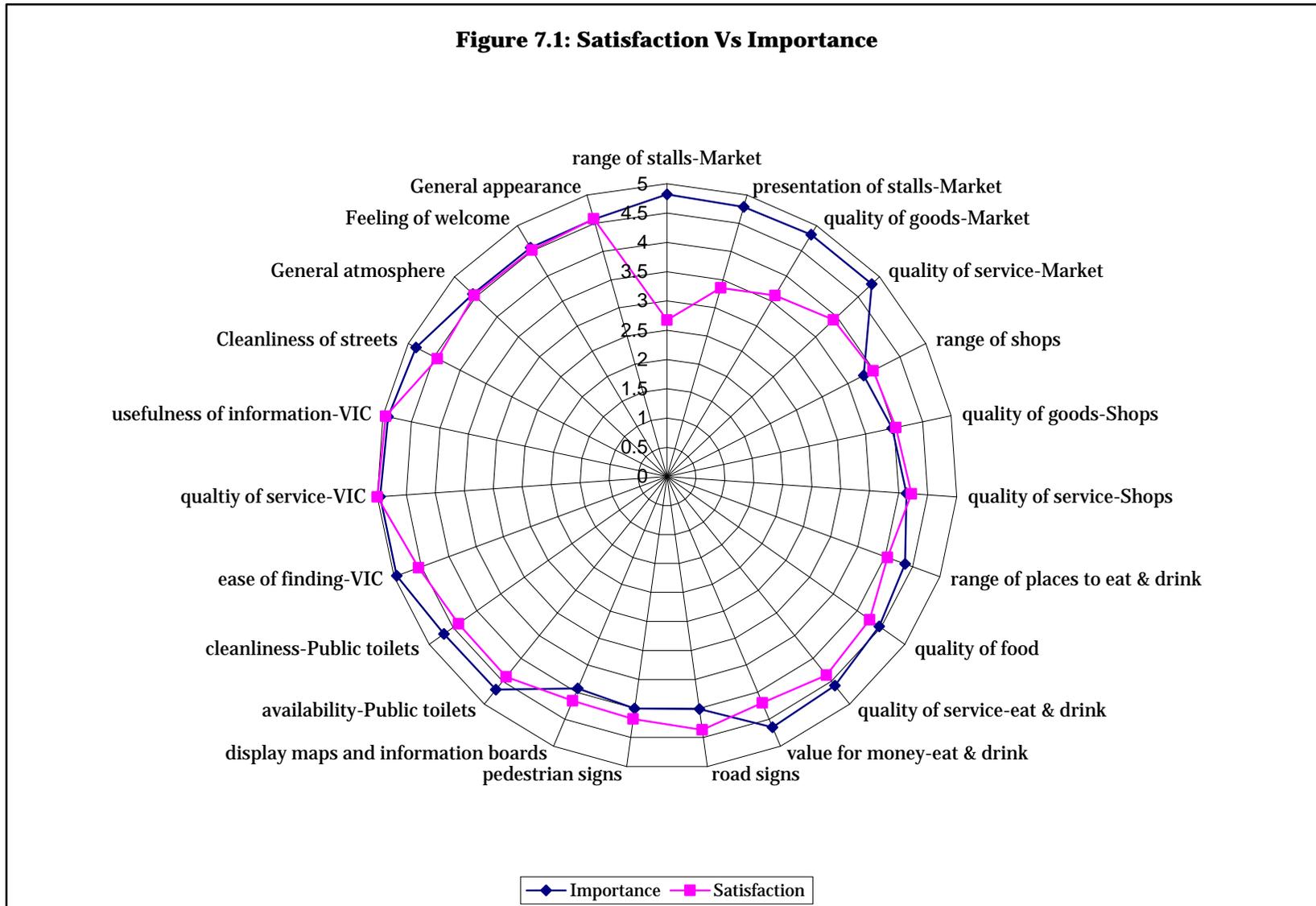
Figures in italics show poor scores - below both comparators

Overall Church Stretton was rated fairly highly by visitors. Certainly there were only a few factors in which it scored below average. These included the cost of parking and several factors related to the market (some of the survey days were markets days when visitors were asked to rate it). Church Stretton market has been struggling in recent years and it is therefore not surprising that it scored very low on these factors. It demonstrates that sorting out the market days/site, quality and scale should be a priority - from a visitor perspective one could argue it is doing the town a disservice.

The spidergram on the following page shows the scores graphically - the pink line showing visitors' **satisfaction** with each element. The closer the line is to the edge of the spidergram the higher the score. Visitors were also asked how important each factor was for them - this is plotted with the darker blue line, labelled **importance**. This adds another dimension as certain factors which score slightly lower - such as the range of shops and quality of goods on sale are thought of as slightly lower importance by visitors and thus Church Stretton appears to still be meeting visitors' expectations. However the food and drink offer, the public toilets and cleanliness of the streets scored below expectations (although these scores are relatively good overall). The low scores of the market stand out particularly.

Following this is a SWOT analysis bringing together as many of these factors as possible and looking at the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats which have been revealed - from a tourism perspective. The strengths and weaknesses listed have generated many of the opportunities identified which have been fed into the objectives and action plan.

Importance and satisfaction ratings for Church Stretton



A.5.3 Church Stretton SWOT Analysis

| Strengths | Opportunities |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty / SSSI/ scenery - Natural Gateway to the Shropshire Hills - Local Geology - Proximity to Cardingmill Valley & Long Mynd - Established Tourism Group with active volunteers - Central location (within England and Wales) - Friendly community - Good service levels within the town - Specialist retail & eating opportunities - Organic/Ecological aspirations and commitment - Variety of outdoor activities - Centre for walking - The tranquillity, open landscape and relaxing ambience - Antique shopping opportunities - Compact town centre - Good existing signage - Railway station - Variety of accommodation available | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnership with other destinations and attractions - Enhance town square, eg art/sculpture and better facilities for market - expand and relaunch the market - Improve entrance/gateways to Church Stretton, eg art/archway - Walkers are Welcome Town status - Interpretation of town's heritage eg through info boards, plaques, trails - Improved public transport and possible park & ride scheme - Local museum or "Stretton Centre", architectural/ contemporary/ green design, with info on town history and landscape plus visitor facilities, - Better visitor information in key locations inc car parks - Make more of Rectory Fields and Woods especially for children - Improved facilities for cyclists - Strengthen links between Cardingmill Valley and town (also with Acton Scott Historic Working Farm) - Strong partnership working - Divert more people off the A49 and try to attract more coming by train and coach - Tea shops - joint promotion/trail - Promote local food and drink more inc the Food Fayre - New Community leisure facilities being built - Mayfair Centre venue for courses and promotion of healthy living, walking for health - Silvester Horne Institute |
| Weaknesses | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No signage indicating 'Market Town' - Limited Sunday opening - Lack of specific visitor attractions - Poor range of stalls in market - Range of evening eating options - Small % overseas visitors - Lack of children's facilities - Lack of coach drop-off - Lack of collective marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other market towns / destinations (e.g. Shrewsbury, Mid-Wales, Ludlow) - Perception of cheaper holidays abroad - Importance of tourism still undervalued at central government - High migration rates of young people - Inactivity within the town to maximise opportunities - Poor partnership working - Rising fuel prices - Car park time limits restrict amount of time spent in town |

Annex 6. Workshop Feedback November 2007

Sustaining Tourism in Church Stretton and the Shropshire Hills

1. What are we doing already to help achieve the vision for Church Stretton and the Shropshire Hills?

- Friendly efficient visitor info centre, available all year round
- We have a town website
- Better Welcome Programme
- Annual food fair
- Walking festival
- Arts festival
- Friendliness and quality of service already exists
- Availability of courses eg Welcome Host
- Good new access statements for accom. providers to inform prospective visitors

2. What more could we do? - our ideas

Facilities

- More toilets
- Picnic tables eg on Rectory Field
- Ensure good hotel accommodation
- More information boards
- Children's trail
- Way marked walks
- Not enough facilities for walkers eg places to leave rucksacks, drying facilities, welcome in cafes etc. Have all businesses offer walkers welcome
- Not enough facilities for cyclists eg secure racks
- Improve east-west access across A49 for cyclists and horse riders
- Need to replace lost riding school/horse hire for hacks
- Need pedestrian area for shopping
- Better diversity of shops for browsing
- Better farmers market and location
- Better availability of restaurants - eg Sunday/Mondays
- Indoor facilities - promote Mayfair Centre, community leisure facilities
- Potential for use of Silvester Horne Institute as museum or for exhibitions
- Better paving for infirm/disabled visitors

Transport

- More bus shelters
- Transport opportunities exist but can be developed further through better marketing and promotion plus ongoing funding
- Better promotion of rail links and trips by train
- Improve local info about transport at railway station eg taxis, bus times etc
- Shuttle bus availability mid week
- Better parking facilities

Activities

- Themed weekends
- Winter events
- Book fairs
- Food-drink related events
- Wildlife activities

Promotion

- Better networking between businesses
- Better information exchange
- More joined up thinking - eg linking websites
- Promote outdoor activities
- Encourage outdoor activity providers to engage and cooperate
- Better targeted marketing
- Develop the walking market to target different types of user
- Capitalise on existing assets eg Mary Webb, Malcolm Saville
- New publication with all info a visitor needs including shopping and where to eat
- Clarify issue of promotion of non-inspected accommodation
- Events marketing
- Promoting with better links to surrounding areas and other towns

- Branding
- Target overseas visitors
- Research - better information on visitors - where do they come from and how do they get their info on Shropshire

3. What are the tourism priorities for Church Stretton and area?

- Wet weather facility
- Better signage from foot of Cardingmill Valley into town centre
- More quality pubs
- Better eating places - more evening restaurants
- Better opening hours for visitors at local cafes
- Retain existing hotel accommodation (Stretton Hall)
- More bedspaces
- Promotion of community organisations
- Link Cardingmill valley and Church Stretton better
- More central VIC
- VIC to be open on a Sunday
- Give Church Stretton a definite identity eg Walkers Centre
- Promotion of Shuttles
- Better, increased parking, preferably free
- Marketing Church Stretton and better research and targeting
- Signage from A49
- Co-ordination across the whole tourism sector
- Better coordination of publicity
- Get businesses and organisations to work together more effectively - join forces

4. Which scheme or ideas should we follow up?

- Advertise in papers
- Public transport schemes - slow travel
- Natural and cultural heritage
- Wildlife schemes
- More year round culture
- Developing a business network
- Open air theatre
- Market shuttle linked activities
- Managed database of subjects of interest (to avoid reinventing the wheel)
- Internet resource to enable the freeflow of info, ideas, questions and answers
- Holding networking meetings
- Walkers are welcome scheme - become a centre for walkers
- Improve stiles on footpaths and replace by kissing gates
- Cyclists and horses welcome for businesses
- New leisure centre will have some community use
- Weekly activity/what's on sheet posted on website and email reminder shots
- More linkage of Acton Scott and Church Stretton
- Farming connections
- Steam train promotions

5. Events, trips and training that you want

- More for local food and drink promotion
- Bigger venue for markets
- Walk leader training
- Website training
- Training on funding opportunities, grants, cost saving measures
- Seminars on history, geology, archaeology or Long Mynd and area
- Awareness event to look at how we can better promote our local artistic and literary heritage
- Leaflet swap linked to interesting programme, activity
- More networking opportunities
- Event using shuttles
- Event to promote awareness of facilities on the other side of the Long Mynd
- Event at another tourism venue and talk by proprietor
- Bed and breakfast story telling night!

6. Overall priorities

- Better co-ordination of communication and effort
- Make better use of cultural heritage
- One overall strategy
- More visible children's activities for poor weather days

- Marketing - co-ordination of many different activities and strengths

- Linkages between attractions and events eg weekly activity bulletin

7. One thing I will do after today

- Keep promoting beautiful Church Stretton
- Spend a full day marketing again - I've let it lapse and have seen new opportunities here
- Help make Church Stretton a plastic bag free town
- Get an energy audit and hopefully reduce usage/costs
- See the future of Church Stretton brighter - and change the lightbulbs in the shop
- Investigate all the green aspects and carbon footprint etc
- Become part of Shropshire Hills Brand
- To integrate/affiliate with similar initiatives (sustainable tourism) rather than trying to do something on my own
- Sign up for Walkers Welcome with Quality in Tourism
- Investigate sourcing of local products for VIC using AONB's local products directory
- Fill in business energy survey form
- Work with other local tourism businesses to improve offers to potential visitors

Annex 7. Notes from Heritage Meeting

Church Stretton - Heritage Meeting 24 January 2008

Present:

Tony Crowe, Ian Dormor, Derek Bartlett, Clare Fildes, Alison Symons, Chris Stratton, Alison Caffyn

Visitors who come to Church Stretton

Cardingmill Valley attracts three main types:

- Explorer families
- Those on a tight budget
- Older people with special interests (eg walkers/bird watchers)

The Visitor Info Centre has:

- 'thinking people' who want to know about the town
- Coach parties (staying 2-3 hours in town)
- Fewer people with children

The VIC mainly directs people to visit the church, rectory fields and woods, the antiques centre, plus walking opportunities.

What information is available?

Town trail @ 65p

Shropshire Hills glossy booklet £3.95

All Stretton book £7.50

Ian Jones Walkabout booklet (Handwritten format deters some)

National Trust has developed a series of trails on the valley itself its geology, natural history etc - now downloadable from their website.

There will also be a visitors folder as part of the Sustainable Business Scheme with information about the area, landscape and activity opportunities.

There's scope for a new booklet in a glossy format like the Shropshire Hills one but with a good amount of detail on the town, including old photos etc.

Also potentially a book made up of chapters which could also be produced separately and in different formats, although ideally with a similar look or identity.

What are the main stories?

1. The setting/situation of the town - the history of the Stretton Gap from Roman times and Watling Street up to coming of the railways and current A49 route.
2. Prehistory - bronze and iron age forts, the frontier zone and Welsh border.
3. Agriculture - towns role as a food collection location - livestock, whinberries, market gardening, the maltings (barley and beer), ponies and sheep.
4. Victorian period and the coming of the railway - creation of a recreational resort in the hills 'Little Switzerland' - clean water, access to the countryside and healthy living. (Not a spa town). Carriages and hand carts picking up visitors from trains.
5. Key buildings - Burway House, Long Mynd Hotel, the Church, Bucks Head, Kings Arms, Tudor Cottage, The Maltings (antique centre).
6. Wartime - St Dunstan's and WWII, the building of the A49 bypass.
7. Social/cultural history - eg fairs
8. Literature - Mary Webb and Malcolm Saville
9. Cardingmill Valley
10. Famous people - Silvester Horne, Hezbah Stretton, Reverend Carr and graves/commemorations in the churchyard.
11. Important families and links to road names - eg Bensons, Lutwyche
12. The layout of the town - original plans and unfinished roads and housing.

Tony has information on many other aspects of the town - 36 folders developed for talks, plus 100 A4 historic photos, backed up by files of further slides and resources. The A4 photos could be used to mount temporary exhibitions (he has tried to do this in the past) and also in video type presentations.

Some stories are obviously stronger or more detailed than others - but there are opportunities to tell them in different ways in different locations.

Ideas for interpreting the town's heritage

1. Guided walks

Several people can do guided walks: Tony on the town itself, Chris on the Long Mynd and Cardingmill Valley, Ian on landscape history, plus several other people. The National Trust books regular walks but regular town walks have not been sustainable.

Proposal - collect full details of people who can offer walks and the topics covered and create a listing so that groups and individuals can contact them for bespoke guided walks. Listing to go on website at VIC and in Shropshire Hills folder.

2. Interpretive signs or panels

To tell the stories of key buildings and locations in the town. Potentially to include the buildings listed above, plus the Sandford Entablature and the market square. Could be funded through the Better Welcome scheme. Will need careful design and simple text, plus need to be vandal proof and long lasting. Should also be designed to complement the existing town trail.

3. Permanent museum/heritage centre/visitor centre

Various ideas for what could be featured including scale models of the hills, old maps of the town as planned and as currently, old photographs alongside new, computer generated views of ancient landscape with Brock?? Castle dominating the landscape at the entry to the valley or re-creations of hill forts. Lesley Forbes at Toad Hall has many old objects which might be displayed. Would need to complement exhibits at CMV.

Location (and cost) are the challenges. Options include:

- Silvester Horne Institute
- Railway Signal box
- Telephone exchange?
- Burway Garage site?

Signal box would be a small display focusing on the railway, its signals and its impact on the town. Local railway group are pursuing the option with Network Rail. It would need much improved access from the park. Possible scope to have a mini train running around the park linked to the signal box.

4. Hi-tech interpretation options - Audio

Modern technology offers options such as dialling up on a mobile phone to hear information about a particular site, or downloading a podcast from a website onto an ipod. The idea of an audio trail loaded onto a memory stick with ear piece was popular. These could be sold cheaply at the VIC and shops and once listened to can then be used to store music etc.

Recording stories and information about the town could be enhanced by a reminiscence project - to record memories of older people who lived in the town of how it was when they were younger. This type of project could be eligible for heritage lottery funding.

Audio interpretation is also very good for people with visual disabilities.

5. Hi-tech interpretation options - Video

The idea of a DVD about the Long Mynd and Shropshire Hills has already been mooted. This could be complemented with one about the history of Curch Stretton itself. Accommodation businesses may be interested in buying a copy to show to visitors or bulk buying for sale. It could be shown at CMV tea shop and possibly the VIC.

6. Children

There is very little interpretation targeted at children (other than at CMV)

It was agreed to pilot a children's quiz trail from the VIC. To be a low cost production, targeting 8-9 year olds and their parents and lasting about 30-45 minutes. Ian and Tony volunteered to design this. Alison will help pilot at the VIC and seek feedback on it. If successful it could be produced in a more permanent format or be downloadable from websites.

Another idea was that if play equipment in the park is to be upgraded it could be themed more to relate to the town and landscape and thus tell more of a story whilst still being fun.

Summary and Funding

It was felt that many of these ideas should be pursued. Alison will integrate them into the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and ideas for who could lead or where funding might come from could be pursued. The Civic Society may be able to play a role as a community organisation which can apply for certain types of funding which public bodies cannot.

Annex 8. Useful local contacts and schemes

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| Shropshire Hills Portal site | www.shropshirehills.info |
| Church Stretton website | www.churchstretton.co.uk |
| Visit South Shropshire (SSTA) | www.visitsouthshropshire.co.uk |
| Shropshire Tourism | www.shropshiretourism.info |
| Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty | www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk |
| Shropshire Hills Buy Local | www.shropshirehills-buylocal.co.uk |
| National Trust | www.nationaltrust.org.uk |
| Marches Energy Agency | www.mea.org.uk |
| Quality at Heart | www.qualityatheart.co.uk |
| Visit Britain | www.tourismtrade.org.uk |
| VB grading schemes | www.qualityintourism.com |
| Green Tourism Business Scheme | www.green-business.co.uk |
| Shropshire Wildlife Trust | www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk |
| South Shropshire District Council | www.southshropshire.gov.uk |
| Local to Ludlow | www.localtoludlow.org.uk |
| Walkers are Welcome Scheme | www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk |
| Shropshire Walking | www.shropshirewalking.co.uk |
| Shropshire Cycling | www.shropshirecycling.co.uk |
| Shropshire Riding | www.shropshireriding.co.uk |
| Marches Horse Trails | www.marcheshorsetrails.co.uk |
| County countryside info | www.shropshire.gov.uk/countryside.nsf |
| Shuttle Buses | www.shropshirehillsshuttles.co.uk |
| Rail timetables | www.nationalrailenquiries.co.uk |
| Public transport info | www.travelinwestmidlands.co.uk |
| Stretton Arts Festival | www.strettonfestival.org.uk |
| Walking Festival | www.churchstrettonwalkingfestival.co.uk |
| Food Fayre | www.foodfayre.org |
| Mayfair Centre | www.mayfaircentre.org.uk |
| Cardingmill Valley/Shropshire Hills learning | www.cardingmillvalley.org.uk |
| Forest of Bowland Sense of Place Toolkit | www.forestofbowland.com/publ_plans.asp |
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