

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Communications Strategy



March 2010

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Summary of current promotional / communication activity
3. SWOT analysis of current situation
4. Relevant extracts from AONB Management Plan 2009-14
5. Analysis of target audiences with summary of key message and suitable methods
6. Prioritised Action Proposals

1. Introduction

Since the Promotions Strategy of 2004, the AONB Partnership has come a long way in terms of raising awareness of the AONB and developing a strong 'Shropshire Hills' identity and brand. This has been achieved through our own literature and that of others, and through activities such as the Shropshire Hills Farmers Markets, Shuttle buses, Sustainable Business Scheme and Friends of the Shropshire Hills. The Discovery Centre and its new exhibition also promotes the key AONB messages and is an excellent starting point for people to understand more about the Shropshire Hills AONB landscape.

The new AONB Management Plan says that "many people's connection with the landscape of the Shropshire Hills is strong, but understanding of the designation is generally poor ... challenges are to raise understanding of what the designation means, and to help the AONB and its landscape to generate more benefits to a wider range of people".

This Strategy aims to address this and guide communication by the AONB Partnership. A broad view is taken, recognising that 'mainstream' work (such as through the AONB Partnership group itself, through planning and strategic work, and project implementation) is an important way of communicating about the AONB. The Actions section nevertheless focuses more on actions specifically related to promotions.

2. Summary of current promotional / communication activity

Publications
<p>AONB Management Plan 2009 - 2014 Annual Review (annual publication) General AONB leaflet Shropshire Hills Events, Activities and News booklet (annual publication) Buy Local Directory (annual publication) Sustainable Development Fund leaflet LEADER postcard Shropshire Hills Shuttles leaflet (annual publication) and postcards Friends of the Shropshire Hills newsletter (twice a year – spring and autumn) Teme Rivers Water Friendly Farming leaflet Woodlands Project leaflet Shropshire Hills 'souvenir' booklet – Gordon Dickins/ Keith Pybus (sold at £3.95/ copy) Case Studies and numerous reports available electronically on website</p>
Mobile Exhibitions
<p>2 x AONB pop-up mobile displays 2 x Shropshire Hills Shuttles pop-ups 1 x Buy Local pop-up 4 x 'local' pop-ups</p>
Key AONB Partnership Activities
<p>Sustainable Development Fund LEADER in the Shropshire Hills Rivers Project Woodlands Project Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme Shropshire Hills Shuttles Friends of the Shropshire Hills</p>
Other means of communication
<p>E-bulletin – aimed at 4 times/year Websites – AONB, Shuttles, shropshirehills.info, Buy Local Events / shows / walks etc AONB logo used on office cars, stationery, clothing etc. Shuttles logo on bus. Media / Press releases Articles into other publications Office itself – signage, appearance, entrance lobby, etc Office communication – telephone, emails, letters Visitor Centres: Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Carding Mill Valley, Acton Scott, Bog Visitor Centre, Snailbeach Mine Church Stretton licensed use of the Shropshire Hills branding Roadside boundary signs on A488, A489, A458, A4169 Sustainable Business Scheme Facebook page Shropshire Hills Tourism Ltd licensed use of logo</p>

3. SWOT analysis of current situation

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revised AONB Management Plan guiding activity for the next five years• Dedicated and experienced staff team with specific knowledge and understanding• Established identity, and increased support for generic 'Shropshire Hills' identity. Family of related logos including partners (Business Scheme, Discovery Centre, Friends, etc)• Good quality publications – Annual Review, events booklet, etc• Mobile displays – high quality, flexible.• SDF and LEADER funding – awareness through direct involvement & press coverage.• Project work – Rivers and Woodlands – direct contact with landowners
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low general level of understanding of AONB – what it is, what it means.• AONB has low profile at some key visitor sites, such as Acton Scott, Snailbeach Mine, Bury Ditches.• Distribution of publications, etc not as effective as it could be - mailing lists difficult to manage.• Generally poor profile in Shrewsbury – important as county town• Roadside boundary signs on A49 refused by Highways Agency
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build on and refine established identity rather than re-invent• Strengthened staff team – new Woodlands Project, LEADER etc• Cost effective print (fewer publications, bigger print runs) and timing of publications• Websites – unify the different sites and develop to excellent standard of publications• National Association for AONBs is developing a national AONB 'brand' identity• Build relationships with different departments of Shropshire Council• Removal of Districts may help enable the AONB to be used as a sub-unit of the county• Build involvement and active support for Partnership to develop partners as advocates for the AONB• Potential for more general AONB talks to community groups
<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other designations (actual or proposed) could lead to confusion of identity• Reluctance by some to distinguish the Shropshire Hills or the AONB, e.g. Shropshire Tourism Strategy• Other organisations working to different geographical boundaries e.g. Shropshire wide or Southern Shropshire – important to retain identity of the Shropshire Hills and key messages in terms of protected landscape• Potential funding cuts

4. Relevant extracts from AONB Management Plan 2009-14

Strategic Priority “Helping people to connect with the AONB”

This priority encompasses raising awareness about the AONB and its special qualities, making more of the benefits of living in and visiting the area, and establishing closer links between the AONB designation and the key issues facing Shropshire. Many people’s connection with the landscape of the Shropshire Hills is strong, but understanding of the designation is generally poor, the cumbersome name being something of an obstacle. Progress has been made in raising the profile of the AONB, and many people have now heard of it. Challenges for the coming five years are to raise understanding of what the designation means, and to help the AONB and its landscape to generate more benefits to a wider range of people.

Objectives:

27. To raise public awareness of the special qualities of the Shropshire Hills and of the AONB and its management.
31. To encourage understanding and knowledge of the Shropshire Hills, especially through schools and further and higher education.
34. To build the AONB Partnership as an inclusive structure with sound governance and strong partnership relations and communication.
35. To monitor and report on progress with the Management Plan and condition of the AONB.

<p>POLICY 40 Opportunities should be taken to strengthen the integrity and identity of the Shropshire Hills as an area of exceptional landscape value. Consistent use of the ‘Shropshire Hills’ identity should be given greater prominence in tourism and other forms of promotion, along with the special qualities of the AONB and opportunities for visitors to adopt a sustainable approach.</p>
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5. Analysis of target audiences with summary of key message and suitable methods

TARGET AUDIENCE	SUMMARY OF KEY MESSAGE(S)	SUITABLE METHODS – EXISTING & POTENTIAL
Those living and/or working in the AONB	The special area in which you live/work is recognised nationally and protected by a designation called the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Its special qualities are vulnerable to a range of pressures, and active steps are needed to protect them. A Partnership of organisations and local people works together to conserve and sustain the area. You can get involved in a variety of ways.	Shropshire Hills Events and News booklet, press releases, local walks, talks and events, exhibitions (e.g. at Discovery Centre, Bog Visitor Centre, Carding Mill Valley, mobile), community projects, contact with staff and partners, Sustainable Business Scheme, Friends of the Shropshire Hills, Farmers Markets, websites, roadside boundary signs, other organisations' publications, office, cars with logo, E bulletin. Parish newsletters. Facebook/Twitter?
Farmers and land managers	The choices you make to manage your land can sustain the natural beauty of the area which is valued nationally as well as locally. Support and advice is available on sustainable land management, and this can open up new business opportunities.	Direct contact with staff and partner organisations (especially Rivers and Woodlands projects, Farmer Engagement project, FWAG, NFU, CLA). Reps attend Farming Working Group. Targeted events, local projects e.g. Land, Life and Livelihoods, demonstration initiatives, press/media, presentations, potential for farmer 'advocates'. Farming/woodland 'summary extract' of Management Plan?
Visitors	As above, plus Choosing sustainable options as a visitor will help to conserve this nationally important landscape. The landscape is heavily influenced by geology and a long history of settlement and farming. The area offers great opportunities to enjoy scenery, wildlife, history and culture. Please be a responsible visitor so that your enjoyment does not harm the special qualities of the area or the livelihood of local people.	Visitor Centres – Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Acton Scott, Bog Visitor Centre, Carding Mill Valley. Shropshire Hills Events and News Booklet, www.shropshirehills.info , Content of mainstream visitor literature including web-based, Walks & cycle ride leaflets. Roadside boundary signs, events, information at accommodation sites. Shropshire Hills Shuttles, Shropshire Hills souvenir booklet, Friends of the Shropshire Hills, Shropshire Hills 'buy local – be sustainable' logo, Sense of Place collection for Sustainable Business Scheme members. Through VICs and other local VIPs – training. Others' publications, e.g. books. Facebook/Twitter?
Developers	Maintaining the natural beauty of the area will in the long term support the local economy rather than restrict it.	AONB Management Plan, Planning Policy documents and Supplementary Planning Documents, other guidance (e.g. Design Statements and Guidance), AONB website, Council planning officers.
Partnership members, (especially organisations)	Together we play an important role in supporting and enhancing this protected landscape. (Working with the AONB will help to deliver your organisation's aims in co-ordination with others).	AONB Management Plan, Partnership papers and minutes, email circulars and mailings, E bulletin, Partnership Tour, meetings, joint projects, AONB staff team contact, presentations, Annual Review, website. NAAONB Outstanding magazine and events.
Local Authorities, elected members and Local Strategic Partnerships	Your authority's financial contribution to the AONB Partnership is combined with many other sources of funding to provide an innovative, efficient and value for money service.	AONB Management Plan, presentations, Annual Review, Partnership Tour, meetings, Working Groups, E bulletin, press/media.
Other organisations/ individuals with an interest, local and national	As above.	Website, Annual Review, Management Plan, E bulletin, education information sheets, Natural England publications, National Association for AONBs.

7. Prioritised Action Proposals

	PRIORITY
Publications	
Management Plan – Good printed supply – push distribution. Produce summary extracts, e.g. for farmers and developers?	H
Annual Review – Continue move towards a less ‘corporate report’ feel to engage a wider audience. Bigger print run and distribution.	H
AONB general leaflet – reprint with update to incorporate Management Plan priorities.	H
Shropshire Hills Events and News booklet – annual publication - continue with area format and including as many local events, activities and news as possible – large print run for wide distribution.	H
LEADER – ensure correct logos used in relation to any work linked to this funding scheme (in accordance with guidance).	H
Buy Local Directory – look at different ways to promote the Sustainable Business Scheme to benefit members.	M
Shropshire Hills Shuttles annual timetable – ensure AONB key messages are integrated within Shuttles promotion.	M
Friends of the Shropshire Hills – newsletter – continue twice a year including range of articles to suit the interests of Friends and continue to promote the Scheme and encourage new members.	M
Teme Rivers Water Friendly Farming leaflet – promote this good practice guide to target audience (landowners with watercourses) and as use an education material for schools, etc. Also Woodlands Project leaflet – distribute to support project uptake and activity.	M
Shropshire Hills souvenir booklet – continue to promote and sell.	M
Mobile displays	
Continue to use in variety of locations, e.g. libraries, community centres, events and shows, VICs.	M
Visitor Centres/ attractions	
Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre - continue to work closely to ensure key AONB messages put across to visitors.	H
Carding Mill Valley – continue to work closely with the National Trust to ensure the Shropshire Hills AONB key messages are included, when appropriate, in any interpretive, educational and visitor information as the most popular visitor destination in the AONB.	H
Acton Scott – need to develop better links in terms of including AONB messages into this visitor attraction.	M
Bog Visitor Centre – Support the volunteers running the centre where appropriate at this unique and popular visitor destination.	M
Stiperstones NNR – continue to work closely with Natural England to sensitively promote the NNR and ensure the AONB is recognised in any interpretive/educational material in terms of wider landscape designation.	M
Snailbeach Mine – work at developing better links.	M

	PRIORITY
Other means of communication	
E-bulletin – do on more regular basis and increase distribution list, especially with community contacts.	H
Websites – need to update design and technology of websites to become more unified and in line with our high quality printed material. Optimise links from other sites. Monitor use and seek feedback.	H
Press/media - keep up volume and quality of coverage - Promotions Officer to co-ordinate press releases. Optimise potential of LEADER and SDF funding.	H
Office communications – dealing with colleagues and members of the public face to face, telephone, email and front of office	H
LEADER & Sustainable Development Fund – ensure recipients acknowledge AONB support	H
Events/ local shows/ guided walks – collaborate with others to put on events and guided walks. Events also delivered through project work, sometimes targeted at specific audience, e.g. Rivers, Woodlands, Sustainable Business Scheme. Possible development of an annual Shropshire Hills Festival?	M
Presentations/ talks - to key partners and to wider community groups. Opportunity for Partnership members to get involved too? Manage storage of presentations and ensure team are using latest slides/images.	M
Articles into other publications/ websites – reactive to opportunities – local focus (use parish newsletters etc more), but wider if opportunities arise. Generally not pay to advertise unless specific e.g. Shuttle, Business Scheme. Seek to raise AONB and Shropshire Hills profile in Shropshire Way promotion and Shropshire Council Outdoor Recreation publications.	M
AONB Partnership Encourage partners to act as advocates for the AONB.	M
Logos on cars, clothing etc – update logos on cars when opportunity arises.	M
Involvement with schools – relatively little capacity for this, mostly comes through links such as SDF & LEADER projects.	M
Public transport – links with, leaflets e.g. on Wrexham – Shropshire - London train service.	M

NB. Priority is based on need for further action related to promotions, and lower priority is not intended to imply less importance as a means of communication.