

Response from Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership on Shropshire Council consultation on the formation of Destination Development Partnerships, 10/9/10

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership supports the principle of better co-operation and joint working throughout the county on tourism, and the proposed formation of a Destination Development Partnership based on the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, as an evocative and relevant visitor destination area.

The new structure would help to embed the closer working and co-ordination on tourism in the Shropshire Hills which has been developing well in the last few years. In particular, close collaboration between the AONB Partnership, Shropshire Hills Tourism and interests in Church Stretton has resulted in a much stronger consistency of identity and brand, as well as a shared vision for sustainable tourism as the focus for the area. Shropshire Hills Tourism will be a key player and there needs to be clarity on the role of the Tourism Association alongside the new DDP. The geographical definition of the DDP area will need to be considered. The county boundary makes sense to the south and west, but a flexible approach is perhaps preferable to the north and east according to whether individual tourism businesses wish to link with the Shropshire Hills or with Shrewsbury or Telford/ Ironbridge/ Severn Valley. The approach of encouraging each of the DDPs to develop flexibly according to the particular needs of their area is also strongly supported.

Informal discussions have been held between officers of the AONB Team and the Council about optimising alignment of the new structures with existing and planned activity by the AONB Partnership. Of particular relevance are:

- the AONB Partnership's established Working Group – currently the Recreation, Tourism & Products Development Group.
- the Natural Assets funding we have secured for the preparation of a Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the Shropshire Hills.
- our licence agreement with Shropshire Hills Tourism on use of the Shropshire Hills logo.
- our aspiration to attain the Europarc European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, a key requirement of which is a forum bringing together industry representatives with the protected landscape body.
- the Offa's Country programme working on cross-border development of tourism, initially through the 'Walking With Offa' project, in conjunction with other AONBs and the Brecon Beacons National Park.
- the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme, providing a strong network of tourism and other businesses. Other AONB activity also provides strong links to community groups.

1. Would your organisation like to join the proposed DDP?

The AONB Partnership would like to be a full and active member of the new DDP. For some years we have run a Working Group focusing on tourism in the Shropshire Hills (currently the Recreation, Tourism & Products Development Group, see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/partnership/workgps.htm#accrec>). We would propose that this group be merged with the new DDP, and that the DDP is established with an acknowledged link to the AONB Partnership governance structure. As previously discussed, we have a commitment of officer time to this co-ordination role, and along with the proposed merging of groups would be happy to apply this resource in support of the DDP. We do not however feel it would be possible or indeed appropriate for AONB Partnership staff to take the main lead role in support for the DDP.

2. Please list the top three priorities from those listed.

The priorities are listed below. There are also some general comments about role of the Tourism Strategy Board.

Destination Development Partnership Priorities should be:

- ▶ **Developing a better sense of place** - working with destinations to improve the local product offer, share information about local attractions, events and landscape, improve the interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
- ▶ **Developing an action plan** - The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has secured funding for a Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy, due for completion by Sept 2011. The preparation of the Strategy could include gathering some visitor data, consulting local businesses and the wider community, and developing a fully costed five year action plan. The scope of the Strategy will by necessity cover a wider area than the AONB itself. It will include consideration of the market towns, but mostly from the perspective of how they support tourism in the rural Shropshire Hills area as service centres. The market towns, especially Ludlow, have significant tourism activity (and presumably associated development needs) in their own right, but the Strategy will not have the capacity to address these.

We propose that the Strategy is developed with the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership as the lead, in close collaboration with DDP partners, and that along with further strategic work which might be necessary to meet the needs of the towns, it should form part of the agreed action plan for the DDP.

- ▶ **Information within the destination** - There is a need to co-ordinate the provision of information and better liaison with VICs.

All the activities mentioned seem reasonable for the DDP, providing there are sufficient resources. There is some concern that the database suggested under "Research and Database" duplicates work already done by Shropshire Tourism. Is there an opportunity to develop the Shropshire Tourism approach to include all tourism relevant businesses and organisations or should all this work be done locally with databases that 'talk' to each other?

The Tourism Strategy Board

Comments on role:

- ▶ **Developing a Visitor Economy Strategy** - Bearing in mind the importance of mitigating climate change, the need to involve local people in the development of the tourism experience and the fact that many tourism businesses in Shropshire are lifestyle businesses, it would seem more appropriate to develop a Sustainable Visitor Strategy that encompasses the economy, community and the environment for a more coherent approach.

- ▶ There is a desperate need for local research into tourism trends, aspirations of visitors and use of local products.
- ▶ Help with securing funding will be invaluable as public funding is cut.

3. What other priorities/ actions would you like to see the DDP addressing?

The DDP's role should be **about more than the generation of wealth**. It should be minimising negative environmental and community impacts (e.g. able to signpost to renewable energy advice, promoting public transport) and develop the community welcome to improve the visitor experience (community consultations, study tours, familiarisation trips for local people).

The DDP could also play a role in:

- ▶ Identifying and encouraging joint promotions for local products e.g. local passport or loyalty card.
- ▶ Promoting the destination at wider events e.g. Burwarton Show (assuming the Strategy Board would do county, regional and national events), with purpose built displays and promotional literature.

1. Comments on the proposed DDP members

The list is supported. There could be benefit in including recreational interests (walking/ cycling/ riding), perhaps with a link to the Shropshire Local Access Forum. The DDP should also ensure that there are links to other community organisations, local councillors and environmental organisations through their members or through a mailing list.