

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Management Board  
Minutes of Meeting 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016  
AONB Partnership office, Drovers House, Craven Arms



**Present:**

James Williamson (Chair)	Individual member
George Chancellor (vice-chair)	Individual member
Deb Hughes	Shropshire Council
Cllr Cecilia Motley	Shropshire Council
Cllr Chris Turley	Telford & Wrekin Council
Cllr David Turner	Shropshire Council

AONB Partnership staff:

Phil Holden	AONB Partnership Manager
Alison Scimia	Administrator (minute taker)

**1. Apologies**

Veronica Cossons	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Caroline Beddell	Country Land & Business Association
Lee Chapman	Shropshire Hills Tourism
Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire Council
John Pritchard	Individual member
Michael Vout	Telford & Wrekin Council

**2. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**

2.1 Para 8 – Note that the next meeting has changed to Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May, at 9.30am at Drovers House.

2.2 Para 2.1 – Proposed planning meeting – Phil said he had sought advice from Councillors on the Management Board as to the best way forward with this. David had suggested a regular update to Town and Parish Councils, which could include planning officers. George felt there would be real merit in meeting with planning officers, as this had proved useful before. Cecilia commented that the South Planning Committee had recently gone against officers' recommendations to approve some applications in the AONB, and had instead refused them. She suggested contacting Andy Mortimer and Ian Kilby at Shropshire Council to arrange briefing sessions on the AONB for planning officers and committee members. **ACTION – Cecilia, James and Phil.**

A retrospective planning application for Halfway House at the Wrekin was discussed briefly. It was agreed that contact with Telford & Wrekin Council over planning was best pursued separately to Shropshire Council. Phil had been working closely with Michael Vout on the new TWC Local Plan in relation to the Wrekin, and the new Wrekin Forest Plan was being used as supporting evidence, along with a Strategic Landscapes Study.

**3. Work Programme Update**

Phil highlighted the following key points from the report:

### 3.1 Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme

- (a) The Pontesbury Engine House is the largest single capital works in the Scheme. A grant had been received from Historic England which would include a 10 year maintenance period, but the contract had yet to be signed with the landowners.
- (b) The Ground-nesting Bird Recovery Project – Monitoring has shown there were no successful breeding curlews in 2015. Feedback events are currently being held.
- (c) Interviews have been held for the new Training Officer post and a candidate selected. This post had been created following the termination of the training programme contract with Walford College.

3.2 River Clun Recovery Project – The project was progressing well, Alison Jones and Mike Kelly working to implement c£50k of capital works on sites by the end of March. Dye tracing surveys on highway drains were being carried out. Work was also taking place with the Woodland Trust looking at measures to help slow the flow of water in the uplands, investigating the creation of woodland shelter belts.

3.3 Shuttles – A decision had reluctantly been made at the Shuttles Steering Group meeting to stop the Castle Connect service for 2016. This was due to loss of funding and lower passenger numbers. The Board supported the rationale that by cutting the Castle Connect service, it would enable the Long Mynd & Stiperstones Shuttle to continue running for longer.

3.4 Tourism Co-operation project – An outline application had been submitted for £50k of EAFRD Growth Programme EU funding for destination planning and marketing. The bid included updating of the tourism strategy and renewing the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. The £19k of match funding would come mostly from planned activity by partners, along with a small amount of AONB cash match.

3.5 Upland Commons project – Our final input had gone into the draft HLF application for this national project, which will be submitted by 11<sup>th</sup> February by the Foundation for Common Land. A first meeting had taken place of a Shropshire Hills Area Group for the project, which had been well attended. Cecilia believed the project would be very helpful to commoners. Phil outlined the proposed structure of the project, with a two year development phase followed by a two year delivery phase, with a National Programme Manager and area Facilitators in each of the five areas. The timescales were not known exactly, but the development phase would probably start in the latter part of this year if the stage 1 bid was successful.

3.6 Sustainable Tourism Strategy – Phil explained that discussions had taken place with Shropshire Hills Tourism with a view to bringing the Destination Partnership (DDP) under their wing, but with continued support from the AONB Partnership team. This was supported, and linkages to the LEP tourism group were also encouraged.

3.7 Planning – The Acton Scott solar farm application had been granted permission on appeal. It was expressed how important it was for the planning officer's recommendation to be favourable in the first instance.

3.8 Partnership membership – There were ten new members on the Partnership and it was intended to hold an induction/briefing session. This could be linked to the next Partnership meeting.

#### **4. 2015-17 AONB Partnership Budgets**

Phil highlighted the following key points:

- 4.1 Staff projection costs had decreased by £7k.
- 4.2 Office accommodation – No charges for the new office had been billed yet, but based on the costings recently provided by the Council, the overall costs for Drovers House were marginally lower than those for the Old Post Office. However, the service charge balancing invoices for the Old Post Office for 2013-14 and 2014-15 had been billed this year and were higher than anticipated. The Shropshire Council agreed contribution towards occupancy costs for the duration of the LEADER programme had been included in the income section of the budgets, and the office costs shown in full, to aid budgeting. James and George expressed appreciation to the AONB team in moving office successfully in a relatively short period of time and at low cost.
- 4.3 Income & Reserve – The work that core AONB team members have been doing in support of the LPS would bring in around £12k this Financial Year. The income projection for the year had improved, leading to a projected deficit on the year of now only £1,405. It was expected to add slightly to the unattached reserve by moving some money which had been held forward for particular commitments, but was no longer needed for these. Although the total redundancy liability for the team was still more than the total unattached reserve, Phil emphasised that it was important sometimes to use some of the reserve to match fund new projects.

George asked when Shropshire Council's core contribution for the coming year would be confirmed. Deb stated there would be a Cabinet paper issued the following day, which would outline the Council's budget strategy, but as far as she was aware, the Council's contribution to the AONB Partnership was still within the budget.

#### **5. Draft Communications Strategy**

- 5.1 Phil said some further work had recently been done on the draft Strategy, with content on LEADER removed and on-line and electronic communications represented more fully. The Shropshire Great Outdoors website would be added.
- 5.2 Phil said he regretted that due to pressures of other work, an Annual Review for 2014/15 had not yet been produced and the Management Plan was still a text only document on the website. It was agreed to do a fuller Annual Review for 2015/16. The use of social media was discussed. George said he was happy to support further development of the Communications Strategy and meet up with team members. Phil said that he would like to bring the finalised Strategy to the next Partnership meeting in March to agree/ adopt.

#### **6. Charitable Incorporated Organisation Development**

- 6.1 Phil ran through the progress of the charity establishment, stating that three meetings of the initial trustees had now been held, and the bank account application and the Charity Commission application had been fully drafted. The name of the organisation had been queried by one of the trustees. The Management Board were supportive of the proposed organisation name of Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund. Phil confirmed there would be a further Trustees meeting the following week and that hopefully things would progress swiftly after that. There were three trustee seats to be appointed by the AONB Partnership, which it was hoped to do at the March meeting.

## 7. Management Board Support Roles

7.1 The support roles that had been discussed at the Board meeting in May 2015 needed updating following changes to the Board. Members offered to assist in the following areas:

- Planning – David Turner
- Staff/personnel – Deb Hughes
- Finance and the National Association for AONBs – James Williamson
- Communications – George Chancellor

The following roles were also suggested, if members not present were willing:

- Biodiversity & natural environment – Veronica Cossons
- Tourism – Lee Chapman

It was noted that not all the roles may be drawn on very much, but they were still useful to assign.

## 8. Any other Business

8.1 Phil mentioned that this year's National Association for AONBs annual conference would be held at Lilleshall from 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> June, and would be based on the theme of health and wellbeing. The Shropshire Hills AONB team had been asked to organise two site visits for the conference. Visits would also be available to the Malvern Hills, Wye Valley and Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONBs. This was a good opportunity to get more members of the Partnership and team involved with the National Association, though there were costs associated.

The dates for Partnership meetings in 2016 would be circulated shortly and a theme and venue for the tour agreed – **ACTION Phil**.

## 9. Date of Next Meetings

Weds 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016, and Thurs 8<sup>th</sup> September 2016, both 9.30am at Drovers House.