

Application report: framework and guidance

The *Application report: framework and guidance* is one of a set of three publications. The other two are *The Charter* and *How to join the journey: a guide for protected areas*. Together the trio forms guidance on how to become a member of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.

The Charter Principles for Sustainable Tourism

The underlying aims of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas are to

- **increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage, that should be preserved for, and enjoyed by, current and future generations;**
- **improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, which takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.**

The charter principles involve working in partnership, preparing and implementing a strategy, and addressing key issues. Charter protected areas make a series of commitments to achieve the underlying aims:

1 To involve all those implicated by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management.

A permanent forum, or equivalent arrangement, should be established between the protected-area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism industry. Links with regional and national bodies should be developed and maintained.

2 To prepare and implement a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area.

The strategy should be based on careful consultation and be approved and understood by local stakeholders. It should contain:

- a definition of the area to be influenced by the strategy, which may extend outside the protected area;
- an assessment of the area's natural, historic and cultural heritage, tourism infrastructure, and economic and social circumstances; considering issues of capacity, need and potential opportunity;
- an assessment of current visitors and potential future markets;
- a set of strategic objectives for the development and management of tourism, covering:

- conservation and enhancement of the environment and heritage,
- economic and social development,
- preservation and improvement of the quality of life of local residents,
- visitor management and enhancement of the quality of tourism offered;
- an action plan to meet these objectives;
- an indication of resources and partners to implement the strategy;
- proposals for monitoring results.

3 To protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development by:

- monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations;
- encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions;
- controlling and reducing activities, including tourism impacts, which: adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise;
- encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation.

4 To provide all visitors with a high-quality experience in all aspects of their visit, by:

- researching the expectations and satisfaction of existing and potential visitors;
- meeting the special needs of disadvantaged visitors;
- supporting initiatives to check and improve the quality of facilities and services.

5 To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area, by:

- ensuring that the promotion of the area is based on authentic images, and is sensitive to needs and capacity at different times and in different locations;
- providing readily-available and good quality visitor information in and around the area, and assisting tourism enterprises to do so;
- providing educational facilities and services that interpret the area's environment and heritage to visitors and local people, including groups and schools.

6 To encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area, by:

- providing and supporting activities, events and packages involving the interpretation of nature and heritage.

7 To increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism, by:

- providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, other organisations and tourism enterprises, based on assessing training needs.

8 To ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents, by:

- involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area;
- ensuring good communication between the protected area, local people and visitors;
- identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise.

9 To increase benefits from tourism to the local economy, by:

- promoting the purchase of local products (food, crafts, local services) by visitors and local tourism businesses;
- encouraging the employment of local people in tourism.

10 To monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts, by:

- keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space, including feedback from local tourism enterprises;
- creating and implementing a visitor management plan;
- promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative to private cars;
- controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development.

Signed:

Dated:

The Application Report is the key document where all information has to be provided. Concise, summary responses to the questions are needed for the verifier to obtain an overall picture. Cross-reference to other documents may be provided for additional information, but supporting text (as suggested above) must be included.

Please submit your application report in this WORD document and as a signed (*page 2 and end of document*) printed-out hard copy. Please fill in all questions by typing in the grey boxes (which disappear when typed in) paying special attention to those areas shaded in yellow.

SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

A1 Name of the protected area and its responsible body

Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Responsible body: Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, hosted by Shropshire Council.

A2 Contact details

Give name of person and position, address, phone, fax, e-mail (who can be contacted by the verifier to discuss the application report)

Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, The Old Post Office, Shrewsbury Road, Craven Arms, SY7 9NZ
Tel: 01588 674080 Fax: 01588 674099 Email: phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk

A3 Type of designation

The status of the area, including IUCN category. Indicate any zones of varying designation.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, IUCN category V. Single designation with no defined zones.

A4 Relationship to surrounding area/region

- Indicate any formal or informal surrounding buffer zones or other areas of influence (administrative or in terms of tourism policy)*
- Show the complete Charter application area on a map*

The AONB forms the core and majority of the area covered by the Shropshire Hills & Ludlow Destination Development Partnership (DDP), which is the tourism body for the area, and the forum supporting the Charter process. A map is attached as a supporting document.

A5 Size of area/zones

a) *Total size of protected area in hectares and % mixture of the landownership.*

Shropshire Hills AONB is 80,400ha. Detailed figures on land ownership are not available, but approximately 90% is privately owned.

b) *Total size of the Charter application area*

The area covered by the Shropshire Hills & Ludlow DDP is 145,874 ha.

A6 Population

Give population within the protected area and in the Charter application area.

Within AONB 19,000. Within DDP area 54,400 (2001 Census data).

A7 Legal structure relating to the protected area

Indicate the type/status of protected-area authority, relationship with other relevant official bodies or local authorities.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is a Joint Advisory Committee to the two local authorities – Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. Shropshire Council acts as the host authority and accountable body. The Terms of Reference for the AONB Partnership are available at http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/SHAONB_Partnership_TOR-signed.pdf

A8 Reason for designation (*very brief description*)

The Shropshire Hills are a landscape of diversity and contrast created by varied geology, and provide a dramatic link between the Midlands and the Welsh mountains. The craggy Stiperstones and Wrekin, the moorland plateau and valleys of the Long Mynd, the quarried Clee Hills, the wooded Wenlock Edge and the rolling Clun Forest all have their own character. Centuries of farming have shaped the landscape. 70% of the AONB is grazing land, and below the moorland and rough grass hilltops and commons lies a patchwork of fields rich in hedgerows and veteran trees. Ancient woodlands, wildflower meadows and orchards also survive, each habitat with its characteristic wildlife plants and invertebrates. Red grouse, skylark and dormouse are among the great variety of birds and mammals. The Rivers Clun, Teme and Onny, along with many smaller rivers and streams, are very unspoilt. Many are lined with alder, and home to important species such as freshwater crayfish and otter. A rich heritage of hillforts, castles, mottes and Offa's Dyke tell of centuries of border strife. Much of the pattern of dispersed settlement and small fields is very ancient. Stone, brick and timbered buildings combine with the industrial relics of lead mining, quarrying and charcoal burning. Off the beaten track, unspoilt and remote in the context of the West Midlands, the Shropshire Hills are a haven of tranquillity – peace and quiet, dark skies, and of high scenic and environmental quality. From the town of Church Stretton to remote villages, strong and active communities are maintaining rural culture and traditions while adapting to changes. Opportunities for enjoyment and wellbeing are open to both locals and visitors through walks and outdoor activities which respect the area's qualities.

A9 Management and staffing

Total numbers of staff. Please give organisational diagram if relevant.

12 staff (10.2 Full Time Equivalent)

Core Staff:

- Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Manager – full time
- Development Officer – full time
- Community Officer – full time
- Administrator – full time
- Promotions Officer - 3 days per week
- Planning & Landscape Officer - 3 days per week

Project staff:

- River Valleys Officer - full time

Woodlands Officer – full time
LEADER Co-ordinator – full time
Project Officer – full time
Farming Officer - 3 days per week
Farming Community Officer - 2 days per week

Starting in January 2012:
Landscape Partnership Co-ordinators – full time job share

A10 Overall protected-area management

a) *Does the protected area have a management plan?*

(Yes or No) Yes

b) *When was it last reviewed?*

The new Management Plan was approved in March 2009 (submitted as a supporting document).

Indicate briefly the main priorities of protected-area management

The five strategic priorities set out in the Management Plan are:

Valuing, conserving and enhancing what we have

Conserving habitats, heritage and quality; appropriate and high quality development

Keeping the Shropshire Hills countryside thriving

Land management, especially farming; sustainable communities

Shifting to low carbon

Taking the right action to mitigate climate change

Adapting for the future, working alongside nature

Landscape scale conservation; functioning ecosystems; social and economic adaptation

Helping people to connect with the AONB

Awareness; enjoyment and wellbeing; community involvement

A11 Total annual budget

Please indicate total budget of the protected-area body (including overheads and project expenditure). Explain briefly how the protected area is funded, and indicate any external resources that are regularly available.

2011-12 Total budget is £902,582.

Defra provide a 'single pot' of central government AONB funding (including core funding), in 2011-12 of £223,647.

Local authority core funding is currently £49,524.

The AONB Partnership is a LEADER Local Action Group and will receive £331,000 from Defra for LEADER in 2010-11.

The remaining funding is from a wide variety of project grants and some earned income.

Further information on budgets can be supplied on request. A summary of 2010-11 budgets is found within the AONB Annual Review at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Annual-Review-2010-11.pdf>.

A12 Annual visitor numbers

Day visitor: 3-4 million (est)

Staying visitor: 300,000 (est)

Total nights: 1.3 million (est)

Please define indicators such as:

- Total visitor arrivals or bednights per month
- Total day-visitor estimate per annum or per month 3-4 million per annum
- Number of bedspaces (by accommodation type) approx 3,200
- Annual average % bedspace and bedroom occupancy of accommodation
- % of enterprises reporting growth in business over previous year 43%
- % of bedspaces available all year
- Ratio of average occupancy (or total bednights) between busiest and least busy 3 months
- Number of bedspaces per 1000 local population
- Ratio of number of tourists to local population

Are these actual figures or estimates?

Estimates. Most of these statistics are not available for the relatively new geographic unit of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP. It is hoped over time to improve the amount of data available on these topics.

A13 Tourism structure

Give a brief overview of the tourism history and type of tourism in the area.

In a national context the Shropshire Hills, with Ludlow and the other market towns, are not a prime tourist area. In terms of scale of tourism and recognition, Ludlow is by a long way prominent. It is a remarkably unspoilt traditional market town, with a very fine castle and church, many distinctive buildings from half-timbered to Georgian mansions, and a good range of independent shops. Its reputation as a centre of food excellence and local food has grown over the last couple of decades, and it is continuing to develop national recognition with recent favourable TV coverage.

The Shropshire Hills are well known locally and regionally for their high quality landscape and moderate hill walking, a fact reflected in the very high proportion of day visitors. The Long Mynd and the Stiperstones are perhaps most clearly linked in people's minds with the Shropshire Hills, but the area also includes The Wrekin and Wenlock Edge, the Clee Hills, the quiet borderlands of the Clun Valley and Forest, as well as valleys of the Rivers Onny, Teme, Corve and part of the Severn. Though designated as an AONB since 1958, the identity of the Shropshire Hills is however nothing like as clear and established as for example the Cotswolds or the Wye Valley. The name 'Shropshire Hills' still means different things to different people in terms of geography. Over the last five years a strong effort has been made by the AONB Partnership to encourage consistent use of the 'Shropshire Hills' identity to build sense of place and provide a focus for people's attachment to the landscape. Over this time local government in Shropshire has been reorganised and the former Districts have gone. This shift has been reflected in changes to the structures for co-ordination of tourism and promotion. Formerly District-based, these have shifted to destination-based, and the AONB and the Charter process are wholly embedded in this. There remains a priority therefore to shift perceptions of the Shropshire Hills area, that it is not just the former South Shropshire District, but includes well visited northern parts of the AONB near to the urban centres of Shrewsbury and Telford, the visitor honeypot of Ironbridge, as well as towns such as Much Wenlock. Another key issue is to link in a complementary way the Shropshire Hills AONB with the market towns surrounding it, which have their own appeal and also act as important centres of services and accommodation.

Church Stretton is the only town actually within the AONB and has a particular appeal with its location nestled between the Long Mynd and the Stretton Hills. Carding Mill Valley is a particular and longstanding 'honeypot' for day visitors. It has been a popular destination from Victorian times

onwards and has been managed for several decades, along with a large part of the Long Mynd, by the National Trust.

Much Wenlock is a small historic town of great character, with strong connections to the origins of the modern Olympic movement. Bishop's Castle is an eclectic mix of traditional and varied cultures, and an important centre for the sparsely populated area near the Welsh border. Craven Arms owes its origins to transport links, and this remains its key strength as a gateway on the A49 and main railway line. Cleobury Mortimer lies in the far south east of the area, with links towards Kidderminster and the larger urban centres of the Midlands, but nevertheless a strong connection to the Shropshire Hills. Minsterley and Pontesbury are two small towns close together on the northern fringe of the hills where tourism is not as prominent, but there is nevertheless a desire to develop the links to the AONB.

Tourism in the Shropshire Hills AONB was estimated to be worth £126.9m in 2005 and supporting approximately 2,780 jobs in total, representing 23% of the value of tourism to the whole of Shropshire. The AONB is 23% of Shropshire, while the DDP area is 45%, so the figures for the whole DDP area covered by the Charter application can be expected to be correspondingly higher. Shrewsbury and Ironbridge are the two most significant draws and centres for tourism in Shropshire, with Ludlow following. The Shropshire Hills make up a large proportion of countryside-focused visits to the county.

The Shropshire Visitor Survey 2007 was analysed separately for those visitors who were interviewed at a range of locations across the Shropshire Hills AONB. The results indicate:

- Strong representation of repeat visitors (83% of all visitors, 62% of staying visitors)
- A high representation of couples amongst staying visitors (49%), with a strong focus (55%) on those aged 45+
- A high representation of ABC1s amongst visitors to the Shropshire Hills AONB (74% in the AONB; 66% for Shropshire as a whole)
- A reasonable length of stay (4.5 nights), which can perhaps be explained by a significant proportion of staying visitors using non-serviced accommodation (38% in the AONB; 27% for Shropshire as whole)
- Walking/hiking as the activity most frequently undertaken (80%) and the most important main activity (57%) in the AONB. The proportion of visitors to the AONB undertaking walking as their principal activity is substantially higher than for the county as a whole, where it is just 12%.

In relation to the DDP area, the District based analyses of the 2007 Visitor Survey, which include more towns, are also relevant. These show broadly similar general profiles, but a slightly lower representation of day visitors and walking, and more general sightseeing, shopping, etc.

Evidence from the enterprise survey carried out for the Sustainable Tourism Strategy is generally in line with the 2007 Visitor Survey, indicating that the customer profile of visitors to the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow includes a high proportion of couples (64% of staying visitors are couples), a good spread between first time visitors and repeat visitors (3 out of 10 staying visitors are first time visitors), and some tendency towards short breaks (3 out of 5 overnight trips are 1-3 nights).

A14 Infrastructure and tourism offers

Give a brief overview of the amount and type of accommodation, attractions, activities, events, and visitor services

Accommodation

The tourism industry in the area is made up of a large number of generally small enterprises. The 2011 destination guide for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow includes 110 entries, of which 51 provide serviced accommodation and 59 provide self-catering accommodation, representing a total of 721 serviced beds and 416 self-catering beds across the Shropshire Hills. Just 9 serviced enterprises offer 10 or more rooms, with the Longmynd Hotel offering 50 bedrooms - the only hotel in the AONB to be able to take coach parties and large groups, and The Feathers in Ludlow having 40 bedrooms. HPB Management Ltd manages 19 self-catering holiday cottages at Upper Norton near Ludlow, on behalf of the Holiday Property Bond. This brings significant numbers of visitors and income to the area. Ludlow and its immediately surrounding area accounts for almost one half of the serviced accommodation, and 44% of all accommodation, included in the guide. Remaining accommodation is scattered throughout the Shropshire Hills and its market towns. There are of course accommodation

establishments which do not appear in the destination guide, including a considerable amount of self-catering accommodation and group/hostel accommodation, with a strong presence from the Youth Hostels Association.

Grading levels amongst quality assured accommodation are relatively high. For entries in the 2011 Ludlow and Shropshire Hills guide, the average grading for serviced accommodation was 3.9, with a good presence of Gold and Silver awards, and for non-serviced accommodation it was 3.8. A number of accommodation establishments have documented information about their accessibility to those with limited mobility. Nine accommodation providers, including 1 Gold and 4 Silver awards, have been certified under the Green Tourism Business Scheme, accredited by Visit England. The Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Business Scheme includes 22 accommodation providers who have adopted sustainable practices for the environment, local economy and community, as well as promoting local events and activities. Some businesses have engaged with both schemes.

Visitor attractions

Although the majority of visitor attractions in and around the Shropshire Hills are generally small in scale and relatively low key, a small number are highly visible and play an important role in raising the profile of the Shropshire Hills.

Attraction	Number of visits	Entry	Open
Carding Mill Valley (NT)	250,000	Free	Year round
St Laurence's Church, Ludlow	*49,000	Free	Year round
Acton Scott Historic Working Farm (SC)	45,000	Paid	Seasonal
Stokesay Castle (EH)	*40,049	Paid	Seasonal – winter opening to be announced
Ludlow Castle	100,000	Paid	Year round (weekends only Dec/Jan)
Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre (SC)	180,716 (13,274)	Free (Paid exhibition)	Year round
Bog Centre	17,600	Free	Seasonal
Much Wenlock Museum (SC)	*17,571	Free	Seasonal – limited winter opening
Much Wenlock Priory (EH)	15,000	Paid	Seasonal – winter opening to be announced
Buildwas Abbey (EH)	*6,215	Paid	Seasonal

EH (English Heritage), NT (National Trust), SC (Shropshire Council)

*Figure published in Visits to UK Attractions, 2009

With the exception of Ludlow Castle, which is in private hands, these top performing sites are managed by the public or third sector. The National Trust facilities in Carding Mill Valley attract a particularly high number of visits as they act as a focal point for year round access to the valley and adjacent hills. English Heritage manage several properties in the area, including Stokesay Castle. The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre has potential to strengthen its role in welcoming visitors, including families, and introducing them to the area. Although primarily a retail enterprise, the Ludlow Food Centre has also become well established as a place to visit.

Just three visitor attractions currently participate in the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS): the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Stokesay Castle and Wenlock Priory.

Other attractions tend to be smaller in scale and are generally low key. Many have limited opening hours (Wilderhope Manor (NT), Shipton Hall); some are available only for pre-booked group visits (Stokesay Court, Hopton Court). Others are seasonal (Land of Lost Content closed Dec/Jan). Micky Miller's Play Barn in Craven Arms primarily attracts a local audience but provides a useful facility for visiting families.

Smaller heritage sites make a significant contribution to visitor interest, with a high dependence on voluntary activity, including strong input from dedicated trusts and community organisations. These include The Bog Centre, Snailbeach Mine, Bishop's Castle's House on Crutches, Clun Town Museum and, imminently, Hopton Castle. Some, like Clun Castle or Mitchell's Fold Stone Circle (both EH), are visitor sites rather than attractions, which can be accessed at all reasonable times and add a strong

sense of place to the landscape. There are interesting churches in towns, villages and hamlets across whole area.

The Stiperstones National Nature Reserve is managed by Natural England, and actively promoted for visitors. Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) manage a number of nature reserves across the Shropshire Hills; although none of them offers any particular visitor facilities, some have simple car parking and waymarked trails.

Walking

The Shropshire Hills have the best walking in the county, suiting all abilities and across a variety of landscape types from heather and rough hill tops to meadows and woodland. The public rights of way network within the AONB consists of public footpaths (1,275km), bridleways (448km), and byways and Unclassified County Roads (97km) and there is legal open access to 81km² of land (over 90% of the access land in the whole of Shropshire). 19 km of Offa's Dyke Path National Trail runs through the AONB from Knighton across the Clun Forest, including some of the best preserved parts of the fortification. The southern part of the Shropshire Way criss-crosses the area, connecting most but not all of the market towns that relate to the Shropshire Hills. Significant investment in route development, upgrading infrastructure, signing, mapping and information, has enabled this route to be promoted as a flagship for the Shropshire Hills. Circular walks, and walks that can be supported by public transport, have been developed.

Promoted routes include circular walks starting from the Bog Visitor Centre, from Bridges, from Carding Mill Valley, from the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and from Acton Scott. Other local walks are promoted by groups including Parish Paths Partnership (P3) groups. Walks elsewhere include Wenlock Edge (National Trust), the Wrekin Hill Fort, The Ercall (Shropshire Wildlife Trust) and the Three Castles Walk in Corvedale.

In addition to access routes, countryside sites are managed by the National Trust (including the Long Mynd, Wenlock Edge and Hopesay Common), Forestry Commission (including Bury Ditches, Mortimer Forest, Hopton and Eastridge Woods), Shropshire Wildlife Trust (including Rhos Fiddle and Clunton Coppice), Shropshire Council (including Rectory Wood and Field, Onny Meadows (Craven Arms), Poles Coppice (Habberley) and Snailbeach Mine, and Natural England (Stiperstones NNR). A number of easy access routes have been provided, with special attention paid at the Stiperstones and Onny Meadows.

Secret Hills Walking and Wheely Wonderful are businesses which organise guided walking holidays in the area.

Landscape interests

Although often enjoyed through walking, the area has a lot to offer and is popular for birdwatching, botany and general wildlife, and appreciation of geology and heritage. These are carried out on specific sites but also in the wider countryside. Ranging from casual to levels of specialist interest, these activities may be under-represented by surveys.

Cycling

The area is well provided with cycling opportunities to suit all abilities. Four graded cycle routes on quiet roads have been developed by Shropshire Council from each of Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Cleobury Mortimer, Ludlow and Bishop's Castle, promoted through a free leaflet for each town. The Five Towns Wrekin Trail is a new initiative of the Wellington LA21 group, providing a cycle route which will link the AONB with the World Heritage Site at Ironbridge. The Six Castles Cycleway is a challenging hilly 58 miles route, based around National Cycle Route 44, which links six historic castle sites in Shropshire and North Herefordshire. It starts and finishes at a mainline railway station (Shrewsbury or Leominster) making it accessible by public transport. Quiet lanes and bridleway cross the Clun Forest, offering excellent opportunities for cycling on and off-road, including the Jack Mytton Way, a long distance bridleway, and the Kerry Ridgeway, from Bishop's Castle into Wales.

Forestry Commission sites at Hopton and Eastridge Woods offer a variety of mountain bike trails, including downhill. Easier forest track riding is also available at Bury Ditches and in the Mortimer Forest. Mountain biking is experiencing something of a surge in popularity around Church Stretton and the Long Mynd, with a network of trails being recently identified and mapped by the National Trust, in consultation with users and responsible cycle hire operators, in order to both support and

manage the increasing level of access that is taking place. Cycle hire is now available in Church Stretton and at the Shropshire Hills Mountain Bike and Outdoor Pursuits Centre at Marshbrook. Challenge events are becoming increasingly popular. A specialist operator, Wheely Wonderful, offers a range of options for self-guided cycling holidays around the Shropshire Hills, planning routes which are not too challenging and focused on the attractions of the area, including the quiet roads, magnificent scenery and the market towns. Shropshire Hills Cycling also offer cycling holidays.

Riding

The Clun area offers relatively good access for horse riders, and also off road cyclists, with 28% of the Rights of Way network available, the highest proportion of all areas in the County. Elsewhere in the Shropshire Hills, provision is good in the Snailbeach/Stiperstones area. The Long Mynd, Stretton Hills, Wenlock Edge and Clee Hills also have a good network of bridleways.

Promoted routes for horseriders include:

- Jack Mytton Way, now a circular route of over 100 miles of rural bridleways and quiet country lanes, which can be ridden over 5-7 days.
- Blue Remembered Hills Bridleway, a 38 mile circular route around the Clun Valley, showcasing the special qualities of the Shropshire Hills AONB.
- Circular route (18.5 miles) and linear trail (14 miles) promoted on the Long Mynd.

Five licensed riding establishments offer a variety of riding experiences to visitors. Country Treks and the Long Mountain Centre can organise trekking holidays in the Shropshire Hills.

Outdoor activities including air sports

Three commercial activity providers are based within the AONB, offering residential and day activities, to a range of clients from families to stag parties. Activities offered include canoeing, climbing, mountain boarding, quad biking, riding and archery and take place at various sites across of the Shropshire Hills and beyond. The Long Mynd has become very popular as a location for a range of aerial activities, including gliding, paragliding, hot air ballooning and hang gliding. The Midland Gliding Club, one of the oldest clubs in the UK, operates year round seven days a week March to November, offering wave, thermal and ridge soaring for novice and accomplished pilots. Glider pilot training courses run throughout the summer. Private clubs, such as the Long Mynd Soaring Club, are also active in the area. Other activities offered locally include several fishing lakes, golf courses, an archery club and shooting range.

Events

There are a large number of public events in the area provided by a variety of bodies. A joint Shropshire Hills Events programme (see supporting documents) is co-ordinated annually by the AONB Partnership. This collation of events are also listed at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/things-to-do/events/> and more selective listings are provided by other organisations and areas. Some of these are more community focused events, but may be of interest to staying visitors or regular day visitors from nearby.

Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Cleobury Mortimer, Much Wenlock, Knighton and Wellington are Walkers are Welcome towns, and well-established walking festivals are run in consecutive weeks by Bishop's Castle and Church Stretton. Challenge events, such as the Long Mynd Hike, are also important.

Access by public transport

The ability to explore the area using public transport is an important part of the visitor offer. The main Cardiff-Manchester railway line offers a frequent service to and from Ludlow, Craven Arms and Church Stretton, and the Heart of Wales line gives access to a clutch of stations including Knighton as the route heads west into Wales. A further line through Wellington serves the north-eastern corner of the AONB. Mainline rail access is complemented by bus services, including the newly introduced Shropshire Link service. Most importantly, a dedicated Shropshire Hills Shuttle Service is managed by the AONB Partnership, linking the Stiperstones and the Long Mynd with gateways at Church Stretton and Minsterley on summer weekends and Bank Holidays. A second service between Craven Arms, Bishop's Castle and Clun has reluctantly been withdrawn in 2011 due to lack of funding. A new Wenlock Wanderer shuttle service is due in 2012, with a pilot service from Ludlow operating in 2013. The Wenlock Wanderer will link with another new service from Telford and Ironbridge during the summer holidays.

Shropshire Council run the Shropshire Link - a demand responsive service which operates across the county on different days. The increased use of this service by visitors is being explored, with the service being promoted through some new circular walk brochures.

The recently published guide to 'Slow Travel' in the Marches includes Ludlow and Church Stretton as hubs to explore the area and is a valuable contribution to encouraging visitors to explore, discover and engage with parts of the destination of Shropshire Hills and Ludlow.

SECTION B – MEETING THE CHARTER PRINCIPLES

Principle 1 – Partnership with local tourism stakeholders

1.1 Has a forum or other partnership structure been established to enable the protected-area authority to work with others on the development and management of tourism, including implementation and review of the strategy?

Yes

Briefly describe this structure, including size and membership, frequency of meetings, etc.:

The Shropshire Hills & Ludlow Destination Development Partnership (DDP) was formed in Dec 2010 and meets approximately quarterly. The DDP currently includes representatives of 25 organisations (see Terms of Reference included as a supporting document). Shropshire Council proposed the formation of a number of Destination Development Partnerships early in 2010 following the reorganisation of local government to a unitary structure, and alongside the transformation of the former county Destination Management Partnership into a new Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board. The DDP therefore has a direct relationship with the Tourism Strategy Board. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership ran from 2006 to 2010 a Recreation & Tourism Working Group. In response to the Council's proposal for the new DDP structure, the AONB Partnership opted to disband its own Working Group in order to avoid duplication, and now instead provides support to the operation of the DDP. The DDP is at a relatively early stage, and while it has achieved good engagement so far, the public sector bodies will need to adopt fully a spirit of partnership working to maintain the confidence of businesses and their involvement.

1.2 Are local tourism enterprises involved?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes. Tourism enterprises are involved through the main business groupings and tourism groups in the area:

- Bishop's Castle Tourism CIC
- Bridgnorth & District Tourism Association
- Church Stretton Area Tourism Group
- Cleobury Country Tourism Group
- Ludlow Tourism Group
- Much Wenlock Chamber of Trade
- Shropshire Hills Tourism
- Shropshire Tourism
- South Shropshire Farm Holiday Group
- Upper Norton Holiday Property Bond

1.3 Is the local community involved?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes, through the following representatives:
Bishop's Castle Town Council
Church Stretton Town Council
Ludlow Town Council
Much Wenlock Town Council
Up to 2 representatives of rural Parish Councils
Wenlock Olympian Society
Ludlow Assembly Rooms

1.4 Are local conservation interests involved?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes, through the following representatives:
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
National Trust
English Heritage

1.5 Are the wider (regional) bodies responsible for tourism, conservation and regional development involved?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Government regional structures in England have been dismantled in the last year (Shropshire is/was part of the West Midlands region, but there are no appropriate representatives for the DDP at this level). Shropshire Council is represented through a number of departments:

Shropshire Council, Countryside Access
Shropshire Council, Community Action
Shropshire Council, Visitor Economy
Shropshire Council, Visitor Information Centres
Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre
The Bog Visitor Centre

1.6 Are other partners involved, such as volunteers?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes. Other members of the DDP are:
Wenlock Olympian Society
Ludlow Assembly Rooms

Principle 2 – Sustainable tourism strategy and action plan

Preparation

2.1 In what form has the tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area been prepared?

Please state if as a single, self-contained document, two individual documents or within another document (if so please give name of document):

The Strategy is a single, self-contained document.

2.2 Briefly describe the process(es) and timetable(s) for preparing both the strategy and action plan.

The strategy has been based on extensive consultation over four months, including desk research, an online survey of tourism enterprises, five local consultation meetings, one-to-one consultation with over 40 key stakeholders, site visits, a stakeholder workshop, comments received on an interim report, and then a formal three month period of public consultation.

The process started with the letting of an external contract on 15 November 2010, and the Strategy was formally approved by the DDP on 15 September 2011.

2.3 State briefly the main objectives for sustainable tourism identified in the strategy.

Strategic objectives for tourism delivery in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow over the next five years:

1 RAISING AWARENESS

To strengthen the identity of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow and raise awareness of it as a leading rural tourism destination

2 DELIVERING THE HILLS EXPERIENCE

To conserve the distinctive landscapes of the Shropshire Hills and provide and creatively promote a wide range of opportunities to experience and enjoy them

3 DELIVERING THE MARKET TOWNS EXPERIENCE

To ensure that each market town makes the most of its distinctive location and character, provides a quality experience and acts as a gateway to the Shropshire Hills

4 DELIVERING THE LOCAL FOOD EXPERIENCE

To capitalise on the established position of the area as a centre of excellence for its food, based on quality local produce

5 ORIENTATING AND INFORMING VISITORS

To ensure that all visitors are aware of the range of experiences and activities available across the area by providing readily accessible information and interpretation

6 PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE ACCESS AND MANAGEMENT

To encourage and promote actions by visitors and tourism providers which benefit the natural heritage and the wider environment

7 SUPPORTING LOCAL ENTERPRISE

To build the contribution of tourism enterprises to the local economy, increasing business success and ensuring consistency in the quality of the tourism offer

2.4 How does the tourism strategy relate to the protected-area management plan?

The AONB Management Plan includes an action to complete a sustainable tourism strategy. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy is a much more detailed consideration of tourism issues than the AONB Management Plan contains, but the two are complementary and in accordance.

The Sustainable Tourism Strategy covers a wider area than the AONB. The AONB Management Plan is for the designated area of the AONB but includes reference to economic, community and indeed environmental relationships between the AONB and its surrounds, including the market towns within the DDP area. The AONB Partnership has since 2009 operated the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme for England over a wider area than the AONB, and the DDP has recently adopted this boundary. It is hoped this will help to provide an excellent synergy between the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, the LEADER Local Development Strategy and the AONB Management Plan. Consideration is being given to giving the wider LEADER area some further recognition within the next round of AONB Management Plan as a 'zone of economic influence' or similar.

The Shropshire Hills LEADER Local Development Strategy focuses on the links between wellbeing and the landscape, and can be found at http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Devpt_Strategy.pdf.

Consultation

We want to understand how local stakeholders were involved in drawing up the strategy and action plan, e.g. nature of and number of meetings, information supplied and obtained, and other consultation processes or surveys. (Make reference to the forum/partnership structures described under Question 1.1 as appropriate.)

2.5 Was there consultation with local tourism enterprises in preparing the strategy and action plan?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes

- An online survey of tourism enterprises which was promoted through various tourism associations and Chambers of Trade; the survey ran through February and early March, during which time 123 valid responses were received.
- Five local consultation meetings, held between 28 February and 10 March in Rushbury, Clun, Minsterley, Cleobury Mortimer and Ludlow, which were attended by more than 60 people.
- One-to-one consultation with over 40 representatives of tourism associations, those responsible for the delivery of tourism services, individual tourism operators and owners and managers of a number of countryside sites and facilities.
- A number of site visits, where access has been possible outside the main season.
- A stakeholder workshop held in Craven Arms Community Centre on 7 April, attended by 40 people representing a wide range of stakeholders.
- Comments received on an interim report prepared for the workshop and subsequently circulated to the full list of consultees, whether or not they were present at the workshop.
- Consultation on the full draft Strategy with business members of the DDP.

2.6 Was there consultation with the local community and other interests/stakeholders in preparing the strategy and action plan?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes. The five local consultation meetings in Rushbury, Clun, Minsterley, Cleobury Mortimer and Ludlow, were widely promoted and were attended by 60 members of the local community, local businesses, parish councils, tourism groups and other interests/stakeholders. All those attending the consultations meetings or expressing an interest in the plan were also then invited to a final stakeholder workshop and were later circulated the draft plan for comment. Consultation on the full draft Strategy included community members of the DDP.

Assessment of resource needs, constraints and opportunities

2.7 Was there an assessment of the natural and cultural resources, their sensitivities (capacity) and opportunities for tourism? When was this produced?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes.

This was carried out as part of the AONB Management Plan review in 2008-9 and as part of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy process in the spring of 2010.

Source of evidence/brief indication of results:

The AONB Management Plan sets out some principles and Policies for managing recreation (page 29). These include a strategy of encouraging dispersal of access(planned with care), while ensuring

high standards of management at well used sites and the retention of quieter areas. The Plan also set out an approach to sustainable tourism (page 35) and to promotion (pages 48-50).

The Sustainable Tourism Strategy assessment built on the AONB Management Plan and included consulting key agencies with responsibility for conserving the heritage and natural environment including English Heritage, Natural England, Shropshire Council's heritage and countryside staff. Opportunities for tourism were identified throughout the consultation process - from discussions with individual business people or tourism stakeholders and from the consultants' experience in other parts of the UK. The 'Sharing the Best of Shropshire' interpretation plan and the Ludlow Interpretation plan were also revisited for ideas. Other documents which were reviewed to identify opportunities included the Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Strategy (2008) and subsequent Marketing Plan (2009), Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Business Plan (2010) and Much Wenlock Tourism Impact Study (2010). Examples of opportunities identified included making more of walking in the varied landscape types in the area, strengthening the wide range of events which celebrate the local natural and cultural heritage and ways of encouraging visitors to explore locally without using their cars.

**2.8 Was there an assessment of needs of the local community and economy?
When was this produced?**

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes.

The AONB Management Plan State of the AONB section (2009)

<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/State-of-the-Shropshire-Hills-AONB-May-2009.pdf> and the Shropshire Hills LEADER Local Development Strategy (2009)

http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Devpt_Strategy.pdf contain important background data and analysis of social and economic needs in the area. These reports were closely informed by local authority community strategies and planning policy.

Assessment was carried out as part of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy process in the spring of 2010.

In addition a Welsh - English Border Regeneration Plan was commissioned through the AONB Partnership on behalf of a group looking at this wider area. The report recommended development of sustainable tourism closely linked to the high quality landscape as a key approach for economic regeneration in the area. The Programme received high level support from the Welsh Assembly Government and West Midlands Regional Assembly, although these structures have since changed. The reports are available at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/area-initiatives/offas-country/welshenglish-border/>

Source of evidence/brief indication of results:

The assessment for the Sustainable Tourism Strategy involved reviewing previous data assembled for the AONB Management Plan and Council Community and Economic strategies such as the Core Strategy, Sustainable Community Strategy and Housing Strategy. Liaison took place with the new Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. All consultation meetings considered local needs for each part of the area. Tourism was seen as an essential element of supporting local jobs and services such as pubs and shops. It provides an important form of diversification for farmers. Many rural micro businesses are dependent on income from tourism or the tourism supply chain.

The enterprise survey undertaken as part of the Strategy identified the main needs and priorities of local tourism businesses. Over half of enterprises had proposals or aspirations to expand or develop their businesses. The main barriers identified were increased operating costs, limited visitor numbers, and some felt lack of capital or planning restrictions constrained their operations.

**2.9 Was there an assessment of strengths/weaknesses of tourism infrastructure/services?
When was this produced?**

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes

This was carried out as part of the Strategy process in the spring of 2010.

Source of evidence/brief indication of results:

Each consultation meetings spent time considering the strengths and weaknesses of the area in terms of its visitor offer and infrastructure. A composite list of strengths and weaknesses was assembled from these meetings and tested with the audience at the stakeholder workshop – see below. The consultants also input from the information they compiled and their experience elsewhere as to where the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow were particularly strong or weak in comparison to other areas. For example the comparative strengths of the area for food and drink and events and the network of local tourism groups were noted. The Strategy contains a thorough analysis of the overall tourism resource.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful landscape, pretty towns and villages • History/heritage (hill forts/ castles/ churches) • Good rail access to A49 corridor • Rights of way and long distance paths • Good local food and drink producers • Lots of festivals and events • Wide range of accommodation choices • Good national profile of Ludlow • Network of local tourism groups/ associations • Many distinctive visitor attractions • Environmentally conscious businesses • Network of Visitor Information Centres/Points (but some gaps) • Interesting wildlife (No iconic species but some special habitats/sights) • Tranquillity and dark skies • Lots of arts/crafts/skills courses • Some parts of the area are easy to reach from large population centres • Diversity/variety of the area (based on underlying geology) • “Untouristiness”, authenticity and friendly people • Shuttle buses • Relatively inexpensive – good value for money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry fragmented - most tourism businesses very small and busy, some borderline viable • Some lifestyle businesses – not all want to maximize business or are willing to engage • Limited public transport to much of area • Limited other options inc taxis in some areas • Variability of country pubs some v good but others poor and struggling • Little accommodation for larger groups (more small group potential) • Low awareness of Shropshire as a whole nationally (Not a national ‘attract brand’) • AONB not as well known as National Parks and some scenic areas • Accommodation quality improving but still variable • Fragmented offer – limited packaging currently • Festivals and events very dependent on volunteers and not always well publicised • Limited marketing and PR outside county (limited funding/not strategic/lacking in ambition) • Seasonal visitor patterns (worse in some areas than others) • Joint working and communications challenging – difficult to get businesses to work together • Some parts of the area are relatively remote (but this can be seen as a strength) • Relatively limited wet weather options • Issues re online skills and capacity • Areas of poor access to broadband, mobile phone signals • Few overseas visitors – varied nationalities and distribution • Potential loss of public conveniences • Lack of recognition of the importance of tourism in some parts of the area • Lack of engagement from retail and catering sectors • Some good environmental/low impact tourism offers but they are not very visible • Ludlow not well integrated with its landscape and other towns

Assessment of existing visitors and their needs

2.10 Was there an assessment of existing visitor patterns and needs? When was this produced?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes

This was carried out as part of the Strategy process in the spring of 2010.

Source of evidence/brief indication of results:

All existing data on visitors was compiled in the preparation of the Strategy. This included the latest visitor surveys, visitor motivation research and research undertaken into particular niche markets. Much of this research was undertaken by the Shropshire Tourism Research Unit between 2004 and 2008. Specific studies of visitors using Shuttle buses, walkers and visitors to the town of Church Stretton were re-examined, along with several visitor surveys undertaken by particular attractions such as the Much Wenlock Museum and the National Trust's visitor segmentation data for Carding Mill Valley. The resulting overview of visitor patterns and needs were discussed with tourism businesses and local people during the consultations workshops and tweaked to reflect very recent trends – such as increasingly late decision-making by visitors when booking, and the ever increasing popularity of walking as an activity. The results were presented in the Strategy report.

Identification of future visitor markets

2.11 Was there an assessment to identify future visitor markets offering potential? When was this produced?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes

This was carried out as part of the Strategy process in the spring of 2010.

Source of evidence/brief indication of results:

An analysis of the external influences on the visitor market and product was included in the Strategy. Future visitor markets are thought to be influenced by the recession and increase in domestic holiday taking. There has been a trend to more countryside holidays and more holidays involving outdoor activities and experiences. Visitor markets for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow were compared with the current target market segmentation for Visit England. There is a close fit with the priority markets for England with the main opportunities being Cosmopolitans, Discoverers and Traditionals.

The Strategy outlines the primary target markets for the area as:

- Domestic short breaks and holidays - Couples post-family
- Domestic short breaks - Couples pre-family
- Day visitors

Secondary target markets are:

- Domestic short breaks and holidays – families
- Niche markets of dedicated walkers, young active singles and groups of friends, and singles and couples looking for active learning experiences

Implementation

2.12 Does the action plan include an indication of phasing/staging of action over time?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes, the Action Plan allocates actions to years 1 – 5.

2.13 Does the action plan indicate which stakeholders or partners are responsible for the delivery of each action?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes, key agencies and partners are identified against each action.

2.14 What is the size of the **budget** that the protected-area authority is devoting to the implementation of the action plan per year,

a) excluding staff costs? *Note: The verifier will be looking for a realistic assessment of what resources will be required to implement the strategy and action plan and where these resources are likely to come from.*

£109,051 for 2011-12 (see breakdown below)

Comment:

AONB Promotions £2,937 (core funding)

AONB-led projects:

Walking With Offa £62,123

Walking for Wellbeing £5,994

Shropshire Hills Shuttles £31,357

Discover Local £6,640

b) including staff costs?

£161,656 for 2011-12 (see breakdown below)

Comment:

AONB Promotions £2,937 (core funding)

Core staff time (estimated) £29,612

AONB-led projects:

Walking With Offa £62,123

Walking for Wellbeing £16,494

Shropshire Hills Shuttles £31,357

Discover Local £19,133

With the exception of Walking with Offa, the current phase of which is nearing completion now, the levels of funding above will be very similar in 2012-13. Beyond then a number of current projects will have finished and new sources of funding will be required to maintain current levels of activity.

c) What is this as a percentage of its total budget?

Comment:

17% (including staff costs)

2.15 Have funds been provided (or are they being sought) from other sources?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes.

Budget figures above include funds from a variety of sources, including:

Natural Assets funding from Advantage West Midlands, delivered through Natural England.

LEADER

Natural England

National Trust

Shropshire Council

Local Sustainable Transport Fund

Membership contributions/ income from guided walks and events

Other organisations within the DDP have their own funds or access to different sources, e.g. Rural Development Programme for England tourism funding is currently available through Shropshire Council to deliver tourism outputs and there have also been business grants. Shropshire Hills Tourism have some resources for marketing, and also gain substantial income towards the Ludlow & the Shropshire Hills brochure from advertising. The National Trust, Shropshire Council and Natural England all contribute to the joint events programme and/or the Shropshire Hills Shuttles.

2.16 Does the level of funding seem reasonable to deliver the proposed action plan?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes, for the most part.

Comment:

Public sector budgets are currently very tight and will be subject to further cuts over coming years. It is likely that financial constraints will limit or hamper the implementation of some actions in the plan.

A funding Memorandum of Agreement until 2014-15 for the AONB Partnership is in the process of agreement between Defra and the local authorities. Defra funding is projected to reduce by 5.4% per year over that period, but government commitment to core funding for AONBs is strong. From March 2013 there is greater uncertainty as the current rounds of LEADER and other RDPE funding will come to an end. The AONB Partnership is hopeful of successfully securing the next round of LEADER, although this is unlikely to be available until 2015. Other sources of funding will be sought for the interim.

2.17 Describe the staffing that the protected-area authority is devoting to the implementation of the action plan.

The AONB Partnership Manager has been directly responsible for the development of the Strategy, and represents the AONB Partnership on the DDP, currently also chairing its meetings. The Development Officer is responsible for the Shropshire Hills Shuttles, leads on the delivery of the 'Walking with Offa' project, and oversees the Sustainable Business Scheme, 'Discover Local' and 'Walking for Wellbeing' projects, which are implemented by one full time Project Officer. The Promotions Officer leads on the joint Shropshire Hills Events programme, Shuttles promotion and liaison with other bodies over promotion. The Planning & Landscape Officer provides input to planning policy and comments and advice on planning proposals. The Administrator supports these functions and in particular the Sustainable Business Scheme.

2.18 Is staffing being provided from other sources?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes. Shropshire Council have a Tourism Officer for the southern part of the county who plays a key role in administering the DDP and provides support to businesses. The Council also employ staff at Visitor Information Centres, and those at attractions including the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. Staff from partner organisations such as the National Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and Natural England staff have a role to play in welcoming and managing visitors. Businesses and volunteers also contribute staffing capacity.

The strengths of partnership working in the area make a huge difference in this respect. Networks such as the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme have developed through time contributions of a great many people.

2.19 Do you believe the action proposed can be implemented with this level of staffing?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Yes. It should be possible to complete or make progress on the majority of actions in the plan.

Commitment of partners

2.20 Have any formal arrangements been made with partners (such as a legal agreement, a memorandum of understanding or a letter of commitment) for implementation of the strategy and action plan? If not, is there any other good indication of commitment from other partners to the implementation of the strategy and action plan?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief explanation.

Not at present.

Details:

The DDP has agreed Terms of Reference, and has formally approved the Strategy and Action Plan. It is intended that Shropshire Council will formally approve the Strategy through its Cabinet. Consideration will be given to seeking more formal support from partners.

2.21 Please comment on the commitment of the partners to implementing the strategy and action plan, and any methods for motivating them and ensuring this commitment.

Comments:

Shropshire Hills Tourism is a key partner as the main business grouping in the area. A close working relationship has developed between the AONB Partnership and Shropshire Hills Tourism over recent years with both organisations represented on each other's Boards. Shropshire Hills Tourism was formerly the South Shropshire Tourism Association and changed its name in 2010, adopting a licensed derivation of the AONB logo in order to align more closely with the AONB. The licence agreement sets out the commitment of Shropshire Hills Tourism to pursue a sustainable approach to tourism.

Close working by the AONB Partnership over a number of years with other groups including Church Stretton Area Tourism Group has helped to ensure a very good common understanding and commitment of partners to similar strategic aims. Church Stretton Area Tourism Group, supported by the AONB, commissioned its own Sustainable Tourism Strategy in 2008, which was taken into account when the new strategy was drafted. There are close links with the Bishop's Castle Tourism CIC through the Chair of the Walking in the Shropshire Hills Steering Group.

Monitoring results

2.22 Have sufficient **indicators** been identified for the monitoring of the success of the strategy/action plan and can these be practically measured?

Please answer yes or no and give a brief description/explanation how they will be measured.

Yes. Possible indicators identified by the Strategy include:

Volume and spread of tourism

- UKTS three year rolling average of visitor trips, nights and spending in the county and region.
- Opening times of attractions
- Annual attendance figures at events
- Visits and enquiries to Visitor Information Centres
- Traffic and user counts at main locations (monthly).
- Number of tourism development projects receiving planning permission.

- Trends in website statistics for Shropshire Hills AONB, Shropshire Tourism, Shropshire Hills Tourism and Shropshire Walking websites.
- Stile counter monitoring.
- Business Survey of 50 businesses on the impact of walking on their business.

Visitor satisfaction

- Percentage of visitors satisfied in general and with types of facility/service.
- Proportion of repeat visitors.

Tourism enterprise performance and satisfaction

- Accommodation occupancy rates and visitor numbers at attractions and main sites (monthly as indicator of seasonality).
- Enterprise performance - increase or decrease compared to previous year(s).
- Proportion of enterprises with quality certification.
- Number of tourism enterprises from Shropshire Hills and Ludlow in membership of Shropshire Tourism Ltd and Shropshire Hills Tourism.
- Percentage of enterprises satisfied with management and marketing of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow

Environmental impact

- Records of air and water quality
- Levels of litter in key sites
- Proportion of visitors arriving by public transport
- Passenger numbers using Shropshire Hills Shuttle Buses
- Number of enterprises in Green Tourism Business Scheme or equivalent environmental certification.
- Number of enterprises taking environmental management measures such as recycling.
- Number of enterprises in membership of Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme.
- The area of SSSIs in favourable condition.

Practical methods of data collection for selected indicators will need to be agreed, taking into account the financial constraints most organisations are now under.

ADDRESSING KEY ISSUES

Under the following headings, please indicate what actions have been undertaken or are proposed relating to each of the Charter Principles 3 to 10. We are looking for evidence that action is being taken to address each of these principles, either to make progress or to maintain existing high standards.

Before going into the details of the principles below, please provide a short summary (one page max.) describing the protected area's sustainable tourism strategy and what it is aiming for as a whole. This is useful for the evaluation committee to have a clearer idea of what all the information below aims to portray or achieve, and is useful for the verifier to make sense of all the documentation sent.

Summary of Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the Shropshire Hills & Ludlow

Primary aim: To develop, manage and promote the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow as a high quality sustainable tourism destination, in keeping with its focus on a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Associated aims:

- To provide all visitors with a fulfilling and enjoyable experience of the Shropshire Hills and neighbouring market towns.
- To foster a prosperous tourism and food industry, providing secure year round jobs.
- To enhance the quality of life within local communities and support for local services.
- To increase appreciation and understanding of the special landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage of the area and support for their conservation.
- To minimise negative impacts of tourism on the environment.

Guiding principles

Building an integrated destination, linking the towns and the hills (AONB)

There is a need to reduce fragmentation and make the most of the area's unspoiled and accessible upland countryside combined with towns full of character and individuality. The approach should involve building awareness of the area as a whole while strengthening linkages between the constituent parts.

Ensuring effective partnership working between stakeholders at all levels

The new Destination Development Partnerships reflect tourism policy in England to partnership working at the destination level. The opportunity now is to strengthen linkages between these more local groupings, within the context of a cohesive destination and alongside the AONB to which they all also relate. There DDP for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow needs effective engagement of the private sector, public sector, conservation, heritage and community interests, as well as links to marketing and business support services at a Shropshire level.

Growing tourism spending year round and throughout the area

There is capacity for growth in the volume of tourism in the area without harm to its special qualities. The emphasis is on increasing visitor spending, with growth in visitor trips, length of stay and spend per head; on generating more spending at less busy times of the year and on spreading tourism spending across the area, within all the market towns and the wider countryside, while reflecting the capacity and needs of each.

Bringing out opportunities to enjoy the area's special qualities and distinctiveness

The area already has a number of strengths, notably with respect to food, landscapes, the built environment, historic heritage, events, walking and other rural activities. It is well placed to appeal to a wide market seeking a richly rural experience, both active and passive. The approach should involve adding value to the attractions and experiences on offer and making them more appealing and accessible.

Being ambitious about the sustainable aspects of tourism

Consultation showed the strength of support for the strategy to adopt strongly the principles of sustainable tourism. Shifting to low carbon is a strategic priority of the AONB Management Plan and there are excellent examples of tourism businesses and whole communities where this has been embraced.

Providing a quality experience for all visitors

Success will depend on providing a level of quality that matches or exceeds visitor expectations and leads to repeat visits and recommendations. The area should also ensure that the needs of all visitors are met without discrimination. Quality of tourism enterprises is quite high, but there is room for further improvement and more consistency. Maintenance of the quality of visitor infrastructure and the public realm remains an ongoing challenge.

The vision

By 2016: The Shropshire Hills and Ludlow will become established as a sought after rural destination, based on its special combination of outstanding landscapes and historic market towns. Businesses, communities and visitors will celebrate and care for the place, its heritage and the wider environment.

Principle 3 – Protecting natural and cultural heritage

Cross reference to Strategy Action Plan sections: 2. Delivering the Hills Experience, 6. Promoting Sustainable Access and Management

Key partners: AONB Partnership, National Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Shropshire Council Outdoor Recreation, Shropshire Council Planning, Telford & Wrekin Council, English Heritage

Principle 4 – Meeting visitor needs/quality of experience

Cross reference to Strategy Action Plan sections: 2. Delivering the Hills Experience, 3. Delivering the Market Town Experience, 5. Orientating and Informing Visitors, 7. Supporting Local Enterprise

Key partners: Shropshire Council Economic Development, Shropshire Council Arts & Museums (inc Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre & VICs), Town & Area Tourism Groups, Shropshire Hills Tourism

Principle 5 – Communication about the area

Cross reference to Strategy Action Plan sections: 1. Raising Awareness, 5. Orientating and Informing Visitors

Key partners: Shropshire Hills Tourism, Shropshire Tourism, National Trust, AONB Partnership, Town & Area Tourism Groups

Principle 6 – Tourism products relating to the protected area

Cross reference to Strategy Action Plan sections: 2. Delivering the Hills Experience, 3. Delivering the Market Town Experience

Key partners: South Shropshire Farm Holiday Group, Shropshire Hills Tourism

Principle 7 – Training

Cross reference to Strategy Action Plan sections: 2. Delivering the Hills Experience, 7. Supporting Local Enterprise

Key partners: AONB Partnership, Shropshire Council

Principle 8 – Community involvement and maintaining local quality of life

Cross reference to Strategy Action Plan sections: 1. Raising Awareness, 2. Delivering the Hills Experience, 3. Delivering the Market Town Experience

Key partners: Town Councils

Principle 9 – Benefits to the local economy and local community

Cross reference to Strategy Action Plan sections: 3. Delivering the Market Town Experience, 4. Delivering the Local Food Experience, 7. Supporting Local Enterprise

Key partners: Farmers Markets, South Shropshire Farm Holiday Group,

Principle 10 – Managing visitor flows

Cross reference to Strategy Action Plan sections: 6. Promoting Sustainable Access and Management
Key partners: National Trust, Natural England, Shropshire Council Planning

Principle 3 – Protecting natural and cultural heritage

3.1 Monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

Many of the most sensitive locations are in ownership and/or management specifically for conservation, and monitoring impacts of visitors is an integral part of their management:

- The **National Trust** owns a large area of the Long Mynd, along with Wenlock Edge and various other sites, and has both paid and voluntary warden staff. An extensive programme of ecological monitoring includes vegetation/habitats and sensitive species e.g. the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project. The Trust maintain and promote access to the Long Mynd carefully, and have recently been working closely with users and businesses to develop mountain biking opportunities without harm to conservation interests.
- **Natural England** own and manage The Stiperstones as a National Nature Reserve, with a team of staff on site based at Pennerley.
- **Shropshire Wildlife Trust** own a series of reserves including on the Stiperstones, Earl's Hill, Hope Valley Woodlands, Rhos Fiddle, Catherton Common and the Ercall, and the Forest Glen car park at the Wrekin. The Trust also oversees a network of county Wildlife Sites.
- The **Forestry Commission** manage a range of woodlands offering recreational opportunities balanced with conservation interests, including Bury Ditches hillfort and promoted mountain biking forests at Hopton and Eastridge Woods.
- **Shropshire Council** manage public rights of way and open access land, as well as some countryside sites including Rectory Woods at Church Stretton and Poles Coppice at Pontesbury.
- The **Wrekin Forest Partnership** and associated project work has worked with private landowners at the Wrekin to manage the impact of visitors.
- Natural England are responsible for **Sites of Special Scientific Interest** which provide some control over activities on designated sites. They also have **Stewardship Agreements** in place on a number of popular sites in private ownership providing a means to manage public access.
- Partners are active in the **Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership** which provides a framework for determining and pursuing conservation priorities.
- **English Heritage** are responsible for Scheduled Ancient Monuments which provide protection for sensitive sites such as hillforts.
- A local group manages Whitcliffe Common at **Ludlow**.
- Upper Onny and Upper Clun **Community Wildlife Groups** monitor bird populations and survey plant species.
- The **Shropshire Mines Trust** manage Snailbeach Mines, keeping conservation and restoration at the fore.

Planned activities:

- **Public sector organisations** are having budgets reduced and may in some cases be under pressure to dispose of sites they own. Some voluntary sector bodies remain actively interested in acquiring further land.
- The National Trust have been in negotiations for some time over purchase of **former quarries at Wenlock Edge**. This is a major project and currently one of the Trust's most significant potential acquisitions. An extensive programme of public consultations has been carried out about sensitive uses for the quarries for conservation, recreation and appropriate commercial activity.
- A project funded by LEADER to develop new **community wildlife groups** in the area is just starting, which will expand the range of ecological monitoring carried out.

3.2 Encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions

Activities already undertaken/current activities

The area is rich in heritage, from towns and villages, hillforts and border castles to a wide variety of historic buildings and relics of former mining and quarrying. There is a great deal of activity around all of this by both community groups and larger organisations, and much of it results in improved tourism uses. Many projects have been supported by the AONB Partnership with grants through the Sustainable Development Fund, LEADER and other schemes. Some examples include:

- **Ludlow** is a treasure trove of heritage and historic buildings, and this provides the basis for a wide variety of tourism and visitor attractions and businesses. There is a strong and active Civic Society, as in a number of the other towns. **Church Stretton, Much Wenlock and Craven Arms** all have active heritage groups.
- **Much Wenlock** currently has much activity around the **Olympics** and its historical connections to William Penny Brookes and the birth of the modern Olympic movement.
- The **Offa's Dyke** Association, along with other organisations, supports the conservation of this hugely important monument and management of the National Trail which goes along it.
- **Acton Scott Historic Working Farm** is run by Shropshire Council on the Acton Scott estate, and preserves and presents to visitors a vivid feel of life on a Victorian Farm (as featured on TV) through demonstrations, exhibits and events as well as training courses in traditional skills. The Council also runs museums in Ludlow and Much Wenlock.
- **English Heritage** manages Stokesay Castle, Clun Castle, Buildwas Abbey, Wenlock Priory and other sites.
- **Hopton Castle** has recently been restored by a private trust with over £1m of funding including HLF and LEADER, and sensitive, low-key visitor provision and interpretation made.
- **'Once Upon a Hill'** is a recent significant HLF and LEADER funded project by Natural England and others to restore two former smallholders **cottages at Blakemoorgate** on the Stiperstones, along with a walks booklet, events and interpretation about the miner squatter settlements of the area.
- **Bishop's Castle Town Hall** is currently being restored and will become a new Visitor Information Centre. A Festivals Officer is employed for Bishop's Castle & Clun Valley, supporting a variety of cultural events including the Clun Green Man Festival.
- Former lead and barytes **mining sites** around Snailbeach are managed by the Shropshire Mines Trust.
- The **Titterstone Cleve Heritage Trust** formed from an AONB project in 2007 and is now active in heritage projects in the Novers site and wider Cleve Hill area.
- The Bettws History group and Upper Onny book arose out of the HLF **Blue Remembered Hills project**.
- The **Arbor Tree** (a rare Black Poplar) and associated Arbor Day celebrations at Aston on Clun are widely known and have been supported through recent projects.
- A good number of **historic farm buildings** have been converted to holiday accommodation, usually with great sensitivity to their character and heritage value.
- The **Caring for God's Acre** project has for over 10 years supported churchyard conservation and has published a variety of information aimed at visitors.
- A number of **Parish Paths Partnership (P3) groups** survey and maintain historic rights of way as well as promoting walks.
- The **Church Stretton Heritage Initiative's timeline and 22 plaques** and panels attached to historic town centre buildings won the Environment and Culture category of the West Action for Market Towns Awards.
- **The Gleanings**, a new rural study centre has been supported with grant aid to run courses such as craft skills and traditional music.
- **Walking with Offa** in the Shropshire Hills has created self guided walks leaflets and organised a series of guided walks highlighting heritage and promoting rural businesses.
- A **wide variety of groups** in both the towns and rural parts of the area maintain culture and traditions, with many events being open to visitors.

Planned activities:

- A new HLF **Landscape Partnership Scheme for the Stiperstones and Corndon** area will include a range of heritage projects from conserving former mining sites to traditional skills.
- The **Walking with Offa Co-operation project** will promote walking, use of public transport, Walkers are Welcome and events along the border.

3.3 Action to control development (including tourism) which would adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- The main means of controlling development is through **planning functions** of the local authorities, principally Shropshire Council. Both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils have strong policies for protection of the AONB and reaching high environmental standards in all development.
- The **AONB Management Plan** includes as part of Policy 1:
Organisations which regulate designated sites and features, environmental quality and amenity should make full use of available measures to ensure the highest standards appropriate to a nationally protected landscape are achieved in the AONB.
Policies are also in place regarding tourism development, farm buildings and diversification, tranquility and road schemes.
- A number of the towns have **Conservation Areas** designated to ensure the quality of any new development. **Voluntary bodies** such as Civic Societies comment on planning proposals.
- There are a wide variety of **grants and sources of advice on reducing energy use and using renewables**. Local groups include Stretton Climate Care, Sustainable Wenlock, The Wasteless Society (based in Bishop's Castle), Ludlow 21 and the Rea Valley Environment Network.
- Waste, pollution and noise are overseen mainly by **Environmental Health** departments of the local authorities and the **Environment Agency**.
- The AONB Partnership has produced an **Agricultural Buildings Design Guide** and provided extensive support for a **Church Stretton Town Design Guide** which has been adopted by the Town Council.

Planned activities:

- There are concerns that current changes to national planning policy may weaken protection of the environment. Both local authorities are developing more detailed stages of their **Local Development Frameworks** following adoption of Core Strategies.

3.4 Action to reduce tourism activities which adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Activities are regulated through **planning and other statutory functions** as above.
- The **AONB Management Plan** includes the following relevant policies:
Policy 18: Tranquillity should be taken fully into account in both strategic and specific decisions. Proposals having a significant impact on tranquillity in the AONB should be prevented where possible.
Policy 20: A principle of 'quiet enjoyment' should apply, and activities which are in keeping with this encouraged. Recreation activities which are inherently noisy or intrusive should be discouraged, and where possible prevented, e.g. facilities for such activities not allowed through the planning system.
Policy 21: Recreational off-road use of motor vehicles should not be encouraged or promoted within the AONB. Voluntary measures and pro-active work with users are recommended to minimise the impact of legal off-road use of motor vehicles on the landscape and on people's quiet enjoyment of the countryside. Where the impact on the AONB is significant however, measures including traffic regulation orders restricting legal use should be used. Illegal motorised activities should as far as possible be prevented, and pro-active support given to the Police.

Policy 22: Events in the AONB such as concerts, festivals, and challenge walks should be planned (e.g. in location, timing and scale) to minimise environmental impact, and regular events should not be allowed or encouraged to grow to a scale where problems arise. Event organisers should seek advice at the planning stages to enable this.

- Much of the activity relevant to this heading is **pro-active work promoting good environmental practice** through advice and incentives, rather than aiming at bad practice. Examples are set out below in sections 7.2 and 1.3 in particular.

Planned activities:

- There are very few examples of tourism activities in the area which are significantly out of keeping with the ethos of the AONB Management Plan and the Sustainable Tourism Strategy. The approach is likely to continue of **focussing on proactive support for sustainable approaches**, which have a broad base of support in the area.
- A new **Green Events Guide** will be delivered through the Discover Local project.

3.5 Encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation (e.g. “visitor payback” schemes)

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- All subscription income from the **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** group goes into Sustainable Development Fund grants (currently c£1,500 pa).
- The AONB-led **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme** requires member businesses to undertake or support some kind of conservation activity.

Planned activities:

- It is proposed in both the AONB Management Plan and the Strategy Action Plan to develop a **visitor payback scheme**.

Principle 4 – Meeting visitor needs/quality of experience

4.1 Surveys to measure visitor satisfaction

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

A number of surveys have been carried out:

- Shropshire County Council (2008) **Shropshire Countryside Access Strategy 2007-2017** [http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/countryside.nsf/viewAttachments/GPRE-8KFDCL/\\$file/countryside-access-strategy-for-shropshire-2008-2018.pdf](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/countryside.nsf/viewAttachments/GPRE-8KFDCL/$file/countryside-access-strategy-for-shropshire-2008-2018.pdf)
- Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership (2008) **Shropshire Hills AONB Visitor Survey 2007**, The Research Solution <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Visitor-Survey.pdf>
- Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership (2006) **Awareness and Perception Study of the AONB**, Martin Horne consultants <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Awareness-and-Perception-Survey.pdf>
- **Better Welcome surveys** 2007 carried out by Shropshire Council’s predecessor local authorities for Church Stretton, Ludlow, Bishop’s Castle and Much Wenlock.
- Additional more recent surveys for **Much Wenlock**.
- Research on **Farmers Markets**.
- **Feedback** is systematically gathered by a wide range of the **events** carried out in the area, including Walking Festivals, guided walks, festivals etc.

Planned activities:

- No budget has been identified in the short term for new research. However, we are mindful that much of the survey information is now several years old and also no data has ever been collected for the newly defined area of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP. Some **up to date information for the DDP** would provide valuable evidence of the need to strengthen promotion of the area at a county level.
- There is perhaps scope to explore **online surveys** or collection of more ad hoc data from visitors through social media and incentive schemes.
- Explore feasibility of providing a means for general views from visitors about the area to be **fed back from accommodation providers** to a central point for collation.

4.2 Identification of future visitor markets and their needs

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- This has been carried out through the **Sustainable Tourism Strategy** (see section 3.2 page 33).
- The Strategy also applied at a local level the findings of **national research and strategies** e.g. Visit England's rural tourism strategy and wise growth strategy.

Planned activities:

- Encourage more **user-generated comments** via websites, social media etc on needs and feedback.

4.3 Specific provision of facilities and information for disabled people

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- All Ability Trails at the **Stiperstones NNR, Onny Meadows and Oak Farm**.
- The Shropshire Hills **Shuttles** are wheelchair accessible.
- A wide range of **walks, activities and sites** offering opportunities at all levels are promoted.
- High standards of accessibility of all **websites**.
- **Audio** podcasts and links to audio trails available.
- Well researched **information booklets** for disabled visitors available at all VICs.
- The Dog Rose Trust have been involved with **interpretation** in Ludlow, Aston on Clun and several other locations.
- **Church Stretton** publish a disabled access guide and is well-provided for disabled visitors
- **Bishop's Castle** website and booklets indicate premises which are wheelchair accessible.
- **Accommodation** available with disabled access.
- Council **grant schemes** have previously helped with specific facility upgrades.

Planned activities:

- Further **upgrades** of facilities and information.

4.4 Provision of facilities for economically disadvantaged people

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- The **Shropshire Hills Shuttles** provide a service for those without access to a car, and are free to holders of pensioner's bus passes.
- Many of most popular **activities** such as walking and cycling are free.
- Good range of **accommodation** choices including camping and caravan sites, good provision of youth hostels.
- The Walking with Offa walks all promote the use of the **Shropshire Link public transport service**.
- The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and other attractions have **free WiFi** access.

Planned activities:

- Expansion of **Shuttle** services to include Wenlock Edge and Much Wenlock.
- Improved **promotion** of low cost opportunities.

4.5 Action to monitor the quality of facilities and services

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Local authorities and tourism associations still operate a policy of **promoting graded only accommodation**. Shropshire Tourism have their own grading scheme.
- There are well established **complaints procedures** at VICs and for tourism associations.
- The Shropshire Hills **Sustainable Business Scheme** includes a requirement for businesses to display their 'pledge' and sustainability actions to their customers, providing a transparent means of monitoring.

Planned activities:

- Continue to encourage businesses to support **quality schemes**, including VAQAS for attractions.

4.6 Action to improve the quality of facilities and services

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- **Better Welcome** process undertaken in market towns. This included an audit of tourism facilities and signposting, visitor surveys and consultative workshops. Physical infrastructural improvements were funded based on the results of the work to improve the offer to visitors to market towns.
- **Sustainable Business Scheme** includes appraisal process and supports businesses who go further e.g. to Green Tourism Business Scheme.
- **Church Stretton** won a Bronze Award in the 2009 **Clean Britain Awards**, with much work by volunteers from the Church Stretton Area Tourism Group's Pride of Place group.
- Improvements in a number of towns have been carried out with funding from Shropshire Council's **Market Town plans**.

Planned activities:

- Continued support for **Sustainable Business Scheme and Green Tourism Business Scheme**.
- Encouraging businesses to engage more with **social media** such as tripadvisor and to respond positively to any adverse feedback.

Principle 5 – Communication about the area

5.1 Sensitive promotion of the protected area as a destination using authentic images and reflecting capacity/needs of the area, including times and locations

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

See the five visitor promotion documents sent as supporting items to this application.

- Considerable work has gone in recent years into developing promotion at a destination level and **building the identity** of the area. For visitor facing material aimed at attracting people to the area, the brand 'Ludlow and the Shropshire Hills' is used, based on research that Ludlow is the most significant draw. Shropshire Hills Tourism are responsible for the main **Ludlow and the Shropshire Hills tourism brochure** and the **website www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk**. There is strong input from the AONB Partnership to ensure good representation of the AONB's landscape and special qualities, and both the website and brochure also have a section on each of the main towns.

- Joint **Shropshire Hills Events & Visitor Guide** and other actions described under section 5.3 below.
- Most organisations have **libraries of images** and these are often shared between organisations for promotional purposes.
- There are no significant problems in the area with promotion of sensitive locations or times of year. The AONB Management Plan and Sustainable Tourism Strategy have indicated that with a sensitive approach **there is generally greater capacity in the area for more visitors** without harm to the special qualities of the area.
- There has been a recent **PR campaign focussing on walking** through the Walking with Offa project, which has resulted in some strong national and local publicity highlighting the potential for walking and the value of the AONB.
- The AONB Partnership has worked closely with Shropshire Council's Outdoor Recreation department over promotion of routes such as the **Shropshire Way**, promotion of open access land, Shropshire Hills content on the **Shropshire Walking website** www.shropshirewalking.co.uk, etc. The website has a map-based search engine for the area and promoted seasonal walks.
- **Gateway signs** indicating the Shropshire Hills AONB have been erected on most of the main roads leading into the area (with the exception of the A49 for which consent was not given by the Highways Agency). Signs including the Shropshire Hills AONB logo have also been erected at Church Stretton and Pontesbury by licensed agreement with the relevant Town and Parish Council. Gateway signs at Cleobury Mortimer include reference to the Shropshire Hills.
- Shropshire Hills AONB **souvenir booklet** produced and sold through main outlets, Shropshire Hills family **Activity Book** developed by Discovery Centre.

Planned activities:

- Commissioning/collection of **new images** – to fill gaps identified.
- Review of town centre signage in **Church Stretton** is pending. The Town Council is also interested in a town centre app guide.
- **Bishop's Castle** have a newly formed marketing group and intend to focus on attracting visiting groups.
- The **National Trust** is launching a new website which will offer new opportunities for cross-links and content. The Trust is also developing new interpretation boards for the tea-room at Carding Mill Valley.

5.2 Influence on the promotional activities of others (region, enterprises, etc.)

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Regional structures in England have largely been dismantled following the change of government and there is now **no promotion at a regional level**. Some food outlets still link with Heart of England Fine Foods (HEFF).
- Shropshire Hills Tourism and the Shropshire Hills AONB have been working closely with **Shropshire Tourism**, who are responsible for the main out of county promotion of Shropshire, through a **brochure, website** <http://www.shropshiretourism.co.uk> and **PR**. The profile of the Shropshire Hills is improved in the content of these, but there is further to go and much of the structure of the promotion is still based around the old Districts rather than the new DDPs.
- The AONB Partnership has produced a '**Sense of Place Toolkit**' which is provided to all tourism businesses in the Sustainable Business Scheme, with consistent text about the area and a library of images which businesses can use.
- The AONB Partnership has run a number of Sense of Place **workshops** through the Walking with Offa and Discover Local projects, familiarisation trips on the Shuttles, and a Shropshire Hills seminar for tourism businesses in 2009.
- Shropshire Council has run a series of free one-day development programmes for tourism businesses called **Sharing Our Shropshire**.
- The **DDP** has close working relationships with the Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board, with Shropshire Tourism and Shropshire Council.
- **Church Stretton** have produced a **Style Guide**.

- A new **Church Stretton town website** is being developed. Advice will be given by the AONB Partnership to ensure it contains coherent messages about the AONB and continues with the Shropshire Hills branding.
- Shropshire Council have provided funding for development of a **Marketing Strategy for the DDP** following on from the Sustainable Tourism Strategy. This work is currently in progress.

Planned activities:

- The Strategy indicates that while considerable progress has been made in co-ordinating promotion at the destination level, there is an urgent **need to get the identity and brand values of the area better represented in county level promotion and marketing**, which is the most significant in terms of attracting people to the area.
- There is potential for greater **consistency of presentation** of the area as a whole and the landscape and sustainable tourism approach in the promotion by both more local areas (e.g. the towns) and by individual businesses. This may be achieved by a combination of guidance and making suggestions directly. Not everybody is aware of or immediately won over by the rationale for more consistent use of the 'Shropshire Hills' identity.

5.3 Provision of clear information material on where to go and what to do when in the area (guides, maps, websites – relevant languages)

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- **Ludlow and the Shropshire Hills tourism brochure and website** www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk (see 5.1 above).
- The AONB Partnership lead on production of an annual **joint Shropshire Hills Events & Visitor Guide**, supported by Shropshire Hills Tourism, the National Trust, Shropshire Council and including events from a wider range of organisations. The guide this has introductory sections to each part of the area bringing out the sense of place and special qualities of each, with short news items.
- A **Shropshire Hills and Severn Valley Discovery Map** is produced as a free guide for visitors within the area.
- The **AONB website** www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk has a 'Things to Do section'. The walking pages of this have been substantially upgraded recently to reflect research that the area attracts a wide range of walkers from casual to keen.
- In 2011 **Ludlow** produced a new **town guide** with a section on the adjacent landscape of the Shropshire Hills. There is also a Ludlow Town Map and an Events Guide. **Church Stretton** produce an annual 'In and Around' **guide**. The town has adopted the strapline 'The Heart of the Shropshire Hills' and have a licence agreement to use a derivation of the AONB logo. Bishop's Castle and Clun both produce leaflets.
- Most of the **towns** have their own **websites** <http://www.ludlow.org.uk/> <http://www.bishopscastle.co.uk/> <http://www.churchstretton.co.uk/visitors/> <http://www.cleoburycountry.com> <http://www.clun.org.uk/> <http://www.muchwenlockguide.info/>
- **Church Stretton** Town Council and Church Stretton Area Tourism Group have formed a Community Interest Company (CIC) to run a **new town website** from Sept 2011.
- The Shropshire Council **activity websites** - one each for **walking, cycling and riding**, offer a comprehensive listing of routes and other links, such as to holiday providers. The Shropshire Way website has 'hotspots' for tourism attractions and businesses.
- Church Stretton, Bishop's Castle, Much Wenlock, Wellington and Cleobury Mortimer are all **'Walkers Are Welcome' towns** and each have a series of walks from the town centre for visitors and locals alike.

Planned activities:

- There is further work to be done in **co-ordinating the various websites**, making sure appropriate linkages are in place, ensuring the area's **identity** is being promoted (especially use of 'Shropshire Hills' rather than other terms), and **consistency** and accuracy of description of the AONB and landscape.

- **Ludlow**'s main priority for future promotion is to link better with the wider Shropshire Hills area.
- Continued **good communications and joint working** will be required on all areas of promotion.
- Increased use of **social media** to promote events and new offers.

5.4 Provision of accessible information centres/points for visitors and local people

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- **Official Visitor Information Centres** run by Shropshire Council are located at Ludlow, Church Stretton, Much Wenlock and the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre at Craven Arms. Fortunately the co-location of visitor information along with other council services has meant that most have not been affected by recent budget cuts.
- **Other centres** providing good services of visitor information include: Carding Mill Valley (National Trust), the Bog Centre near the Stiperstones, Acton Scott Historic Working Farm (Shropshire Council), centres at Bishop's Castle and Cleobury Mortimer (run by volunteers). Some small shops serve as informal visitor information points, e.g. Clee Hill.
- In situ **information boards or panels** are found in a number of other locations, including Craven Arms, the Forest Glen car park at the Wrekin, Stiperstones NNR, Forestry Commission sites, Shropshire Wildlife Trust reserves and parish noticeboards.

Planned activities:

- The new information centre in **Bishop's Castle Town Hall** will be a major improvement and more accessible.
- A **feasibility study** has recently been carried out to look at potentially relocating the Visitor Information Centre in **Church Stretton** to a more central accessible location, perhaps in combination with other visitor or community functions.

5.5 Processes for ensuring that others (especially tourism enterprises) provide good information for visitors and local people, including groups and schools

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- The **Sense of Place Toolkit**, Walking with Offa and Discover Local **workshops**, Sharing our Shropshire and sense of place workshops all mentioned above.
- The **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme** provides a network for businesses wishing to align themselves with the Shropshire Hills and with sustainable practices.
- **Shropshire Hills Tourism** has a newsletter for its members and provides support.
- There is a strong **network of local Area Tourism groups** including Church Stretton, Ludlow, Bishop's Castle & Clun, Much Wenlock, sharing information and keeping members abreast of new information. Regular (annual) familiarisation trips are held most years.
- Shropshire Council **training** for VIC staff on walking opportunities.
- A guide to suitable sites in the area for schools '**Where Wild Schools Go**' was produced by Shropshire Wildlife Trust as part of the Blue Remembered Hills project and is available at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/WhereWildSchoolsGo.pdf>
- The **National Trust** liaise where possible with Duke of Edinburgh groups, with whom the Long Mynd area is very popular.
- Shropshire Geological Society and Ludlow Museum and Resource Centre provide advice to groups with a particular interest in **geology**, for which the area is well known.

Planned activities:

- There is plenty of scope to continue **developing networks and support** for local businesses in this respect.

5.6 Provision of guiding services and an events programme for visitors and local people, including groups and schools

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- The **joint Shropshire Hills Events & Visitor Guide** includes a wide range of events and guided walks, provided by the AONB Partnership, National Trust, Natural England, Shropshire Wildlife Trust and others. There are also family oriented events especially at the Shropshire Hills Discover Centre, Acton Scott and the Stiperstones. Many events are run jointly in partnership between various organisations, providing good co-ordination.
- The **National Trust's education programme at Carding Mill Valley** involves around 22,000 children per year and has its own website <http://www.cardingmillvalley.org.uk/>.
- **Education programmes** are also run at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and Much Wenlock Museum.
- A number of **Forest School** initiatives have been supported by the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.
- A new **network of walks leaders** has been developed through the Walking with Offa, with a successful series of walks with pub lunches over 2011. Some of these walks leaders are available to hire by individuals and groups and can be found on the Shropshire walking website.
- The AONB's **Walking for Wellbeing** Project is working to link walking groups, Walking for Health projects and tourism walking initiatives to improve levels of provision and co-ordination.
- The **Discover Local** consumer events programme showcases local producers and increases awareness of sense of place with the public.
- **Guided town walks** are currently offered in Bishop's Castle and Ludlow.

Planned activities:

- Further promotion of **walks leaders services**, targeting of walking groups in other localities.
- Continuation of Walking with Offa series of **guided walks**.

Principle 6 – Tourism products relating to the protected area

6.1 Provision/development of tourism offers (special events, holiday programmes, etc.) involving the discovery and interpretation of natural and cultural heritage

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Wide variety of **events and guided walks** from different providers as above.
- The **Ludlow Food Festival** is attended by more than 20,000 people annually.
- AONB Partnership runs the **Shropshire Hills Shuttles** www.shropshirehillsshuttles.co.uk.
- **Walking Festivals** are held annually in Bishop's Castle and Church Stretton.
- There is now a real concentration in the area of towns with **Walkers Are Welcome** status: Church Stretton, Bishop's Castle, Cleobury Mortimer, Wellington and most recently Much Wenlock.
- **AONB 'Walking with Offa' project** currently under way developing guided walks, walks leader training, familiarisation visits for walking group leaders, interpretation, 'Days Out' itineraries, etc. Walks include rural businesses and are accessible by public transport.
- **Car free walks** using rail and bus network published on Shropshire Walking and via AONB website.
- Businesses including Secret Hills Walking, Shropshire Hills Cycling and Wheely Wonderful cycling provide **activity holidays** linked to exploring the landscape.
- Magnolia B&B is part of a grouping of accommodation providers linked to the YHA providing staged **accommodation on Offa's Dyke Path National Trail**. Some accommodation providers link specifically with the **Shropshire Way**.
- The Baron at Bucknell, Magnolia B&B and other tourism businesses are offering **bespoke walking weekends** for guests.

- **Church Stretton** list annual events on the town website. The town is actively promoting itself as a **centre for outdoor activities** and links are being encouraged with outdoor pursuits providers. Recent development of two new cycling businesses around the Long Mynd.
- **Bishop's Castle** Tourism work closely with the Civic Society and Bishop's Castle Heritage Resource Centre which produce a Town Trail and heritage leaflets, and with a Parish Paths Partnership group on producing walking books/maps/leaflets. The CIC co-ordinates and promotes events in Bishop's Castle & Clun and employs a Festivals Officer.
- The **National Trust** can provide pre-booked events like bushcraft and walks for groups. The Trust is having a national push on walking and other outdoor activities. Locally the Trust have eased restrictions on wild camping and wild swimming at the reservoir at Cardingmill Valley.
- **South Shropshire Farm Holiday Group** is a business association based on farm accommodation.
- **New circular walks around Much Wenlock** are being provided by Shropshire Council with Shropshire Hills LEADER funding.
- Recent **Clun Valley Walks book** and **Cycle ride around the Wrekin booklet** funded by AONB Sustainable Development Fund.
- Shropshire Geological Society have produced a series of **Geotrails**.
<http://www.shropshiregeology.org.uk/Geotrails/Geotrails.asp>

Planned activities:

- Continued **encouragement of businesses' and voluntary groups'** activities in these areas.
- Potential for more holiday and short break **package products** based on walking, heritage, wildlife, etc.
- Potential for development of the **small group market**, especially around walking.

6.2 Effective promotion of these offers

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Events promoted through the **joint Shropshire Hills Events guide** as above, along with interpretation of natural and cultural heritage. Landscape value and activities are heavily promoted in the Ludlow & Shropshire Hills brochure.
- **South Shropshire Farm Holiday Group** run www.shropshiregold.co.uk with information on members' accommodation, things to do and suggested itineraries.
- Complementary 'Things to Do' sections on www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk (more focused on attractions and businesses) and www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk (more focused on wider landscape and helping people to do their own thing).
- Shropshire Council are developing a project around use of the '**Viewranger**' Smartphone App for self-guided walks.
- **Walking with Offa** has promoted walking through a significant **PR campaign** and all 12 walks will be available on Viewranger.com as Smartphone apps.

Planned activities:

- Information on what is available could be better **co-ordinated**. Improvements needed in 'Things to Do' web pages.
- Accommodation providers could arrange **packages** with activity providers, and providers could promote their services with discount vouchers for accommodation guests.
- Church Stretton Area Tourism Group are looking to develop **e-marketing** to targeted groups with suggested options for activities/visits.
- Improved mechanism for the distribution of tourism leaflets etc to accommodation providers.
- **South Shropshire Farm Holiday Group** plan to develop Shropshire Gold itineraries. The group could do more to arrange themed holidays such as walking, arts and crafts, historical studies etc but need advice on the availability of local experts to lead events.
- Joint promotion of walking activities along the Welsh English Border is planned through the **Walking with Offa co-operation project**.

Principle 7 – Training

7.1 Providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, in sustainable tourism

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Involvement with tourism is **spread across a number of the AONB staff team** including AONB Partnership Manager, Development Officer, Promotions Officer, Project Officer, Administrator and Planning & Landscape Officer. Most of these staff attended consultation events as part of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and other workshops. All have involvement in different ways with liaison with tourism groups and businesses.
- Through events of the **National Association for AONBs and Europarc Atlantic Isles** a number of staff have visited other protected landscapes holding the Charter or working on sustainable tourism.
- The **Offa's Country Partnership** has brought the Shropshire Hills AONB together regularly with other protected landscapes along the Welsh – English border.
- The AONB Partnership works to a **Sustainability Policy & Action Plan**
http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Sust_Policy-and-Action_Plan.pdf

Planned activities:

- Continuing the above.
- The **Walking with Offa Cooperation project** will provide training and sharing of good practice between Europarc Charter areas along the border.

7.2 Providing or supporting training of other organisations and tourism enterprises in sustainable tourism

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- **Familiarisation events** run for Shuttles drivers, VIC staff and tourism businesses 2009 and 2010.
- Training and networking events for **Sustainable Business Scheme** since 2008.
- **Discover Local** project runs a variety of training courses for businesses.
- AONB hosted **business advice clinics** with Business Link and now through Shropshire Council.
- AONB project on commercial recycling.
- **Sustainable Development Fund** support to a number of projects offering energy advice to businesses, targeting tourism.
- Close liaison with **Stretton Climate Care** offering advice on energy conservation and renewable energy.
- **Sharing our Shropshire** was well received by businesses as a good vehicle
- **National Trust** at Carding Mill Valley have showcased energy saving measures and renewables (log boiler, solar thermal heating).

Planned activities:

- Potential for more regular **information for accommodation hosts** and demand for relevant courses, especially from the perspective of very rural enterprises.

Principle 8 – Community involvement and maintaining local quality of life

8.1 Involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Wide consultations over **AONB Management Plan review** 2008-9.
- **Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Strategy** 2008-2013 produced through SDF grant and AONB input to process. Followed by Church Stretton Marketing Plan 2009.
- Wide consultations for production of **Sustainable Tourism Strategy** during spring 2011.
- Consultation by Shropshire Council on **DDP structure** during 2010.
- **Shropshire Hills & Ludlow DDP** established Nov 2010. Strong representation from Town Councils.
- **AONB Partnership** has had close involvement with local strategic partnership economic and environmental theme groups over a number of years, increased liaison with local tourism groups across the area, especially developing links with Shropshire Hills Tourism, contact with businesses through Sustainable Business Scheme and projects through Sustainable Development Fund, LEADER and economically focused projects.
- **Town Councils** are very closely involved with tourism in each of the towns, providing community links and democratic accountability.

Planned activities:

- Recruitment of **rural Parish Council reps** to DDP.
- New round of consultation on **next AONB Management Plan**.
- Better involvement of **community organisations** in the DDP.

8.2 Communication between the protected area, local people and visitors

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- The AONB Partnership works to a **Communications Strategy**, approved March 2010
http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Communications_Strategy_Mar10.pdf
- **AONB Partnership promotions** include joint Events & Visitor guide, press releases (48 in 2010-11), comprehensive and regularly updated website, Annual Review, talks and events (37 events led in 2010-11 attended by a total of over 670 people, plus a further 26 talks and support to 44 events led by others).
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** provides a means for local people or visitors to belong to and support the AONB. The group was started in late 2008 and now has over 130 members.
- **AONB staff** are out in the community through project work and often providing support and advice. This face to face contact is probably the most powerful form of communication.
- AONB Partnership has maintained **close links with visitor centres** and provided input to information and interpretation, including Discovery Centre, Cardingmill Valley, Bog Centre.
- AONB **Facebook** page and two **Twitter** accounts reach a total of over 1,200 people and are updated several times a week.
- Walking with Offa project has included contracts to review **web marketing** of walking and a **PR** contract which has resulted in new greater levels of publicity, especially at national level.

Planned activities:

- Continuing all of the above. Increase applications of **social media**.
- Development of **new web-based AONB newsletter**.
- Improvement of storage and sharing of contacts and mailing lists to improve **co-ordination of e-mail publicity**.
- Establishment of dedicated **web page for the DDP** with information on its meetings and activities.

8.3 Mechanisms for identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- This is integral to the **AONB Management Plan** process, including Sustainability Appraisal focussing on potential conflicts. Recreation and tourism issues do not feature highly as areas of conflict.
- The **DDP structure** provides a relatively new form of link between tourism businesses, public sector bodies including the AONB Partnership and Shropshire Council, and local community representatives.
- **AONB Partnership** provided strong conservation input to Shropshire Countryside Access Strategy. The **Shropshire Local Access Forum** run by Shropshire Council provides a mechanism to address access-related issues, and the AONB Partnership has regular contact with this.
- AONB Partnership commissioned **Wrekin Forest Sustainable Transport & Access Study 2010**. http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Wrekin_Forest_Sust_Trans_and_Access_Study_2010.pdf
- The AONB Management Plan provides **guidance** to reduce likelihood of misunderstanding and conflict. AONB Partnership provides input to significant planning proposals, where possible at pre-application stage.

Planned activities:

- Continuation of all of the above.

Principle 9 – Benefits to the local economy and local community

9.1 Promoting the purchase of local products (food, crafts, local services) by visitors and local tourism businesses

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- **'Buy Local'** initiative including website directory and Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme <http://www.shropshirehills-buylocal.co.uk>. Operating since 2008. Recent Awards ceremony for high achievers in each category <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/2011/10/14/sustainable-business-winners/>.
- Co-ordination of Farmers Markets promotion as **Shropshire Hills Farmers Markets**, since 2006 with AONB Partnership support. Now rolled out county wide.
- **Ludlow Farmers Market** is particularly strong, attracting around 40 stallholders. Variety of other linked activity, supported by <http://www.localtoludlow.org.uk/> with strong branding.
- Craven Arms Farmers Markets are held at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre. The **Craven Arms Community Food** project provides additional community activities and linkages.
- The Soil Association run a programme of **school farmers markets** funded by LEADER in the Shropshire Hills.
- AONB **Discover Local** project provides local produce related events for members of the public and training/ networking events for businesses. <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/discover-local/>
- LEADER and Sustainable Development Fund projects including **School Farmers Markets**, **'Grow Cook & Share'**.

Planned activities:

- Church Stretton looking to develop marketing with **Arriva Trains Wales** – B&B discounts etc.
- **Bishop's Castle** Tourism plan to encourage all catering outlets to say exactly where their produce comes from. The Town Council is to ask all Farmers' Market stallholders to do the same.

9.2 Encouraging the employment of local people in tourism

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Involvement in '**Homegrown**' skills project for young people and employers, 2010.
- Church Stretton Area Partnership to hold **Retail Forum** in autumn 2011 to promote trader/customer dialogue.
- **Bishop's Castle** Tourism have many retail members and advertise them in a booklet and website. The variety of local, independent shops in Bishop's Castle and Clun is actively promoted.
- **Lecturing and visits** by AONB staff to Recreation & Tourism courses at FE colleges and at Harper Adams University College.

Planned activities:

- Continuation of above and seek opportunities for new activity.
- A new **training programme** is planned for the Stiperstones and Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme, which will include the improvement of heritage assets and look at interpretation skills.

9.3 Development of tourism in association with traditional economic activity (e.g. agriculture)

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- **South Shropshire Farm Holiday Group** exists specifically for farm based accommodation.
- AONB support for **Farmers Markets and Schools Farmers Markets**.
- **AONB Farming project** offering first-line advice and referrals to specialist advice, including on development of tourism enterprises.

Planned activities:

- Possibilities for further development of **equine tourism**, e.g. facilities for guests bringing their own horses, links between accommodation providers and stabling.

Principle 10 – Managing visitor flows

10.1 Keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space, including feedback from local tourism enterprises

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- **Visitor surveys** carried out for specific sites and attractions within area (Cardingmill Valley, Stiperstones, The Wrekin).
- Desk based **Economic Impact study** with estimated visitor numbers carried out in 2007 for county, Districts and AONB. AONB report at <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Tourism-Econ-Impact-Report.pdf>
- Close work with tourism **businesses** through Sustainable Business Scheme and Buy Local initiative.
- **Business survey** conducted for Sustainable Tourism Strategy and for DDP Marketing Strategy.
- **Feedback from enterprises** via local tourism groups and Shropshire Hills Tourism.

Planned activities:

- **DDP** has an identified role in relation to research and monitoring, but financial resources are tight. Collation could be carried out of existing visitor surveys done within the area.
- Ideally a new **visitor survey** or estimate of numbers for the new DDP area is needed.
- Business survey of 50 tourism businesses through the **Walking with Offa project**.

10.2 Creating and implementing a visitor management plan

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- Overall approaches to visitor management included in the **AONB Management Plan**, including principle of dispersal, encouragement of walking, discouragement of off road vehicles.
- **Sustainable Tourism Strategy** Action heading 6. Promoting Sustainable Access and Management p57.
- AONB Partnership has had strong input to **Shropshire Countryside Access Strategy and Local Transport Plan**.
- **Input by AONB Partnership** and other conservation bodies to Shropshire Way, Walkers Are Welcome proposals, promoted routes, etc.

Planned activities:

- Continue actions above and ensure that **visitor management issues are addressed** by the AONB Partnership, Local Access Forum and DDP.
- Support for organisations reviewing visitor management on particular **sites** to ensure approaches fit with the wider context.
- Consideration of **guidance for organisers of larger events**, to avoid harmful impacts.

10.3 Promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative to private cars

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- AONB Partnership has run **Shropshire Hills Shuttles** since Oct 2009, with strong input to promotion before that. These run on weekends and Bank Holidays from Easter to the end of September from Church Stretton.
- Links with **Arriva Trains Wales** and formerly with Wrexham & Shropshire (direct London service).
- Strong input to Shropshire's **walking, cycling and riding websites**.
- **Car free walks** published <http://www.shropshirewalking.co.uk/shropshire-way/linear-walks.htm>.
- **Sustainable Transport in Ludlow** initiative just being launched with significant DfT funding for next four years. Will include promotion of walking and cycling, improvement of links between railway station and town, etc.
- Earlier work on **Sustainable Managed Access Project** (c2002-4, some routes still in use) and Blue Remembered Hills bridleway route.
- A Feasibility Study has been completed by Church Stretton Town Council on the creation of a **Travel Hub** linking rail, coach and road to Shuttle service and buses.
- Support to cycle centres to hire out **electric bikes**.
- Promotion of "**Guide to Slow Travel in Marches**" Les Lumsdon, May 2011
- Promotion of **Shropshire Link** demand responsive transport through Walking with Offa promoted walks.
- Bishop's Castle encourage use of **Shropshire Link**, and Festivals Officer is encouraging use of train and Shropshire Link to visit local festivals.
- **Larger events** such as Ludlow Food Festival have good planning and park and ride etc in place – also Clun Green Man etc.
- **Wrekin Forest Sustainable Transport & Access Study**, as above.

Planned activities:

- Further discussion of **licensing arrangements** so that accommodation providers can use their own cars to meet guests at railway stations or drop them at points where they may catch buses.
- New **Wenlock Wanderer** shuttle service to be launched 2012, with pilot service from Ludlow planned in 2013.
- The **Walking with Offa Co-operation project** includes letting a contract to develop relationships and activity with the regional transport providers, such as Arriva Trains Wales, for the whole border

area. There is potential for more work with the Marches Line (Manchester - Cardiff) running through the centre of the area, and the Heart of Wales line running to the south-west.

- Build links between train and bus services at **Wellington** with walks on and around the Wrekin.

10.4 Controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development

Activities already undertaken/current activities:

- These are local authority **planning** responsibilities. The AONB Partnership provides input to planning policy and decisions.

- The **AONB Management Plan** includes the following relevant policies:

Policy 10 The siting, design and specification of new developments for tourism and recreation should be to high standards of environmental sensitivity and sustainability. The following guidelines are recommended:

- *Single developments of more than around ten accommodation units are less likely to be supported in small settlements and open countryside.*
- *Large parks of static caravans, cabins or chalets 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.*
- *Built facilities for recreation should only be allowed where their location and the activities they support are compatible with the special qualities of the AONB.*

Planned activities:

- Consider need for revising policy in review of AONB Management Plan.

Signed:

Dated:

For further details on the Charter see also www.european-charter.org

EUROPARC Federation

Waffnergasse 6

93047 Regensburg

Germany

Tel: +49 941 59935980

e-mail: info@european-charter.org

Application by Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

List of other available documentation

Shropshire Hills AONB Visitor Survey 2007 <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Visitor-Survey.pdf>

Shropshire Hills AONB Awareness & Perception Survey 2006
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Awareness-and-Perception-Survey.pdf>

Shropshire Hills AONB Tourism Economic Impact study 2007
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Tourism-Econ-Impact-Report.pdf>

Church Stretton Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2008-2013
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/CS-Sust-Tourism-Strategy.pdf>

Church Stretton Marketing Strategy 2009 (not on-line)

Wrekin Forest Sustainable Transport & Access Study – Sept 2010
<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/news-publications/other-reports/>

Other information leaflets include material for the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme and the Shropshire Hills Shuttles.