

Item 3 Update on AONB Partnership Work programme

1. Summary

This paper presents an update of recent progress and activity, and a summary of the work programme for the coming year 2016-17.

2. Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme 2015-16, recent progress (see also update paper to AONB Partnership meeting 17 November 2015)

Take and co-ordinate action to conserve and enhance natural beauty, to promote enjoyment and understanding and to further sustainable development.

• Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme

The LPS Board met on 16 December, receiving a presentation from Resources for Change on the initial findings of the mid-term review.

Coal and transport. A development and repair grant offer for £108,000 has now been received from Historic England for the **1784 Engine House** at Pontesbury, but the contract remains to be signed by the land owners.

Lead & barytes mining. CBS Conservation have completed some restoration work at Snailbeach and Cothercott mine sites. Plans are being made for new interpretation at both sites.

Rescuing rocks & overgrown relics. Practical task days are being held over the winter at **Earl's Hill**, Poles Coppice and Nills Hill (mainly tree and scrub clearance) and at Snailbeach and The Bog (scrapes and vegetation management).

Volunteer survey work through 'Open hills, old ways and commons' is being fed into the Historic Environment Record, with professional support.

Hillforts & Castles. Ground stabilisation has been carried out at Castle Pulverbatch motte and bailey (parking area) and task days held here and at Callow hillfort.

A **meadows** talk was given on 22 November and a new contractor is being sought to run the machinery in 2016.

Buzz in the Borders workshops on pollinators and wildlife gardening have been held in Pulverbatch, Stiperstones and Chirbury.

The Jean Jackson Charitable Trust has agreed an additional £36,000 for the **Ground-nesting Bird Recovery Project** in 2016-18. Monitoring data for 2015 has been reported and two feedback events held. Curlew breeding success was very poor.

The three **Community Wildlife Groups** in the area have continued with plant and bird surveys.

16 **small grants** for farmers and smallholders have been completed to date.

The **Young Rangers** project is to be launched shortly.

Down to Earth projects are progressing in Hyssington/Church Stoke, Pontesford Hill and Snailbeach/Stiperstones.

Training. Interviews are being held on 18 January for the new Training Officer post.

See <http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/> for further information.

• Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund

The 14 projects for 2015-16 listed below are heading for completion by the end of March, and project ideas for 2016-17 are being gathered. The Jean Jackson Trust have confirmed

an annual contribution of £15,000 for the next three years, which is greatly appreciated. An AONB talk evening for grant recipients was held on 6 October and well received.

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|--------------------------------------|---|--------|
| South Shropshire Youth Forum | Clee Hill and Church Stretton Young Rangers | £3,000 |
| Church Stretton Town Council | Developing a vision for Rectory Wood & Field | £1,000 |
| John Osborne Arvon Centre | The Dovecote Meadow and Orchard Project | £2,284 |
| Redlake Valley CBS | Raising awareness of woodland conservation and the work of RVCBS | £1,136 |
| Loudwater Studio | Five Sites, Five Senses | £2,530 |
| Shropshire Wildlife Trust | Discover Shropshire Hills - John Muir Award | £3,000 |
| Friends of Pontesford Hill | Pontesford Hill Appeal | £500 |
| West Midlands Butterfly Conservation | Species Champion - sponsoring a species in the new book covering butterflies of West Mids | £150 |
| Leigh Hall Estate | Bromlow Callow Gorse Control | £1,500 |
| Stiperstones & Corndon LPS | Built Heritage L3 Training | £1,000 |
| Stiperstones & Corndon LPS | Ground Nesting Birds Recovery Project | £3,500 |
| Upper Onny Wildlife Group | Upper Onny Invasive Plant Project | £2,200 |
| S Wheeler & Son | Bales Education Facilities | £1,000 |
| Severn Rivers Trust | Teme Riverflies Training | £2,500 |

For further information see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/conservation-fund/>.

- **River Clun Recovery Project and Clun Catchment work**

Practical habitat improvement work on the two recovery sites for Freshwater Pearl Mussel has begun, following the production of Management Plans, landowner liaison and obtaining necessary statutory consents. Advisory visits to 35 farms or holdings, where issues affecting the conservation status of the River Clun SAC have been identified. These include sites adjacent to the SAC up to the top of the catchment near Anchor, plus tributaries such as Folly Brook and the Unk.

Working towards implementation of the Management Plans for the Recovery Sites; involving liaison with 7 landowners adjacent to Recovery Site 1 (Bush Farm), and 2 landowners adjacent to Recovery Site 2 (Lawn Farm). Engaged with landowners to secure 11 practical projects, with farmers signed up to work with the Project, with several more under development. Completion of detailed riparian surveys, Felling Licence applications and Ordinary Watercourse Consents. Engagement of contractors (local) for tree management, fencing, tree planting and track restoration work.

Clun Catchment Officer (Alison Jones) to be increased to 4 days/week following reorganisation of project budget.

Leading on work on **highways runoff** in the lower Clun Catchment – working with Environment Agency and Shropshire Highways Team to map sediment pathways to the river.

See <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/projects/rivers/> for further information.

Working with Woodland Trust, Land Life & Livelihoods and Severn Rivers Trust on a project to encourage **woodland creation** in upper Clun and Teme catchment.

Natural England are funding an additional **Recovery Site Monitoring project** with input from Plymouth University and West Country Rivers Trust.

The **Clun Catchment Partnership** will meet on 27 January.

- **Shuttles**

After careful analysis of passenger data, a decision has reluctantly been made not to repeat the Castle Connect service in 2016. The Long Mynd & Stiperstones service will continue, with some slight alterations to route and timetabling. Unfortunately the longstanding £5,000 Natural England contribution (from the Stiperstones NNR) has been lost.

For further information see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/enjoying-the-shropshire-hills/shuttles/>.

- **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Network** Relaunch with stronger focus on sustainable tourism, and two year membership, with bronze, silver and gold certificates to reflect **the businesses' commitment over 6 years. All the businesses in the old scheme have** been invited to join the new network. The 2016 series of networking events are being planned. For more information see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/enjoying-the-shropshire-hills/buy-local-be-sustainable/>.

- **Promotion** activity.

Winter **E-Newsletter** sent in December via new .govdelivery system

<http://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSHROPSHIRE/bulletins/128f986>.

Interview on Big Centre TV regional programme.

2016 events being gathered for website.

- **Advice and support** to a range of activities and projects, including Memories of the Landscape (joint work with CPRE, Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust, Clun Forest History Group and Newcastle School), HeARTland project (joint work with National Trust, Arts Alive & Ben Osborne), Upper Gravenor (developing the farm for educational and community benefit), Sophie Holt (local food project), Tru Wood (social forestry), Friends of Pontesford Hill, and Clee Hill signage proposals.
- **Wrekin Forest Partnership** meeting to be held 21 January. New Wrekin Forest Plan is being used as evidence to support the new Telford & Wrekin Local Plan. <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/area-initiatives/wrekin-forest/>
- **Clee Hill Partnership** meeting held 23 November.
- Western Power **undergrounding** programme – works are in preparation for sites at Clee Hill and Rhos Fiddle.

Project development

- **Tourism Co-operation project** outline application submitted for EAFRD Growth Programme (EU) funding. £50k grant sought against £19k match for marketing, update of tourism strategy and Charter, and training for tourism/information providers. Partnership project overseen by the Destination Partnership, working with Shropshire Hills Tourism, Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, town tourism groups and others.
- Final input into draft HLF application by the Foundation for Common land for **'Our Common Cause' – Upland Commons project**, with activity in the Shropshire Hills AONB and other upland areas. First meeting 20 January of Shropshire Hills Area Group for project.
- Involvement in 'Stepping Stones' feasibility work for a landscape-scale conservation project focused on the Long Mynd and Stiperstones area.

- Further discussions with Woodland Trust, Small Woods Association and Woods for Wellbeing about the proposed **Social Forestry project**.

Develop policy and strategy for the area through the AONB Management Plan, and influence the policies and strategies of others.

- Text version of approved **AONB Management Plan 2014-19** available on website. Work in progress on a basic designed pdf with figures and some images.
- **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan** The AONB Partnership now has the leading and coordinating role for the **Shropshire Hills & Ludlow Destination Partnership**, following the withdrawal of Shropshire Council staffing support for DDPs. See Co-operation project development above. <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/area-initiatives/shropshire-hills-and-ludlow-destination-development-partnership/>.

Working closely with partners in support of **Irresistible Offa**, which is the development of the Walking with Offa cross-border collaboration project. Current focus of work has centred on researching and discussing potential EU funding (such as InterReg) to support new project initiatives identified in the Irresistible Offa Business Plan.

Working closely with **Shropshire Hills Tourism** on the production of a new visitor map of the Shropshire Hills to replace the now out of print Discovery Map.

- **Planning**. Submissions on ten planning applications in 2015-16 to date –
 - [Wheathill Caravan Site, Wheathill – 13.11.15](#)
 - [Spring Cottage extension, Leighton – 12.10.15](#)
 - [Anaerobic Digester, Bitterley – 11.9.15](#)
 - [Proposed Development, Land North & East of Cwms Lane, Church Stretton – 18.8.15](#)
 - [Solar Farm, Henley, Acton Scott – Appeal – 23.7.15](#)
 - [Church Stretton Housing, Land east of Shrewsbury Road – 2.6.15](#)
 - [Springbank Employment Site, Church Stretton – 2.6.15](#)
 - [Whitton Solar Farm, Caynham – 23.4.15](#)
 - [Proposed dwelling NW of the Fishpools, Pontesford Hill – 23.4.15](#)
 - [Newcastle Hall Barns, Newcastle, Craven Arms – 14.4.15](#)

The Henley (Acton Scott) solar farm was granted permission on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate in January.

- Input to other **non-planning casework and strategies**, including EA River Basin Management Plans, response to EU Habitats and Birds Directives consultation, Ordinary Watercourse Consent consultations, Natural England Environmental Impact Assessment screening decision consultations.

Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.

- Biennial review of **Partnership membership** completed, with 10 new members appointed, and new Chair and Vice Chairs. It is intended to hold a briefing/induction session for new members early in 2016.
- Consolidation of **new office** base at Drovers House. Establishing running arrangements, budgets, etc. Installation of broadband remains the highest priority and is in hand but awaiting completion. Current IT arrangements are makeshift and staff are continuing to have to use home working to overcome this.

- Input to **National Association for AONBs**, through annual **Chairmen's** conference in November. <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>. Lead Officers meeting in Birmingham 1-2 Feb. The Shropshire Hills AONB will be one of the host areas for the 2016 Conference.
- Support and input to establishing the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund as a **Charitable Incorporated Organisation**. The applications for a bank account and to the Charity Commission have been drafted.

Support the involvement of the community in the management of the AONB (also a cross-cutting theme in some items above).

- Support and advice for a wide range of **community projects**.
- 2015 **volunteer-led guided walks programme** completed. A review concluded that the walks are mostly popular and successful, but the total staff time of around 17 days for 98 attendees could not be justified. We intend to look at how staff time can be better used for awareness-raising, and walks delivered through other providers.
- **John Muir Award** programme with schools (education/activity programme themed on wild places), currently working with Bucknell and Rushbury primary schools, plans to work with **St George's Shrewsbury if funding secured**. Training day for leaders on John Muir Award mid-November. Organising Clun Forest field study trip for Ludlow College A level Geography students in March
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** currently has 134 members (counting joint couple/family memberships as two). Andrew Wood is helping as a volunteer with member recruitment.
- **Volunteers**. David Tomkins is currently helping as a volunteer on the River Clun Recovery Project in a technical research role. Volunteers tree planting is planned in the Clun Catchment for this winter.

3. Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme 2016-17

The team's summery work programme for the coming Financial Year 2016-17 is given in Appendix 1.

4. RECOMMENDATION:

The Management Board is recommended to note and comment on recent and planned activity.

This paper has been prepared by Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager. For further details contact 01588 674088 phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk.

Appendix 1

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme 2016 -17 Summary