

Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund 2015-16

Pontesford Hill Appeal - Project Report

Applicant: Friends of Pontesford Hill

Project Reference: CF/1516/22

This is the project report accompanying the Pontesford Hill Appeal final claim to the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund for 2015/16.

The Conservation Fund has been set up for projects which deliver either or both of the priorities:

- i. Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape, wildlife or heritage of the Shropshire Hills AONB.**
- ii. Educational and awareness-raising activities relating to the AONB and its conservation, especially involving young people.**

The purpose of the Pontesford Hill appeal was to raise funds to allow Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) to purchase some 65 acres of Pontesford Hill, thus conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape, wildlife and heritage of this part of the Shropshire Hills AONB.

Project Outcome

On 20th April 2015 final completion of the purchase by SWT took place. The purchase price paid was £207,500. The appeal target had been fixed in November 2014 at £265,000 to cover the purchase price, professional fees and leaving a surplus as an endowment for future maintenance. As at 1st August 2015 the appeal had raised slightly more than £268,000 before gift aid amounting to around £45k is taken into account. The surplus available for maintenance is therefore now around £100,000. This appeal is widely regarded as the most successful one that SWT have ever had.

The Friends of Pontesford Hill (FoPH) was set up to focus efforts to raise funds for the appeal and to help SWT manage the hill and organise community and educational activities once the purchase was complete. Although private donations came from far and wide, there was huge local support for the appeal because Pontesford Hill has played such an important role in people's lives for generations. There had been much anxiety when the hill was sold to a private buyer in 2010. It was widely recognised that ownership of the hill by SWT would effectively end the threat of inappropriate development and ensure public access in perpetuity.

The list of events held to raise money is too long to mention in full here but some of the highlights include:

- a local schools sponsored walk that raised over £11k,
- a family fun run,
- a dinner at which BBC presenter Nick Owen gave the after dinner speech
- two illustrated talks on treks in the Himalayas
- an evening with the author Mary Webb

Since the completion of the purchase, activities have focused on two types of survey:

- a series of 'human surveys' to find out people's views on the future management strategy
- a series of ecological surveys to find out what is there before any improvements are carried out.

Much of the hill is currently covered with conifer trees planted in the 1950s by the Forestry Commission. FoPH are working with SWT to produce a management plan for the hill that will see the gradual removal of conifers replacing them with more appropriate broad leaved trees and with woodland glades being opened up to encourage wildlife. Early results from the human surveys show that whilst people value the hill as it is now, there is very strong support for this vision provided the changes are handled sensitively and are not rushed. FoPH support the SWT aim of managing the whole of Earl's Hill and Pontesford Hill as one reserve although clearly each side of the hill will have rather different management requirements for some time to come.

We hope and expect to see the following benefits as the years go by:

- A steadily improving bio-diversity as new plant and animal species move in.
- Improved public access (a) safeguarding and confirming as public rights of way the previous permissive access (b) improving physical access by sensitively enlarging the car park and tackling some muddy paths whilst ensuring the natural feel is maintained.
- Protection of the local archaeology i.e. the Iron Age forts and earthworks currently threatened by encroaching scrub and tree roots.
- Opening up views across the countryside not seen in a generation.

David Morgan (Vice Chairman Friends of Pontesford Hill) - 20/8/2015



Aerial shot of Pontesford and Earl's Hill



Pontesford Hill car park indicating the need for sensitive improvements here



The view from Lower Camp Pontesford Hill showing how tree growth in the last 50 years now obscures once cherished views to the village below.