

Item 7. AONB Team 2016-17 Work Programme and budgets update

1. Summary

This paper presents an update of recent progress and activity, and a summary of 2016-17 budgets.

2. Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme 2016-17, progress from April

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

In 2016/17 the LPS is in its fourth year. The focus of work this year has been about consolidating project development and delivery to date, and beginning to look towards **legacy planning** for the Scheme, for when it ends in March 2018.

This year will see completion of a number of our **built heritage capital works projects** (including the 1784 Nag's Head Engine House) as well as significant improvements to physical access and interpretation at key sites around the Scheme area.

In relation to **natural heritage**, this year we have consolidated our work with farmers and landowners through the 'Ground nesting bird recovery' project and 'Wildflower meadows, pastures and verges' as well as our Small Grants Programme. Curlew monitoring of 20 nests has again unfortunately established that no pairs successfully reared young again this year.

Our new **volunteer groups**, formed around community archaeology, practical habitat management and wildlife survey and monitoring continue to be active and we are looking at how we can resource these groups into the future, beyond the life of the Scheme. The Scheme has delivered a wide range of **public events** this year including very well received Hay Meadow Festival at The Bog in July and Curlew Country arts activities running May-July.

Our **training** project is now running well with the first of our three planned 12-month traineeships in Work-based Environmental Conservation due to complete in February 2017 and in addition we have run a number of short Skills in the Hills traditional skills courses and an accredited 6-day course in conservation of built heritage. Our **Young Rangers** Programme is now up and running with monthly sessions for up to 15 young people, based around practical conservation tasks and engendering appreciation of our natural heritage and special landscape. The LPS Board had a tour of work and sites in September.

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

3 staff from the core AONB team are all involved in fee-earning work for the Landscape Partnership Scheme:

Steph (Promotions Officer) – one day/week on LPS publicity and promotion work

Nigel (Sustainable Tourism Officer) – interpretation including Earl's Hill & Poles Coppice, Mines Project - Snailbeach Loco Shed, Cothercott Barytes Mill and Tankerville Mine

Cath (Community & Landscape Officer) – starting delivery work on Buzz in the Borders

- **Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund**

The 11 projects for 2016-17 listed below are heading for completion by the end of March, and project ideas for 2017-18 are being gathered. The Jean Jackson Trust have confirmed an annual contribution of £15,000 for the next three years, which is greatly appreciated.

Name of Organisation	Name of project	Amount of grant
Small Woods Association	Social Forestry	£3,000
Shropshire Wildlife Trust	More John Muir Award and new Wildlife Watch	£3,000
Shropshire Wildlife Trust	Conservation work on three Local Wildlife Sites	£3,000
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	Foundation for Common Land – ‘Our Common Cause’ Upland Commons Project	£1,800
Upper Onny Wildlife Group	Upper Onny Invasive Plant Project	£2,000
Butterfly Conservation	Stiperstones Butterfly Trail	£900
South Shropshire Youth Forum	Clee Hill and Church Stretton Young Rangers	£2,500
CJ & MJ Davies	Gorse control on Lawley East Local Wildlife Site	£750
Jean Atkin, Poet in Education & Community	In woods we forget things, at the wood edge we tell stories	£1,800
Lucy Grove	Stanway Dormouse Project	£1,500
Land, Life & Livelihoods	Celebration and consultation in the Upper Clun	£2,750

The Conservation Fund Panel is visiting a number of project sites on 28th November. Discussions are in progress about transfer of the grant admin process to the new AONB Trust charity.

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

- **River Clun Recovery Project**

Practical habitat improvement work on the two recovery sites for Freshwater Pearl Mussel (FWPM) continues, requiring ongoing liaison with the two landowners adjacent to Recovery Site 2 (Lawn Farm) and the seven landowners adjacent to Recovery Site 1 (Bush Farm).

Significant progress has been made at Lawn Farm, including tree planting to protect new woody revetment, improvements to the watercourse crossing point and creation of microhabitat for FWPM in-channel, by the introduction of large boulders.

Further advisory visits have been made to farms and holdings in the wider catchment, to advise on issues affecting the conservation status of the River Clun SAC. This has resulted in further practical projects, with 14 farmers and landowners now signed up to work with the Project, with 5 still in progress. Several more proposals are under development.

Practical work completed on sites through the catchment include:

- Tree planting 5 sites with volunteers – Severn Trees Trust, the Craven Arms Shropshire Wild team plus the landowners themselves.

- Provision of 5 livestock watering systems to 4 holdings where fencing has been erected to protect the riparian habitat. These consist of solar pump kits and water troughs.
- Installation of concrete sleepers to rove approach to watercourse crossing
- 5 new culverts installed and 160m of track restored
- Tree coppicing along 1,600m of River Clun.

Continue to obtain statutory consents and new Environmental Permits.

Engaged contractors (local) for track restoration and in-channel work.

The project is on track in terms of outputs and spend. See

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

• **Additional Clun Catchment work**

- Completed Highway Drainage Surveys for the Lower Clun (WREN funded) and for the River Kemp (Environment Agency earned income). This work has been circulated to project partners and will inform future targeting and capital works in the Catchment.
- We continue to work closely with partner organisations the Clun Catchment (mostly Natural England, Environment Agency). The River Clun Recovery project is working in tandem with EA's 'Unmuddying the Waters' project in the Clun Catchment.
- We continue to play an important role on the Clun Field Officers and Clun FWPM Steering Groups which work to share best practice and to influence local and national strategies and policies.
- Facilitated Clun Catchment Partnership workshops to progress EA's "Mechanisms and Measures" for the River Clun. Following a recent High Court Judicial Review, the Clun has been designated one of four pilot areas to represent 44 other European Protected river and wetland sites in England and Wales. For background see: <http://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/WWF-briefing-Judicial-Review-19-20-Nov-2015.pdf>
- Secured additional EA earned income to undertake highway surveys and mapping in the Redlake Catchment and a management fee to oversee EA funded works at Clungunford and Coxall – Awaiting Partnership Agreement.
- Secured earned income from NE to undertake surveys of fords and mapping in the Clun Catchment - Awaiting Partnership Agreement.
- Prepared a farm runoff management plan to undertake various improvement works on farm near the Clun SAC.
- Worked up an outline proposal for an upper Teme cross-border project to develop a network of habitat links between areas of high biodiversity either side of the River Teme. Such a project will help deliver biodiversity gains in line with the requirements of the Natural Environment White Paper (Lawton principles). Still early days, but such a project is likely to be in partnership with Radnorshire Wildlife Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Severn Rivers Trust, The Woodland Trust and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and potentially hosted under SRT 'Springs of Rivers' project. Using the above proposal, a funding brief has been submitted to NE by SRT.
- Facilitated MOREwoods woodland creation projects on behalf of the Woodland Trust. Two are progressing, one of which located near Hopesay will be completed this autumn/winter.

- **Shuttles**

The Long Mynd & Stiperstones service ran from May bank holiday to end of September. 4,273 passengers (4,385 in 2015), income from fares £2,792. A donations box was trialed on the last few weeks of the season and £262 was raised, along with some useful feedback comments.

Planning for next year's service is under way, looking at budgets and promotion, chasing partner contributions, discussion with stakeholders, etc. Discussions with National Trust and Church Stretton reps about possible use of Shuttles to alleviate peak time traffic pressures at Cardingmill Valley.

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

- **Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Network** Membership events – hosting tour of Veolia Battlefield Energy Reclamation and Waste Management Site. Meetings with members, chasing membership (currently stands at 41 members). Discussions about developing the network for business support/sponsorship. Transferring content from old website and ownership of Shrophills-buylocal URL, updating content on website. For more information see <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/enjoying-the-shropshire-hills/buy-local-be-sustainable/>.
- **Promotion** activity. Summer **E-Newsletter** distributed in June <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKSHROPSHIRE/bulletins/14e8aca>.
5 press releases issued and 13 news items on website, along with regular output on Facebook and Twitter. Support for NAAONB 'Outstanding Week' Sept. 2015-16 Annual Review prepared for distribution very shortly.
- **Sustainable tourism.** Worked closely with Shropshire Hills Tourism on the production of new visitor map/guide 'Great Days in the Shropshire Hills', and discussions under way for 2017. Leaflet swap event held. Clun Valley walks book being reprinted in partnership with Clun Walks group. Support for Shropshire Hills Tourism, attendance at Board meetings, discussion re membership development, marketing & promoting destination.
- **Support and advice** for a wide range of activities and projects, including:
 - restoration of Myndtown Church
 - developing links for increased environmental education at Brynmawr
 - South Shropshire Youth Forum and Young Rangers
 - Clun Log Company (SBS & Friends member)
 - Prince's Farm Resilience Programme
 - Land Life & Livelihoods 10th anniversary festival in November
 - signage at Clee Hill Common
 - Severn Rivers Trust Springs of Rivers project and proposed education centre at Ludlow
 - Church Stretton Business Forum marketing group
 - Church Stretton walking festival
- **Western Power undergrounding programme** – Input to West Midlands Area Protected Landscapes Undergrounding Forum. Works completed at Rhos Fiddle and Norbury and 950 metres of overhead electricity lines on Clee Hill Common are being removed and placed underground in October. This work also involves the removal of 21 wooden poles as well as a switchgear upgrade, which will improve the speed of power restoration to 638 homes in the

region. This is part of an ongoing £2.3 million initiative by Western Power Distribution to enhance protected landscapes. The work is being funded through a regulatory backed initiative to enhance protected landscapes by removing electrical infrastructure like overhead lines. We have worked closely with local communities over the last few years to identify suitable sites for consideration. This has been really helpful to pinpoint high priority schemes and enable the limited funds to be spent as effectively as possible. Along with other Protected Landscapes officers, attended an electricity familiarization day at WPD's training centre in Tipton.

- **Wrekin Forest Partnership** meetings held 14th April and 12 May and Wrekin Forest Landscape Partnership Scheme bid to HLF submitted by Shropshire Wildlife Trust. <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/area-initiatives/wrekin-forest/>

Project development

- **Tourism Co-operation project** - outline application for EAFRD Growth Programme (EU) funding approved and handed over to Shropshire Council for delivery, with involvement of the Destination Partnership.
- Ongoing input into HLF re-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. Second meeting planned for 7th November of Shropshire Hills Area Group for project to consider and discuss the resubmission of the application to HLF.
- Ongoing Involvement in '**Stepping Stones**' (landscape-scale conservation project focused on the Long Mynd and Stiperstones area. Meetings with new project officer, Andrew Hearle, and discussion of work together, including re Commons project.
- Further discussions with Woodland Trust, Small Woods Association and Woods for Wellbeing about the proposed **Social Forestry project**. Mike and Cath attended a four day Social Forestry course and gained OCN Level 3 award.
- Active partner in **HeARTland arts project** (joint work with National Trust, Arts Alive & Ben Osborne) - funding secured and recruitment of artists now under way.
- Early discussions about a potential '**Caring for Caradoc**' project - looking at specific fund-raising campaign linked to a 'visitor giving' pilot for the Church Stretton area, and doing remedial work on serious path erosion on the south ridge of Caer Caradoc and over time seeking to address wider recreation management issues.

Other fee-earning work

- Nigel delivered three training courses on running guided walks for the Meres and Mosses LPS.

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

- 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**, working closely with Shropshire Hills Tourism. <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/area-initiatives/shropshire-hills-and-ludlow-destination-development-partnership/>. Meetings with Destination Ludlow Partnership and a county Visitor Economy group linked to the Local Nature Partnership. Discussions re destination marketing with partners and workshop organised for review of marketing action plan.
- **Planning.** Submissions on two planning applications in 2016-17 to date – [Hurst Barn poultry, Clunton](#) – 6.9.16
Input to Hopton Castle poultry appeal.
- Input to other **non-planning casework and strategies**, including NAAONB consultations, Ordinary Watercourse Consent consultations, Natural England Environmental Impact Assessment screening decision consultations.
- Involvement in **strategic groups**: Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Partnership Board, Shropshire Biodiversity Partnership and Board of Shropshire Hills Tourism, Shropshire Hills Walking Forum. Attended regional workshop on Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan and a national 'Uplands Alliance' meeting at Defra in London.
- **Presentations** Led a visit on the Long Mynd and Stiperstones for David Gibbon and the international delegates from the International Farming Systems Association Conference, July. Presentation to Ludlow Local Joint Committee (LJC) at Bitterley.

Develop the AONB Partnership as an inclusive and effective organisation.

- **Conservation Board proposal and transition.** This has involved close contact with the two Councils leading to approval in October of the proposal by the Cabinets of both Councils. The Transition Board has been established and two meetings held. Detailed budget planning to 2020 and preparation of Business Case. A visioning workshop was held with Transition Board and team members. Stakeholder and public engagement has been launched, with responses now coming in from Parish Councils and organisations. Initial work has been done on an HLF Resilient Heritage bid related to the transition process, and a working group formed. Meetings held with Shropshire Pension Fund, Jean Jackson Charitable Trust, liaison with Natural England, NAAONB and other AONBs, including visits to Cotswolds and Mourne.
- AONB Partnership meetings held 18 April, 14th June (with Tour at Norbury) and 8th September.
- We were one of the host areas for the **National Association for AONBs Annual Conference**. <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/>. Hosted two field visits, to the Long Mynd and the Clun Valley. Most team members completed Outdoor First Aid training in preparation for this. Also led a conference workshop on our governance structure transition process. 3 Case studies and Performance Indicator returns submitted to NAAONB for Defra. Attendance at national State Aid meeting.
- Ongoing input through AONB Manager as an *ex officio* trustee to establishing the **Shropshire Hills AONB Trust** as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. The Charity Commission registration was completed in July, and new trustees are now being recruited.
- Hosted a visit for **study of European Protected Areas** by reps from the German Nature Park Foundation, as the only UK area visited.

- Recruitment undertaken for **Administrator post**, with reduction from 37 to 25 hours. Alison Kay is due to start on 7th November.

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**.
- **John Muir Award** programme with schools (education/activity programme themed on wild places). In partnership with SWT, currently working with Shrewsbury St George's and Kinlet primary schools on Stiperstones and Catherton Common, and plans to work with Farlow School next year if funding secured. Attended Norbury Schools JMA ceremony to celebrate some of the children achieving their 'Conservation Award', this is the highest JMA level, and Norbury is the first school to achieve this in Shropshire. Working closely with JMA England Manager to develop JMA resources for AONBs and they are holding up our work as an excellent example of award delivery in a protected landscape and partnership working. Delivered part of JMA England's recent training for teachers at Wilderhope Manor. In partnership with SWT, approached and secured 10 schools in the AONB to participate in Wildlife Watch, a good follow-on from the JMA for teachers to continue in school. Also met with Antonia Bury re developing educational access at Millichope Park.
- **Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB** currently has 111 members (counting joint couple/family memberships as two). This year's annual Friends event visited catchment work at Bryn Farm with Alison Jones and Brineddin Wood to hear about the work of the Redlake Valley CBS and Bucknell Schools John Muir Award.
- **Volunteers**. Heather Scott is working on a voluntary placement three days a week partly on the River Clun Recovery Project and partly on the Landscape Partnership Scheme. She is a second year student at Harper Adams University. Further volunteer tree planting is planned in the Clun Catchment for this winter.
- Total of 14 AONB-led **events** led attended by 412 people (excluding LPS).

3. Notes on 2015-18 AONB Partnership budgets

Appendix 1 gives revised budgets for the current Financial Year 2016-17 and for 2017-18.

- i. Staff costs show the saving from reducing the Admin post to 25 hours and the short period of vacancy. Pension lump sum costs are significantly higher than last year.
- ii. Office rent includes half year costs for 2015-16 which were not charged within that Financial Year.
- iii. The Rivers project is running very much to expected budgets.
- iv. The Sustainable Business Network is proving hard work for a modest return (of both involvement and income). Proposals are being developed to turn this into a different scheme/ schemes related to visitor giving and to business sponsorship.
- v. Income is expected to be achieved much as budgeted by the year end.

4. RECOMMENDATION:

The Transition Board is recommended to comment on progress with work programme delivery and on the budgets.

This paper has been prepared by Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager. For further details contact 01743 254741/ phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk.

Appendix 1 2016-17 AONB Partnership budgets