

Item 3. AONB Team Work Programme update

1. Summary

This paper presents an update on 2017-18 work programme progress.

2. Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Team Work Programme – updates on recent work

TAKING ACTION - on the ground and in our communities - to conserve and enhance natural beauty and to promote enjoyment and understanding.

Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme

Focus on completing project delivery during the last year of the Scheme up to March 2018.

Conservation and enhancement of heritage:

- Completion of the Pontesford 1784 Engine House repair which was finally finished in May,
- ongoing management at hillfort and castle sites,
- significant habitat management contracts at the 6 'Rescuing Rocks & Overgrown Relics' sites,
- small grants for capital work on private land,
- continuing work to manage meadows and curlew recovery.

Community participation:

- programme of practical conservation task days for volunteers starting again this autumn,
- Community Wildlife Groups surveyors have been active throughout the summer monitoring plant and bird species,
- community archaeology team has been busy validating new records from their fieldwork which will go into the Historic Environment Record,
- 12 Down to earth community projects so far have been completed in communities across the Scheme area covering a wide range of topics from Community Juicing to local history and reminiscence to an outdoor classroom and Forest Schools area.

Interpretation & Access

- major work to complete new interpretation across a number of sites including on the mining theme, and an 'Impressions of the Past' creative arts project based around hillfort heritage,
- contracts delivered including by SC Outdoor Partnerships to complete a suite of promoted routes linked to the 'Open Hills' project around Stapeley, Corndon and The Bog (ongoing).

Training and skills:

- three Environmental Conservation trainees this year are doing really well working with our placement partners and completing technical certificates such as Chainsaw, Pesticides and brushcutter training. They are all on track to receive their Level 2 Diplomas and to complete their 12 months of work experience in February 2018.
- continued to deliver a range of short courses in heritage skills including spoon carving, shrink-pot making and horse logging, and a 6-day accredited course in Care and maintenance of Pre-1919 Buildings.

Young people:

- two of our Young Rangers made an exciting trip representing UK protected areas at the Europarc Federation International Junior Ranger Camp in Switzerland in July.
- delivered 49 John Muir Awards this summer through our Buzz in the Borders project as well as archaeology fieldwork sessions with Welshpool High School.

Events:

- 58 events since April including the second Hay Meadow Festival at The Bog in June which attracted about 500 people, and our LPS Celebration day in October, attended by over 80.

Legacy and Evaluation:

- Active development of new project proposals to continue or develop successful activity, and support to independent groups to encourage continuation. Ongoing maintenance and management agreements and arrangements being developed for sites where necessary.
- Stakeholder interviews being carried out by Resources for Change for final evaluation report.

River Clun Recovery Project (WREN funded)

Practical habitat improvement work continues on the recovery sites for Freshwater Pearl Mussel. Focus now on Recovery Site 1 (Bush Farm) - agreements in place with 5 of the 6 landowners.

- Work has begun on coppicing diseased and vulnerable Alders & Elm, and pollarding or coppicing mature Willow.
- Much of the material will be used on site to create soft woody revetments to protect sections of riverbank which are actively eroding.

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. These have resulted in further practical projects, and a total of 25 farmers and landowners are now signed up to work with the Project. 15 projects have been completed and 10 are now in progress, and several more proposals are under development.

Practical work completed on sites throughout the catchment include:

- Installation of concrete sleepers to improve five gateways. Further measures to reduce soil erosion runoff at these sites include the installation of French drains to capture and divert runoff, creating rough grassy margins, plus tree and shrub planting to trap overland flows.
- Tree aftercare and maintenance on two sites with volunteers, including the Shropshire Wild Teams from Craven Arms, Shrewsbury & Bridgnorth, and members of the Pheasant Tail Fly Fishers club.
- Tree aftercare and maintenance on two large sites by contractors.
- Coppicing willow at the Discovery Centre, to be used as live willow stakes in the revetments.
- Tree coppicing and a new fenced buffer strip along 400m of River Clun. Tree planting is scheduled here for December.
- Revetment completed at one site so far.

Ongoing liaison and partnership working with staff from Environment Agency, Natural England and Woodland Trust.

Continuing to obtain statutory consents, exemptions and bespoke Environmental Permits.

Alison & Mike undertook Pearl Mussel Training with West Cumbria Rivers Trust and NE.

Continuing to facilitate Woodland Trust MOREWoods projects – currently looking at three Sites within or near the AONB – NB Woodland Trust contribute to Clun project as part of this.

Additional work being carried out for Environment Agency 'Unmuddying the Waters' project.

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

Other Clun/Teme catchment delivery work

Woodland Opportunity Mapping in the Upper Teme Catchment:

Small contract funded by Natural England, who are keen to see this evolve into a 'Woody Dingles' project delivering on the ground. Outline project proposal submitted to support internal bid by Natural England. The Woody Dingles project could evolve further into a Landscape Partnership

type Project to help deliver a more joined up landscape in the Upper Teme Catchment (Teme Eco Bridge), to link high biodiversity value sites in the Clun Forest to Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire Hills. A workshop was hosted by AONB team involved Radnorshire and Shropshire Wildlife Trusts, Natural England, Woodland Trust and Natural Resources Wales - there was broad support for such a project.

Sustainable Tourism delivery

Shuttles:

2017 service finished, claims completed and report written. c3,500 passengers carried over 44 days. Slightly down on last year but income very similar. £650 taken in voluntary donations. Funding confirmed for next year and tendering for new service currently being undertaken. Research done on low carbon alternatives.

Tourism Cooperation Project (EU funded) focused on on-line marketing: Supported the project work, attending steering group meetings, liaising with consultant, providing feedback, contacts and ideas. Scheduled for completion Dec 2017.

Conservation Fund (now the responsibility of the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust)

Cath is providing support and admin on a paid basis. All money allocated and projects well under way for 2017-18, with six of the 19 projects completed and final grant payments paid. Project ideas starting to come in for 2018-19. Grant Panel set for 22nd March 2018.

Schools & education

John Muir Award: Completed Award with Ludlow Home Education Group and Churchstoke School. This year working with Clunbury and Farlow Primary Schools - both well under way. Clunbury School Sharing Event 27th November. Farlow due to finish their award by March 2018.

Ran sessions at Norbury School After School Club.

Held Wildlife Watch training for teachers with SWT on Sept 21st and 28th.

Spoke at Wildlife Trust Outdoor Learning National Conference about our John Muir Award partnership working in the AONB.

Organised Buzz in the Borders adult winter events, including a tour of Bowbrook Allotments and four Gardening for Wildlife talks with Jenny Steel (14/11/17 – 12/12/17).

Project development

'Our Common Cause' Upland Commons project – HLF funding secured by Foundation for Common Land (with National Trust, Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and Dartmoor National Parks). Now awaiting outcome of procurement procedure for Area Facilitator role and start details.

Stepping Stones – Input to Project Steering group. Discussions about which HLF funding stream to go for, details of project focus and priorities, and working through National Trust internal procedures for new large projects. Paid work by Cath to coordinate farmer consultation, carry out farmer interviews and publish report, completed October.

Proposed Monuments Volunteering project – further discussion with Historic England and project enquiry submitted to HLF – now moving to full application.

Proposed Youth project – second development meeting held and project proposals being written up. Project will require several bids to be made.

Natural Flood Management pilot project in the Upper Clun Catchment - a two year funded project proposal has been submitted to Natural England to be funded through the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative and facilitated by AONB team.

Caering for Caradoc - scoping and project proposal prepared and discussed with the AONB Trust. Site visits made and enquiries concerning methodologies for restoration.

Contributed to National AONB Roadside Verges project bid. Submitted the Shropshire Hills proposals to Plantlife in support of a bid to Dream Lottery. This was unsuccessful, but hope to continue this activity via other means. Support for Myndtown Combined Parish verges project.

Supporting emerging Social Forestry initiative for Shropshire Hills – meeting with Shropshire NHS Trust end Nov – aspiration to make Shropshire Hills a focus for this activity.

Exploring a possible project to survey native Crayfish in the AONB. There is a potential link with similar projects supported by EA and NE in wider Shropshire and Wye/Lugg Catchment.

Support for University of Exeter bid to roll out 'Farms for AONBees' pollinator project – unsuccessful.

National grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative project – Expression of Interest approved but full application deferred until 2018.

INFLUENCING OTHERS - lead and champion the delivery of public benefits from the AONB, working strategically and collaboratively from policy to grassroots level.

AONB Management Plan

Scoping for Management Plan review started, and presentations made by partners on key issues at 14th November Partnership meeting.

Took part in national survey of planning pressures for housing – questionnaire and interview. Report just published by NAAONB and CPRE.

Discussions with Shropshire Council officers re future casework and planning policy. Meeting requested with SC Planning Portfolio Holder.

Site meeting and discussion at Shadwell Hall re poultry farming.

Local partnership working

Clun Catchment Partnership meeting 13th September with field visit to River Clun Recovery Site 2. Also represented on River Clun Steering Group, Clun Field Officers Group, Teme Catchment Partnership and run the Clun Catchment Partnership.

Represented on Board of new Marches Local Nature Partnership.

Attended meeting called by Little Wenlock PC to look at car parking issues at the Wrekin.

Input to other strategies & schemes

Through the Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership (DP), we are leading the review of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Sustainable Tourism Strategy. On-line survey of tourism businesses completed with 70 responses and analysed. Strategy sub-group of the DP has met twice, and a

consultative workshop was held on 31st October and well attended. Initial drafting of re-evaluation report for European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

Represented at quarterly Board meetings of Shropshire Hills Tourism, developed relationships with Discover Telford and Visit Hereford, and attended Buy From Conference concerning supporting small businesses in Shropshire.

Consultation response submitted on ideas for Defra's new Water Environment Improvement Grant (WEIG). This grant should become live in Jan 2018 and should be able to apply to the fund. Hoping to attend workshops to get some idea how this fund will operate.

Consultation responses made on Environmental Impact Assessments and Ordinary Watercourse Consents.

Communications & public awareness

2016-17 Annual Review published. Autumn newsletter issued and regular output on Facebook and Twitter. Twitter following increased by over 400 this year (now 3,242) and Facebook security improved. Supported adoption of Hootsuite platform to manage social media across several channels. An AONB Pinterest account was set up in support of Poles Coppice Impressions of the Past Project.

Initial plans discussed for Shropshire Hills AONB 60th anniversary in 2018. Main celebration event to be joint Partnership/Trust/ Friends tour on Tuesday 19th June.

Hay Meadow Festival at the Bog to be repeated in 2018 on Sat 7th July, led by AONB Partnership.

Proposals being investigated for modernising and improving functionality of website platform.

Working with Shropshire Hills Tourism on 'Great Days in the Shropshire Hills' leaflet 2018.

Local authorities and Partnerships

James and Phil met on 13th September with Peter Nutting, the new Leader of Shropshire Council. Also met with Tim Jenkins, new SC Leisure & Culture Manager.

Evidence base

Data gathering continues for next 'State of the AONB' report to inform Management Plan review.

Support for groups

Support for Land, Life & Livelihoods/ Upper Onny Wildlife Group Facilitation Fund application. Submitted on 14/11/17, awaiting outcome.

Heartland arts project – all activities completed and final celebration event held at Carding Mill Valley on 16th September.

Attended Redlake Valley Woodland Fair on 7th October. Excellent event with over 500 people attending.

Church Stretton Walking Festival - supported the festival, providing opportunities for promotion through the Shuttles budget.

Supported Bishop's Castle 2017 Walking Festival - Devised and guided the Clun Highlands Walk. Advised Clee Hill volunteers on the provision and location of a new toposcope and issues concerning access and anti-social behaviour

MANAGING OUR BUSINESS - develop a robust, effective and financially sustainable AONB organisation.

Transition process to Conservation Board

Informal discussions with Defra officer and Minister on 23rd November following formal resubmission on 3rd August.

AONB Partnership

Biennial membership review completed with several new members attending 14th Nov meeting. One to one meetings held with some of new members.

AONB Team and office

Unit 12 at Drovers House has been vacated, requiring an extensive sort of old files and equipment to reduce storage space required. Business Rates valuations are being appealed.

Work on proposed new Funding & Programmes Officer post, and on proposed reapplication for HLF Resilient Heritage funding.

AONB Trust

Trustees supporting recruitment push for Friends, and looking at other income sources. www.shropshirehillsaonbtrust.co.uk domain used to lead to Trust page on main AONB website.

National Association for AONBs

James and Phil attended the NAAONB Chairmen's Conference in London in November. Main discussion topic was the potential use of new AONB Management Plans to target future agri-environment type schemes, post Brexit.

Supported the NAAONB development of new Communications Strategy and participation in weekly Outstanding Hour on Twitter (#outstandinghour). Steph is attending the NAAONB Communications Officers meeting in December.

Submitted NAAONB Performance Indicator returns and Case Studies for 2016-17 (see <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/about-aonbs/aonb-work/>).

Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB

New banking arrangements in place via the AONB Trust, with Direct Debits and Gift Aid now possible. 22 new members have signed up since July.

Meeting with Andrew Wood re volunteering as Friends recruiter.

3. RECOMMENDATION:

The Transition Board is recommended to comment on the work programme updates.

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