

Item 3. AONB Team Work Programme update

1. Summary

This paper presents a brief update on 2017-18 work programme items since the last meeting.

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 (selected updates)

Short extensions have been agreed with HLF for some of the staff contracts – Jen Jones to end March (previously end Feb), Joe Penfold to end April, Prue Dakin and Joy Howells to mid May. For practical reasons, the office at Chirbury will be vacated at the end of March. Staff with extensions will work at home and/or hot-desk at Craven Arms.

HLF have also agreed to allow project spend on the siting of a ropeway trestle at the Bog (a steel lattice tower from an aerial ropeway in Lancashire, very similar to the one which used to run from the Bog to Malehurst). Planning permission for this has been obtained, and the project is being led by Andrew Wood (LPS Chair) mainly through the Shropshire Caving and Mining Club.

The team are busy completing various project outputs, including some interpretation and publications. Most are on target, except for those on which variance has been agreed with HLF.

Legacy arrangements for various activities are a priority, including support for independent groups (e.g. Marches Meadows Group) and fund-raising for continuation of the Curlew Country project, under new hosting with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust from April.

Sessions held on evaluation with the LPS Board in Dec and January and report being written.

The LPS will be completed and wound up by the next Transition Board meeting in May.

River Clun Recovery Project (WREN funded)

Contractors are under way at various sites but work on the ground has been affected by poor weather and ground conditions. There is 15 months left of the project overall.

Waiting on permits for boulder work and drinking bays at Recovery Site 1 Bush Farm.

Additional work is being carried out for Environment Agency on a borehole water supply project.

Discussions at Shelderton Farm to alleviate a highways drain run-off problem through a wetland.

Other Clun/Teme catchment delivery work

Habitat opportunity mapping is being carried out on the Upper Teme area for Natural England.

Responded to EA consultation on big increases to flood risk permitting fees – a national issue.

Discussions with Woodland Trust and landowners on several sites for 'Morewoods' tree planting.

Sustainable Tourism delivery

Shuttles – the service has been re-tendered and prices submitted are higher than previously.

Decisions are being made about duration of the service.

Support to completion of EU funded tourism co-operation project, developing on-line marketing.

'Our Common Cause' Upland Commons project

Joy Howells started work on 15th January 2.5 days/week as the national Project Manager, based in our office. The contract has just been secured for Cath to act as the Area Facilitator for the Shropshire Hills area, following submission of a detailed bid in a competitive tendering process.

The contract is for a 20 month period commencing probably late Feb 2018 for 10 days per month at £200 per day (inc VAT), plus travel costs (a total of around £35k ex VAT for the whole contract).

Education

John Muir Award work completed with Clunbury School and ongoing at Farlow.

Project development

Discussion ongoing re proposed Monument Volunteers project, including with Tarmac (Callow Hill). Feedback from HLF on project enquiry requires all sites which are to be worked on to be identified now, which is requiring further thought.

Involvement in a site visit meeting with National Trust specialists for Stepping Stones project.

Involvement in development workshop for potential social forestry project, with health sector.

Expression of Interest submitted for Woodland Trust 'Trees Outside Woodlands' project.

Discussions with EA and partners on possible LIFE fund bid for Clun catchment.

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

Work on Sustainability Appraisal Scoping and State of AONB report. See Agenda item 6.

AONB Trust, Conservation Fund and Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB

2017-18 Conservation Fund claims are coming in and project ideas for 2018-19. The Panel is set for 22nd March and applications are being received. Funding criteria have been refined.

Meeting held with volunteers on Friends recruitment. Membership is currently standing at 102.

Planning

A meeting was held with members of Shropshire CPRE regarding planning and ways to work more collaboratively.

Four members of the team attended a training session on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment with members of Shropshire Council's South Planning team.

Local partnership working

Wrekin Forest Partnership meeting held 10th January.

The Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership at its meeting of 18th January approved the new Sustainable Tourism Strategy (deferred from before Christmas).

Clun Catchment Partnership meeting held 24th January.

Input to other strategies & schemes

The Sustainable Tourism Charter application is to be submitted by end of Feb and is at full draft stage. A contribution of £200 has been pledged from Shropshire Hills Tourism towards the cost of the re-evaluation.

Communications & public awareness

A 60th anniversary badge has been developed and a plan of activities.

Two planning meetings have been held for the Hay Meadow Festival. An advert has been sent out for stallholders.

The 'Great Days' leaflet for 2018 has been finalised (Shropshire Hills Tourism).

Local authorities and Partnerships

James is meeting with George Candler on 15th Feb, principally to discuss funding for 2018-19.

Evidence base

Data analysis for 'State of the AONB' report.

Support for groups

The application to Natural England's Stewardship Facilitation Fund by Land Life & Livelihoods and the Upper Clun Community Wildlife group was successful.

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

Transition process to Conservation Board

One meeting of a Transition Board sub-group was held on 8th January (agenda item 5). Phil & James spoke to Gill Hamer about Shropshire Council hosting arrangements for the Marches LEP team.

Resilient Heritage

A second Resilient Heritage application was submitted to HLF on 15th January. The application was significantly scaled back from the one submitted a year ago, but most elements have remained in it. With a total cash budget of £48,634, the grant requested is £38,100, with £10,535 of match funding to be found from the AONB budget. £26,784 of the cost is towards the proposed 1.5 days/week Funding & Programmes Officer post. Consultancy is now £12,000, made up of one contract of £5,400 for 9 days work on support for business planning, communications planning and evaluation, and one of £6,600 for 12 days work on support to develop particular income streams.

AONB Team and office

As expected, rates for the previously unregistered unit have now been charged, including retrospectively.

National Association for AONBs

Steph attended the Communications Officers meeting in December. Phil will be attending the Lead Officers meeting in Birmingham on 14-15th Feb.

3. RECOMMENDATION:

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

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