

## SHROPSHIRE'S GREAT OUTDOORS STRATEGY

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### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28 sets out the strategic direction for the management and development of publicly accessible greenspace, rights of way, and other access in the unitary authority area of Shropshire, aiming to inspire action to improve health, prosperity and happiness by cherishing Shropshire's great outdoors. The strategy fulfils the statutory requirement of a 10 year rights of way improvement plan, but broadens the remit to deliver across multiple policy areas and to integrate activity across local authority services and partner organisations.
- 1.2 This strategy has been developed in partnership with a range of key organisations and users and informed by data analysis and research. It was made available for three months for public consultation from May 2018.
- 1.3 The aim of the strategy is:



**By the end of 2028, people will be happier, healthier and more prosperous as a result of being better connected to Shropshire's great outdoors through safe and cherished publicly accessible outdoor assets.**

- 1.4 We will aim to increase:
- Economic return by 25% (to £125m)
  - The amount of accessible natural greenspace from 1.66ha/ 1,000 population to 2.0ha.
  - Visitor facilities at four sites across the county
  - Visits to the natural environment from 57% to 65% of the population
  - Users of the Shropshire's great outdoor website from 135,000 to 200,000
  - Best Value Performance Indicator for the rights of way network to or above 70% ➤ The ORVal welfare value of sites by 10% (from £43,882,000)

- 1.5 All references for these targets are within Appendix 1 of the strategy.
- 1.6 Appendix 5 of the strategy details the revised Shropshire Council policies for rights of way, parks and heritage sites.

## 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet support the publication of the Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-2028 and the revised Shropshire Council policies in Appendix 5 of the strategy.

## REPORT

### 3.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 The public sector has seen significant change since the last Countryside Access Strategy (Rights of Way Improvement Plan) was produced in 2008; in particular, the current economic climate and associated budget pressures, economic growth aspirations aiming to significantly increase the population and business base of Shropshire, and the growing need for outdoor recreation for health and wellbeing. This is having an impact on the voluntary sector and there is now even greater need to have a clear, evidence-based, prioritised plan to target limited resources whilst giving the greatest public benefit. A new approach is needed, delivering across multiple policy areas and integrating activity across local authority services and partner organisations.
- 3.2 Feedback from Natural England confirms that the strategy meets the statutory requirements of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP), as laid out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and that it should be considered as a national exemplar by the professional body:

*"The overall structure and content feels contemporary and realistic. A sense of purpose comes over strongly which I think is important when this strategy is read and used in partnership/funding contexts – the language is more business and political than the usual ROWIP. At the same time it manages to be more public/personal feel with the quotes and focus on why Shropshire is special.*

*Overall I think it's great and very much represents what such strategies/plans should be covering and how they should look/feel in the current economic and social climate. I'd like to use it as an example of a future-facing ROWIP type plan and perhaps IPROW/ADEPT would be (should be"! ) interested in highlighting it?"*

**Andrew Mackintosh, Senior Specialist: Public Access and Rights of Way  
Valuing the Environment: Strategy Implementation Team Natural England**

- 3.3 There are considerable statutory requirements associated with rights of way and publicly owned greenspace, which are discussed within the document. Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28 will raise the profile of the exceptional outdoor assets that we have in Shropshire, identify gaps, clarify the opportunities to improve

health, wellbeing and community cohesion, the local economy and the environment, and bring together partner organisations with similar goals, encouraging more coordinated, cost-effective approaches. It will not attempt to duplicate other plans and strategies but will link to them where appropriate.

3.4 The Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) initial screening and assessment follow up is shown in appendix 1.

3.5 The consultation ran for 3 months from the 3th May 2018 to the 31st July. The strategy was generated as a result of engagement with key stakeholders and the public consultation was designed to gather views relating to the Strategy and to inform next steps for implementation.

3.6 The information presented as part of the consultation to ensure respondents could make informed comments included:

- Appendix A - Shropshire Great Outdoors Strategy- Final draft.pdf
- Appendix 1- Examining the Evidence V3 - final draft.pdf
- Appendix 2- Network Assessment 2017.pdf
- Appendix 3- Accessible Natural Green Space Mapping.pdf
- Appendix 4- Strategic fit.pdf
- Appendix 5- Shropshire Council Outdoor Partnership Policies draft.pdf
- Appendix 6- Shropshire's Great Outdoors statutory responsibilities and discretionary powers.pdf
- Appendix 7- SGO Strategy Action Plan.pdf
- Shropshire's Great Outdoors ESIIA.pdf (Equalities and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment)
- PDF copy of the survey

3.7 Stakeholders and members of the public were given a choice of ways in which to comment on the strategy, options included:

- complete an online survey
- complete a paper version of the survey
- comment by email
- leave comments over the telephone

3.8 A further series of meetings and workshops were held to gather feedback on the strategy from key partners.

3.9 Due to the co-production of the strategy with key partners, this robust consultation process and methodology only generated 54 responses to the consultation survey and 4 written organisational responses. Responses were received from a range of age groups, locations and people with different characteristics so they appear to be relatively representative of the wider population. The responses received suggest an overall agreement with the contents of the strategy, its targets and priorities. Despite this overall support all the comments were considered and incorporated into the final strategy, where appropriate.

- 3.10 The findings from the public consultation, alongside those from stakeholders, indicated support from the wider community for the strategy and therefore an endorsement of the view taken in the initial ESIIA.
- 3.11 This is that the strategy sets out to have a positive impact across the protected characteristic groupings, particularly the groupings for age, with regard to children, and disability, with regard to all ages and with regard to seen and unseen disabilities. This will itself then include older people, given the ageing demographic profile of the county. A positive impact is also anticipated for groupings including people with caring responsibilities, as well as those at risk of social exclusion. Efforts were made during consultation on the draft strategy to seek views from communities as well as from stakeholders. Impact had not for example been able to be assessed ahead of consultation with regard to race, for people whose first language is not English, including tourists as well as residents. However, some data has now been obtained.
- 3.12 The Council will also work in particular with the other groupings that were under represented in the survey responses i.e. the 15-19 year olds and the over 85s. This will also help the Council and partners to pick up on equality related matters identified as gaps in the strategy, which would assist positive outcomes for these age groups as well as for people in the disability groupings. The strategy prioritises work with children and young people and with older age groups, so communication and engagement with these groupings is of particular importance.
- 3.13 It is recognised that there will need to be ongoing efforts to engage with people in the protected characteristic groupings. Links may usefully also be made with specific target groups such as children and families, people with mental health problems, and people with physical disabilities, through projects and partnership initiatives already under way. Actions may then be more readily identified from evidence gathered to enhance the positive impact of the strategy for these groupings, leading to better outcomes overall for communities in Shropshire.
- 3.14 Actions set out in the draft strategy include:
- Planning of new developments to include larger, more accessible greenspace and walking and cycling routes
  - Launch and development of 'Healthy Outdoors for Schools', including introduction of the daily mile in primary schools
  - Promotion of fully gated routes
  - Better all-ability access
  - Events and talks
  - Increased volunteering opportunities
  - Development of buggy walks and activities for families
  - School visits to sites to experience the natural environment through walks and activities such as pond dipping
  - Daily mile routes on Shropshire Council sites
  - New promoted routes/ multi-user routes
  - Better promotion using a range of channels and communication mechanisms in recognition that not everyone is online and that some may require information in readily accessible formats or materials

## **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Funding for the service area will follow the usual budget process and the delivery of this strategy does not change this.
- 4.2 Improvements to outdoor assets highlighted in the priorities will mostly be funded outside core public sector funds. Increasingly, external funding will need to be found and this could include:
- Earned income from parks and sites, events and commercial activities
  - Project funding from external sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, Sport England, Arts Council and other charities and trusts
  - Countryside Stewardship or alternatives following the introduction of the new schemes
  - Business support or sponsorship
  - Funding associated with new housing and commercial developments, the provision of greenspace and developer contributions to canal towpaths and other access
  - Memberships, donations and legacies
- 4.3 External funding is becoming increasingly competitive and joint working between partners will be key although match funding will need to be considered.

## **5.0 Background**

- 5.1 This strategy follows on from the Countryside Access Strategy 2008-2018. It incorporates Shropshire Council's statutory responsibilities of producing a 10 year Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- 5.2 The priorities outlined in Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28 are in line with national thinking and will help deliver against a range of national, regional and local strategies.
- 5.3 In particular:
- The 25 Year Environment Plan, Defra - better connecting people, health and the outdoors, especially for young people and to benefit those with mental health issues; improving the delivery of biodiversity and greenspace gains through the planning process, and raising awareness of the economic benefits of the outdoors.
  - Everyone Active Every Day, Public Health England - encouraging regular physical activity.
  - The Cultural White Paper, DCMS - maximising the opportunities to transform communities through natural and cultural heritage.
  - The Industrial Strategy, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy - strengthening cultural assets and developing skills.

- Strategic Enterprise Plan, Marches LEP - promoting Shropshire as a business investment opportunity, building on individuals' quality of life, staff wellbeing and company reputation.
- Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy - developing the visitor economy, agricultural support following exit from the EU, developing skills, improving quality of life and ensuring attractive environments.
- Shropshire's Local Plan - better planning of meaningful greenspace and nonmotorised access, new destination country parks, protecting environmentally sensitive sites.
- Shropshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy - harnessing the power of the outdoors to increase physical activity, address mental health issues, and help people to stay independent for longer.
- Local Transport Plan for Shropshire - encouraging walking and cycling.
- Shropshire Council Corporate Plan - helping to deliver across the board: resilient communities, healthy people and prosperous economy.

## 6.0 Additional Information

### 6.1 The objectives of the strategy are as follows:

- **Happy** - encourage enjoyment of Shropshire's great outdoors by more people, of all ages and abilities.
- **Healthy** - benefit the health of residents and visitors through increased physical activity and improved mental wellbeing in the great outdoors.
- **Prosperous** - promote opportunities to improve the local economy by sympathetic commercial use and development of the outdoor assets.
- **Connected** - bring people together within their communities to appreciate the potential of their outdoor assets, to make decisions locally about these, and to participate actively in their maintenance and improvement.
- **Cherished** - conserve and enhance special places that are important for nature, heritage and people.
- **Safe** - ensure Shropshire's outdoor assets are safe and well maintained to meet statutory obligations and new opportunities now and in the future, within current financial restrictions.

### 6.2 Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28 will be achieved by partnership working across a wide range of organisations and individuals, which includes:

- Statutory authority - Shropshire Council
- Landowners - Shropshire Council, National Trust, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, English Heritage, Natural England, Canal and River Trust, National Rail, farmers and other landowners
- Users - British Driving Society, British Horse Society, Byways and Bridleways Trust, Cycling UK, outdoor activity and equipment providers, Ramblers Association, walking forums, Riding and Carriage Driving Forum, Green Lane Association Ltd. and other user groups
- Volunteers working on the outdoor assets
- Other interested parties - Historic England, English Heritage LEADER Local Action Group, Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, Marches Local Nature

Partnership, Open Spaces Society, Public Health, Rural Community Council, Rural Services Network, Severn River Trust, Shropshire Council, Shropshire Disability Network, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Sustainable Transport Shropshire, West Mercia Police, Town and Parish Councils, bordering Local authorities and Local Access Forums.

- 6.3 Delivery will be overseen by the Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board, acting as the Local Access Forum.
- 6.4 Shropshire's Great Outdoors Action Plan will be monitored and reviewed annually and there will be a major review of the strategy after five years. Overall evaluation of the strategy will be assessed by monitoring some overarching indicators:
- Joint strategic needs assessment health indicators
  - Monitor of engagement with the Natural Environment
  - ORVal welfare value tool
  - Assessment of the provision of accessible natural greenspace
  - Shropshire's 'Great Outdoors Annual Survey'
  - Best Value performance indicator for rights of way
  - Visit Britain data

## 7.0 Timescales

- 7.1 The strategy will be published in October 2018 and will run until 2028. It will be evaluated and reviewed after five years. A new 10-year plan will be published, following a full evaluation of Shropshire's Great Outdoors in 2027.

### **List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

Appendix A - Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28  
 Appendix 1- Examining the Evidence  
 Appendix 2- Network Assessment  
 Appendix 3- Accessible Natural Green Space Mapping  
 Appendix 4- Strategic Fit  
 Appendix 5- Shropshire Council Outdoor Partnerships Policies  
 Appendix 6- Shropshire's Great Outdoors Statutory Responsibilities  
 Appendix 7- Shropshire's Great Outdoors Action Plan

### **Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Cllr Lezley Picton

**Local Member** N/A

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - **Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28**  
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Appendix 6- Shropshire's Great Outdoors Statutory Responsibilities

Appendix 7- Shropshire's Great Outdoors Action Plan

Appendix 8 - Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA)