



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 22 June 2010	<u>Item</u> 5
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OFFA'S COUNTRY AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROJECT WORK

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Summary

This paper provides an introduction to the presentation to be made at the meeting on this new area of project delivery, for which funding has been recently secured.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note and comment on the information provided.

Background

1. Funding from Advantage West Midlands' Natural Assets programme (administered by Natural England) has recently been secured for two related projects, both undertaken jointly with the Wye Valley AONB:
 - i. Walking with Offa project (£132,750 from Natural Assets, £14,700 match) to be spent within the Wye Valley and Shropshire Hills AONBs and surrounding market towns as follows:

Infrastructure on Long Distance Path Development	£10,000
Interpretation and information	£65,000
Training for businesses	£20,000
Walking promotion & web pages	£15,000
Walking route development	£37,500
 - ii. Sustainable Tourism Strategies (£33,750 Natural Assets, £3,750 match) for consultant time to develop and write strategies for the Shropshire Hills and Wye Valley AONBs.
2. This funding will start to bring to fruition work which has been under development for some time. Initial proposals for a sustainable tourism and transport project along Offa's Dyke led in 2008 to a broader Welsh-English Border Strategic Regeneration Programme. This was supported with significant profile by the Welsh Assembly Government, West Midlands Regional Assembly and Advantage West Midlands, with project management and co-ordination by the AONB Partnership's Development Officer (see background papers). Following completion of this, our attention returned to the tourism work and the opportunity arose to bid jointly with the Wye Valley for Natural Assets funding. This was confirmed on 13 May, though at a reduced level without funding for the proposed transport element or staff and management costs.

3. A Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the Shropshire Hills is intended to be a step towards the Europarc European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (and is a requirement for gaining the Charter). The Strategy would follow on very well from the successful Sustainable Tourism Strategy for Church Stretton completed in 2007-8, which has greatly enhanced alignment between our vision and that of the tourism sector. A Strategy for the whole Shropshire Hills area (covering more broadly than just the AONB) fits well with the strategic approach to tourism at a county level, and will be well timed to influence future directions. The Europarc Charter does not in itself bring funding directly, but is likely to enhance opportunities for seeking external funding (see background papers). The Charter is already held by the Brecon Beacons National Park and the Clwydian Range AONB, so in the context of the Offa's Country work it would be a strength for ourselves and the Wye Valley as the other protected landscapes to gain this too, giving the area a strong sustainable tourism focus.
4. The other main requirement for gaining the Charter is a forum bringing together industry representatives with the protected landscape body. Our own existing working group does this to some extent. We are also in discussion with Shropshire Council's Economic Development team about current proposals to create area-based destination development partnerships under revised county Destination Management Partnership structures for tourism. Since the Shropshire Hills is one of the proposed areas, there is great potential for alignment and collaboration to meet a number of purposes. We have also recently made a licence agreement with South Shropshire Tourism Ltd (now trading as 'Shropshire Hills Tourism') for controlled use of derivations of the AONB logo in order to support the Shropshire Hills identity and brand. In combination, these developments and the project work will continue to boost the AONB's strong profile and contribution in relation to tourism.

<p>List of Background Papers</p> <p>Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme Business Plan Phase One – Walking with Offa, available electronically on request.</p> <p>Presentation on 'Europarc European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas' to AONB Recreation, Tourism & Products Development Group 9 March 2010, available at http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/partnership/workgps.htm#accrec</p> <p>Welsh-English Border Strategic Regeneration Programme, available at http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/partnership/Welsh-EnglishBorder.htm</p>
<p>Human Rights Act Appraisal</p> <p>The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.</p>
<p>Environmental Appraisal</p> <p>The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.</p>
<p>Risk Management Appraisal</p> <p>Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.</p>
<p>Community / Consultations Appraisal</p> <p>Extensive consultation has been carried out in both the Welsh-English Border Strategic Regeneration Programme and the development of Walking With Offa.</p>
<p>Appendices None</p>