



UPDATE ON SHROPSHIRE HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE TEAM FUNDING AND ACTIVITY

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Summary

This paper updates members of the Partnership on a significant new allocation of capital funding from Defra, and on other aspects of funding and activity by the team.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to comment on the information provided.

Funding

In the government announcements of 29th November 2023 there was some welcome additional funding announced – £10 million of capital funding in 2024-25 for Protected Landscapes ‘to restore wildlife habitats and improve access, achieving more for people and nature’. £5 million of this is allocated to National Landscapes and the National Landscapes Association has proposed to Defra a funding formula to divide this between the 34 areas. On this basis we are expecting to receive £151k. The team have started a process to identify potential projects for spend, and since it is capital and we do not own or manage any assets directly, this will inevitably involve partner organisations. We will look at projects generated from within the team such as the Ancient Woodlands Restoration project, and also at projects co-developed with partner organisations who manage suitable sites in the Shropshire Hills.

Also allocated for 2024-25 is the second tranche of Defra ‘Access for All’ capital, which for us is £69,833. A similar process to identify projects with partners is under way.

2024-25 is the fourth and last scheduled year of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and in the Shropshire Hills we have for the coming financial year an allocation of £1,490,699, of which grants to land managers will make up £1,337,468. This is the largest allocation of the programme so far, but demand and uptake has been rising, and provided good applications continue to come in, we are confident of spending the allocation effectively. Farming in Protected Landscapes has been well received both locally and nationally, and there is an active discussion about possible ways to retain a useful ongoing role for protected landscape teams in land management advice and project support.

The Shropshire Hills National Landscape team’s total projected budget for 2024-25 to £1.974 million, 87% of which is from Defra. The Shropshire Council core contribution of £36,100 (comprising 10% of the core budget and 1.8% of overall turnover) is understood

to be secure. The local authorities' contributions have for some years been roughly 50% down on the expected level, creating a requirement for earned income.

Government are working on a new formula for core funding for protected landscapes (both National Parks and National Landscapes) to feed in to Spending Review processes, and we will have opportunities to feed into this. Following the Landscapes Review, the Defra Protected Landscapes team are very supportive of securing greater resources for National Landscapes teams to enable them to do more.

Team activity – selected updates

Farming in Protected Landscapes – We now have three dedicated staff now working on the programme (Alison Jones, Helen Oliver and Jenny Wakeman) plus support from other team members. Over 100 projects have now been funded in the Shropshire Hills. Allocation of the £1,037,000 available for grants for 2023-24 has gone well. Although some projects have struggled to complete all planned activities due to weather and wet ground conditions in the early part of 2024, some new small projects have been able to come forward so that the vast majority of the grant pot will be spent.

Ancient woodlands restoration – the ancient woodlands project is working on three sites this winter with Severn Trent funding and has engaged so far with more than 26 owners of ancient woodland sites comprising over 150ha.

Sustainable tourism

The new Sustainable Tourism Strategy was completed in December and actions are now being implemented including a new visitor map and the annual Shropshire Hills Tourism Expo on 20th March.

Clun catchment headwaters eco-hydrology survey

Detailed survey work is under way in the upper Clun area on selected land with owners' consent, funded by Natural England and the FiPL programme. The survey has found less significant peat deposits than expected, but is making recommendations for enhancing environmental benefits by re-naturalising hydrology in the headwaters.

Engagement Ranger

Joe Penfold is now working in our new temporary post of Engagement Ranger, continuing the popular Young Rangers activities, as well as establishing new outreach activities with under-served groups.

Stepping Stones

Cath Landles continues to undertake work contracted to the National Trust for the Stepping Stones project, especially support to the Upper Onny Farmers Group, which is developing an application for the next round of the Landscape Recovery Scheme.

Shropshire Hills summer forum and field visits 13th June 2024

The annual summer forum and field visits event will be held on Thursday 13th June, based at Cleehill Village Hall, with visits in the surrounding area. This is an event for Partnership members, those involved with the Trust, Friends of the Shropshire Hills and interested members of the public.

List of Background Papers

The Strategy & Performance Committee papers on budgets and team work programme updates can be made available to Partnership members on request.

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Environmental Appraisal

The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.

Risk Management Appraisal

Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.

Appendices

None