

**A STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN  
FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM  
IN THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS AND  
LUDLOW**

**2011 - 2016**

**Approved by Shropshire Hills and Ludlow  
Destination Development Partnership**

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Prepared on behalf of Shropshire Hills and Ludlow  
Destination Development Partnership  
under contract to Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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In December 2010, the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership, together with Shropshire Council, commissioned The Tourism Company with Alison Caffyn to prepare a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the whole of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow destination, as covered by the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership (DDP).

The idea originated with the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Management Plan 2009-14, which identified the potential benefits of becoming accredited as one of the family of protected areas holding the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, and was reinforced by the Welsh English Border Strategic Regeneration Programme in 2009. A sustainable tourism strategy for the AONB is required in order to progress an application to EUROPARC. On the point of finalising arrangements for this to be prepared, Shropshire Council suggested that the strategy would have more meaning and value if it covered the wider area of the newly emergent Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP, one of four DDPs which were being created late in 2010 which together cover the whole of Shropshire, Telford and the Wrekin.

While the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP area has 'fuzzy boundaries', it can be seen to include:

- the whole of the Shropshire Hills AONB, which includes the towns of Church Stretton and Clun
- the towns of Bishop's Castle, Cleobury Mortimer, Craven Arms, Ludlow, Minsterley, Much Wenlock and Pontesbury
- the countryside around these towns that relates to them.

The neighbouring towns of Knighton, Wellington, Telford and Ironbridge are important service centres for visitors to the Shropshire Hills. Connections with these towns are valuable, and the Strategy is relevant to them in this role. However since they do not fall within the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP area, the Strategy does not encompass overall development of tourism in relation to these towns.

A focal aspect of the strategy is the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which relates to all parts of the destination. The strategy has been written to comply with the requirements of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and will be a key document in the AONB Partnership's application for the Charter.

The strategy equally recognises the key role in tourism played by the market towns, which play a large part in the visitor interest in the destination and contain many of the tourism facilities and services. It pays particular attention to their opportunities and needs. The linkage (in all senses) between the towns and the AONB is a key theme.

The strategy is driven by the principles of sustainable tourism, which address economic, social and environmental impacts now and in the future. This is a key requirement of the European Charter. It has been written as an integrated document for the destination, considering product, market and management issues and opportunities for the destination as a whole, leading to strategic objectives and a single action plan.

## ***A framework and guideline for all***

The future presents a number of challenges and opportunities for supporting tourism destinations in the UK. Cuts in public sector budgets have been affecting the delivery of some services, but have also engendered a sense of determination to find new ways of working together. There is an ongoing commitment to the visitor economy in Shropshire, based on destination development partnerships, and further opportunities will arise for tourism enterprises and local interests to engage in the enhancement, management and promotion of sustainable tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow.

The need for a partnership approach to tourism is more important now than ever before. The members of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership are well placed to take on responsibility for coordinating the implementation of this strategy and action plan, and to encourage others to work with them in doing so.

## ***How was the strategy prepared?***

The strategy has been based on the following consultation which has been carried out over the past four months:

- A review of background documents, tourism research and promotional material, including websites.
- An online survey of tourism enterprises which was promoted through various tourism associations and Chambers of Trade; the survey ran through February and early March, during which time 123 valid responses were received.
- Five local consultation meetings, held between 28<sup>th</sup> February and 10<sup>th</sup> March in Rushbury, Clun, Minsterley, Cleobury Mortimer and Ludlow, which were attended by more than 60 people.
- One-to-one consultation with over 40 representatives of tourism associations, those responsible for the delivery of tourism services, individual tourism operators and owners and managers of a number of countryside sites and facilities.
- A number of site visits, where access has been possible outside the main season.
- A stakeholder workshop held in Craven Arms Community Centre on 7<sup>th</sup> April, attended by 40 people representing a wide range of stakeholders.
- Comments received on an interim report prepared for the workshop and subsequently circulated to the full list of consultees, whether or not they were present at the workshop.

## ***What does this document contain?***

In the following chapters, we set out:

2. An assessment of the tourism resource and delivery structures, market characteristics, and aspirations for the future.
3. An outline of the policy context for tourism, together with a proposed vision and objectives which form the basis for the sustainable tourism strategy for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow
4. A draft action plan as a basis for discussion with potential stakeholders
5. Arrangements for implementation of the plan and monitoring its delivery.

## 2 ASSESSMENT

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This section summarises the findings of the research and consultation undertaken. It looks first at the general context for tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, the resource base of the area and the tourism offer. It then considers how tourism has been performing, the profile and reaction of visitors, and the needs and perceptions of enterprises. Following a wider look at external factors, it ends with a summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

### 2.1 Economic, social and environmental context

#### *Living and working in and around the Shropshire Hills*

The area of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow represents one of the most rural parts of the West Midlands region, and the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty includes the most sparsely populated areas of Shropshire and of the region. Within the AONB, 27% of employment is in agriculture with a further 11% in tourism. Higher than average numbers of people are self-employed and across south Shropshire distance travelled to work is comparatively low. There are significant numbers of microbusinesses and amongst the highest level of homeworking in the country. The market towns of the Shropshire Hills are considered to be relatively self-contained, with their main connection being to their rural hinterland in the traditional way.

The population of the AONB is estimated at 19,000, including the town of Church Stretton (4,000+) and Clun (1,100+). The surrounding market towns are smallish settlements of some 1800 (Bishop's Castle) to Knighton (3300), with the exception of Ludlow (9,900) and Wellington (20,000+). Together with all of these surrounding market towns, the total population included in the area of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow is around 50,000. (The population of the Shropshire Hills LEADER Area is estimated at 54,000). By comparison, the neighbouring settlements of Shrewsbury (70,000+) and Telford (162,000+) are much larger. However, an economic profile in 2008 suggested the population of South Shropshire District to be growing at a faster rate than England as whole. The population has an older general age profile than the national average, with an outflow of younger people.

Based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, the area includes some of the least deprived parts of the County (parts of Church Stretton and Ludlow are in Quintile 5) and some of the most deprived (parts of the Cleve Hills are in Quintile 1). A high dependency on low paid seasonal employment in agriculture and tourism leads to a relatively low wage economy, and higher than average numbers of people in the area have no qualifications.

The remoteness and unspoilt quality of the area is valued by many of its residents, including the indigenous population as well as significant numbers of people who choose to live here. Tranquillity, as measured by CPRE, is significant in the way that people value the area. In fact, the Shropshire Hills AONB is very significant for tranquillity in a regional and local context, and the Shropshire Hills and English and Welsh Marches are generally significant for tranquillity in a national context.

## ***The natural heritage of the Shropshire Hills***

The Shropshire Hills are believed to have the greatest geological variety of any comparable sized area in the UK, perhaps in the world, contributing to the character and distinctiveness of the various landscapes across the AONB. Shropshire was an important focus for pioneering geological research in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, with place names such as Ludlow and Wenlock recognised internationally as series of rocks.

The Shropshire Hills are amongst the highest ground in England south of the Pennines, with parts of the Long Mynd, Clee Hills and Stiperstones Ridge reaching heights of over 500 m; the highest point, Abdon Burf on Brown Clee Hill, is 540 metres above sea level. These are important areas for conservation as well as public enjoyment. The National Trust own extensive tracts of land on the Long Mynd, including Carding Mill Valley, and on Wenlock Edge, while Natural England manage the National Nature Reserve on the Stiperstones. Wide open spaces and ancient hilltop features offer panoramic views, but amongst the farmed landscape, the woodlands and the river valleys, there are also intimate corners to be discovered.

The destination comprises four main areas of countryside, each one including extensive stretches of upland with its own distinctive character, and the fine collection of historic market towns that serve as gateways to them.

These four areas of countryside are:

- The Long Mynd and the Stiperstones, with gateways at Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Minsterley and Pontesbury. The Long Mynd is a large open plateau with hidden valleys, while the outline of the Stiperstones is unmistakably craggy and rugged; together they make up the largest area of heathland in the Shropshire Hills.
- Wenlock Edge and the Wrekin, with gateways at Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Much Wenlock and Wellington. Wenlock Edge is a long, low ridge covered with broad-leaved woodland which extends for over 15 miles (24 km) while the outlying Wrekin is Shropshire's iconic hill, offering magnificent views across the whole of the Shropshire Hills.
- The Clun Forest and Valley, with gateways at Bishop's Castle, Craven Arms and Knighton. In this, the most deeply rural part of the Shropshire Hills AONB, the rolling upland hills of the Clun Forest are criss-crossed by meandering rivers, including the Teme and Clun, their banks lined with alder.
- The Clee Hills and the Corvedale, with gateways at Ludlow, Craven Arms and Cleobury Mortimer. Nature has reclaimed the Clee Hills from their former industrial use and given them a harsh kind of beauty, towering above the delightful broad valley of the River Corve.

The AONB is well recognised as holding a concentration of biodiversity, resulting from the varied landscape and relatively low intensity of land management and development. The Shropshire Hills are characterised by variety rather than large expanses of the same habitat, and this is reflected in the species found, which include those characteristic of both upland and lowland, and both northern and southern distributions.

The AONB contains 126 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), including biological features, covering 4,500ha (5.6% of the AONB). These are complemented by 214 county Wildlife Sites covering a further 6% of the AONB. Many of the smaller SSSIs are geological sites.

Of the fifteen habitat types present in the Shropshire Hills AONB, each with a habitat action plan (HAP) currently included in the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan (SBAP), three are characteristically associated with the Shropshire Hills and form an important part of the visitor experience: upland heathland, semi-improved upland rough grassland, and semi-natural broadleaved woodland.

Upland heathland is a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Programme. Within Shropshire, it is strongly associated with the Shropshire Hills, especially on the Long Mynd and Stiperstones where there is a sufficiently extensive area to support the diversity of birds normally associated with large upland moors. The Long Mynd is the largest SSSI in the West Midlands. The Stiperstones and the Hollies, an internationally important example of upland heathland, is an EU Special Area of Conservation (SAC) covering 588ha. Most heathland is registered as common land. Current factors affecting the habitat mostly relate to agriculture practice, but also include reference to recreational impacts leading to damage and erosion.

Semi-improved upland rough grassland is considered a significant habitat in Shropshire, providing valuable cover for nesting upland birds, including lapwing, curlew and snipe. It is a valuable landscape feature in its own right and characteristic of hilly areas in the county, including parts of the Clun Hills, the edge of Stiperstones, the Clee Hills and elsewhere in the Shropshire Hills.

Semi-natural broadleaved woodland is widely distributed across Shropshire, but is a significant feature on the Wrekin and Ercall, the limestone escarpment of Wenlock Edge and parts of the Welsh borderland. Current factors affecting the habitat largely relate to woodland management practice, but also include reference to visitor pressure that can lead to damage of sensitive woodland habitat.

Freshwater rivers and streams are also an important feature, although less visible to the casual visitor. Although the AONB excludes the lower reaches of a number of rivers, the Rivers Teme, Clun, Onny and Corve are very important. The River Clun Special Area of Conservation lies just outside the AONB, but its condition is highly dependent on activities within its wider catchment area within the AONB.

### ***Cultural heritage in and around the Shropshire Hills***

The cultural heritage includes the historic landscape and built environment, archaeology, conservation areas, and local skills, crafts and traditions.

This is border country, and much of cultural identity derives from a landscape that was fought over for centuries. Iron Age hillforts crown most of the prominent hilltops and the well known linear feature of Offa's Dyke is thought to date from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. Centuries of unrest along the border with Wales are reflected in the greatest concentration of medieval castle earthworks anywhere in Britain. Stokesay Castle near Craven Arms is described as the finest and best preserved medieval fortified manor house in England.

The built heritage reflects local materials from the landscape, with a rich legacy of half-timbered buildings and the use of local stone in churches and larger houses.

Former mining sites, often associated with haphazard 'squatter' settlement with small enclosures encroaching onto common land, are found especially around the Stiperstones at Snailbeach and the Bog, and around the Clee Hills. The Welsh influence is strong in the west and reflected in many place names.

Work has recently been undertaken on a number of heritage buildings, including Flounders Folly, Hopton Castle, Clun Castle and the old mining cottages at Blakemoorgate on the Stiperstones.

Community involvement is particularly strong in caring for and sharing the local heritage across the whole of the area. This has sometimes been encouraged and supported by a particular project or partnership, but also arises spontaneously and can often involve a significant and long term commitment.

Each of the market towns has its own special merits, and heritage features associated with their own particular history. Ludlow in particular has an established and national reputation for its built heritage and for its food and drink. Of the market towns, only Church Stretton lies within the AONB. Clun takes on some of the functions of a town for visitors to the AONB and is often included within the family of towns in the area.

A number of traditional craft skills are associated with the area, and Acton Scott Historic Working Farm has a full and varied programme of specialist courses on offer. Other cultural opportunities include craft courses at Westhope College and creative writing opportunities with the Arvon Foundation at The Hurst.

## **2.2 The tourism resource**

The overall visitor offer of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow as a destination area is diverse and rich, but also scattered and complex. This is a destination of discovery, which involves some effort on the part of visitors but where the effort made can be greatly rewarded.

### ***Accommodation***

The tourism industry is made up of a large number of generally small enterprises. The 2011 destination guide for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow includes 110 entries, of which 51 provide serviced accommodation and 59 provide self-catering accommodation, representing a total of 721 serviced beds and 416 self-catering beds across the Shropshire Hills. Just 9 serviced enterprises offer 10 or more rooms. Ludlow and its immediately surrounding area accounts for almost one half of the serviced accommodation, and 44% of all accommodation, included in the guide. Remaining accommodation is scattered throughout the Shropshire Hills and its market towns. There are of course accommodation establishments which do not appear in the destination guide, including a considerable amount of self-catering accommodation and group/hostel accommodation, with a strong presence from the Youth Hostels Association.

Grading levels amongst quality assured accommodation are relatively high. For entries in the 2011 Ludlow and Shropshire Hills guide, the average grading for serviced accommodation was 3.9, with a good presence of Gold and Silver awards, and for non-serviced accommodation it was 3.8.

A number of accommodation establishments have documented information about their accessibility to those with limited mobility.

Nine accommodation providers, including 1 Gold and 4 Silver awards, have been certified under the Green Tourism Business Scheme, accredited by Visit England.



The Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Business Scheme includes 22 accommodation providers who have adopted environmentally responsible practices as well as promoting local events and activities. Some businesses have engaged with both schemes.

### **Visitor attractions**

Although the majority of visitor attractions in and around the Shropshire Hills are generally small in scale and relatively low key, a small number are highly visible and play an important role in raising the profile of the Shropshire Hills.

<b>Attraction</b>	<b>Number of visits</b>	<b>Entry</b>	<b>Open</b>
Carding Mill Valley (NT)	250,000	Free	Year round
St Laurence's Church, Ludlow	49,000*	Free	Year round
Acton Scott Historic Working Farm (SC)	45,000	Paid	Seasonal
Stokesay Castle (EH)	40,049*	Paid	Seasonal – winter opening to be announced
Ludlow Castle	100,000	Paid	Year round (w/ends only Dec/Jan)
Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre (SC)	180,716 (13,274)	Free (Paid exhibition)	Year round
Bog Centre	17,600	Free	Seasonal
Much Wenlock Museum (SC)	17,571*	Free	Seasonal – limited winter opening
Much Wenlock Priory (EH)	15,000	Paid	Seasonal – winter opening to be announced
Buildwas Abbey (EH)	6,215*	Paid	Seasonal

EH (English Heritage), NT (National Trust), SC (Shropshire Council)

\*Figure published in Visits to UK Attractions, 2009

With the exception of Ludlow Castle, which is in private hands, these top performing sites are managed by the public or third sector. The National Trust facilities in Carding Mill Valley attract a particularly high number of visits as they act as a focal point for year round access to the valley and adjacent hills. English Heritage manage several properties in the area, including Stokesay Castle. The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre has potential to strengthen its role in welcoming visitors, including families, and introducing them to the area. Although primarily a retail enterprise, the Ludlow Food Centre has also become well established as a place to visit.

Just three visitor attractions currently participate in the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS): the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Stokesay Castle and Wenlock Priory.

Other attractions tend to be smaller in scale and are generally low key. Many have limited opening hours (Wilderhope Manor (NT), Shipton Hall); some are available only for pre-booked group visits (Stokesay Court, Hopton Court). Others are seasonal (Land of Lost Content closed Dec/Jan). Micky Miller's Play Barn in Craven Arms primarily attracts a local audience but provides a useful facility for visiting families.

Smaller heritage sites make a significant contribution to visitor interest, with a high dependence on voluntary activity, including strong input from dedicated trusts and community organisations. These include The Bog Centre, Snailbeach Mine, Bishop's Castle's House on Crutches, Clun Town Museum and, imminently, Hopton Castle. Some, like Clun Castle or Mitchell's Fold Stone Circle (both EH), are visitor sites rather than attractions, which can be accessed at all reasonable times and add a strong sense of place to the landscape. There are interesting churches in towns, villages and hamlets across whole area.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) manage a number of nature reserves across the Shropshire Hills; although none of them offers any particular visitor facilities, some have simple car parking and waymarked trails. There is some focus on the Stiperstones area, where SWT have acquired three reserves in the recent past. The National Nature Reserve is managed by Natural England, who have been involved with others, including SWT, in a number of important partnership projects. SWT have also recently purchased Catherton Common, near Clee Hill.

### ***Access by public transport***

The ability to explore the area using public transport is an important part of the visitor offer. The main Cardiff-Manchester railway line offers a frequent service to and from Ludlow, Craven Arms and Church Stretton, and the Heart of Wales line gives access to a clutch of stations including Knighton as the route heads west into Wales. A further line through Wellington serves the north-eastern corner of the AONB. Mainline rail access is complemented by bus services, including the newly introduced Shropshire Link service. Most importantly, a dedicated Shropshire Hills Shuttle Service is managed by the AONB Partnership, linking the Stiperstones and the Long Mynd with gateways at Church Stretton and Minsterley on summer weekends and Bank Holidays. A second service between Craven Arms, Bishop's Castle and Clun has reluctantly been withdrawn in 2011 due to lack of funding. The recently published guide to 'Slow Travel' in the Marches<sup>1</sup> includes Ludlow and Church Stretton as hubs to explore the area and is a valuable contribution to encouraging visitors to explore, discover and engage with parts of the destination of Shropshire Hills and Ludlow.

### ***Provision for walking***

The Countryside Access Strategy for Shropshire 2008-18 identified the Shropshire Hills and Clun Hills areas as having the best access, including Open Access, in Shropshire for all users. There is walking to suit all abilities, across heather and rough hill tops, through meadows and woodland, and an increasing emphasis on shorter walks, highlighting especially those that can be accessed by public transport.

The extensive network of public rights of way consists of public footpaths (1,275km), bridleways (448km), and byways and Unclassified County Roads (97km). The condition of rights of way is monitored by a national performance indicator measuring the % of paths which are 'easy to use'. In the AONB this has gone up from 40% in 2003-4, to 63% in 2005-6, to 86% in 2007-8. 12.5% of the rights of way network is promoted in some way for recreation.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 provided new legal access to 81km<sup>2</sup> of open access land (over 90% of the access land in the whole of Shropshire). Open

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<sup>1</sup> Lumsdon, L. A Guide to Slow Travel in the Marches, Logaston Press, 2011

access land includes most Forestry Commission land and some areas dedicated by private owners.

Common land covers 5.2% of the AONB (41.9km<sup>2</sup>). Larger areas include the Long Mynd, Stiperstones and Clee Hills, with isolated fragments elsewhere such as the Clun Forest.

Carding Mill Valley is a particularly popular location for access to the hills, serviced with excellent facilities provided by the National Trust. High demand can give rise to pressure on the Long Mynd and Stiperstones, and the National Trust is engaged with a number of management techniques, including support for the Shropshire Hills Shuttle Bus to reduce traffic pressure and open up new walking possibilities.

19 km of Offa's Dyke Path National Trail runs through the AONB from Knighton across the Clun Forest, including some of the best preserved parts of the fortification. Several circular loop walks and podcasts have recently been published on its website. The southern part of the Shropshire Way criss-crosses the area, connecting most but not all of the market towns that relate to the Shropshire Hills. Significant investment in route development, upgrading infrastructure, signing, mapping and information, has enabled this route to be promoted as a flagship for the Shropshire Hills. Circular walks, and walks that can be supported by public transport, have been developed.

Recently, the 'Walking with Offa' project has been able to support renewed activity in the west of the AONB on route development, interpretation and information, training for businesses, walking promotion and web pages.

Promoted routes include circular walks starting from the Bog Visitor Centre, from Bridges, from Carding Mill Valley, from the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and from Acton Scott. Other local walks are promoted by groups including Parish Paths Partnership (P3) groups. Walks elsewhere include Wenlock Edge (National Trust), the Wrekin Hill Fort, The Ercall (Shropshire Wildlife Trust) and the Three Castles Walk in Corvedale.

In addition to access routes, countryside sites are managed by the National Trust (including the Long Mynd, Wenlock Edge and Hopesay Common), Forestry Commission (including Bury Ditches, Mortimer Forest, Hopton and Eastridge Woods), Shropshire Wildlife Trust (including Rhos Fiddle and Clunton Coppice), Shropshire Council (including Rectory Wood and Field, Onny Meadows (Craven Arms), Poles Coppice (Habberley) and Snailbeach Mine, and Natural England (Stiperstones NNR). A number of easy access routes have been provided, with special attention paid at the Stiperstones and Onny Meadows.

Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Cleobury Mortimer, Knighton and Wellington are Walkers are Welcome towns, and well-established walking festivals are run in consecutive weeks by Bishop's Castle and Church Stretton. Challenge events, such as the Long Mynd Hike, are also important.

Specialist operators, including Secret Hills Walking Holidays and Wheely Wonderful, offer guided walking and cycling holidays.

### ***Provision for cycling***

The area is well provided with cycling routes to suit all abilities. Four graded cycle routes on quiet roads have been developed by Shropshire Council from each of Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Cleobury Mortimer, Ludlow and Bishop's Castle, promoted through a free leaflet for each town. The Five Towns Wrekin Trail is a new initiative of the Wellington LA21 group, providing a cycle route which will link the AONB with the World Heritage Site at Ironbridge.

The Six Castles Cycleway is a challenging hilly 58 miles route, based around National Cycle Route 44, which links six historic castle sites in Shropshire and North Herefordshire. It starts and finishes at a mainline railway station (Shrewsbury or Leominster) making it accessible by public transport.

Quiet lanes and bridleway cross the Clun Forest, offering excellent opportunities for cycling on and off-road, including the Jack Mytton Way, a long distance bridleway, and the Kerry Ridgeway, from Bishop's Castle into Wales.

ReaVEN (Rea Valley Environmental Network) is a local group in the Minsterley/Pontesbury/Snailbeach area, focused on sustainability issues. The group has been campaigning hard to open all or part of a traffic free cycling route to Shrewsbury, based on the former railway line wherever possible. Not only would this offer an important opportunity for car free travel to residents, including commuting, but it would open up a new gateway from Shrewsbury into the Stiperstones. There are also aspirations to establish cycle routes along disused railways between Much Wenlock and Craven Arms, and on to Bishop's Castle.

Forestry Commission sites at Hopton and Eastridge Woods offer a variety of mountain bike trails, including downhill. Easier forest track riding is also available at Bury Ditches and in the Mortimer Forest. Several routes are available to mountain bikers on the Long Mynd, including on-road and bridleway sections. A network of trails has recently been identified and mapped by the National Trust, in consultation with users and responsible cycle hire operators, in order to both support and manage the increasing level of access that is taking place. Cycle hire is now available in Church Stretton and at the Shropshire Hills Mountain Bike and Outdoor Pursuits Centre at Marshbrook. Challenge events are becoming increasingly popular.

A specialist operator, Wheely Wonderful, offers a range of options for self-guided cycling holidays around the Shropshire Hills, planning routes which are not too challenging and focused on the attractions of the area, including the quiet roads, magnificent scenery and the market towns.

### ***Provision for riding***

The Clun area offers relatively good access for horse riders, and also off road cyclists, with 28% of the Rights of Way network available, the highest proportion of all areas in the County. Elsewhere in the Shropshire Hills, provision is good in the Snailbeach/Stiperstones area. The Long Mynd, Stretton Hills, Wenlock Edge and Clee Hills also have a good network of bridleways.

Promoted routes for horseriders include:

- Jack Mytton Way, now a circular route of over 100 miles of rural bridleways and quiet country lanes, which can be ridden over 5-7 days.

- Blue Remembered Hills Bridleway, a 38 mile circular route around the Clun Valley, showcasing the special qualities of the Shropshire Hills AONB.
- Circular route (18.5 miles) and linear trail (14 miles) promoted on the Long Mynd.

Five licensed riding establishments offer a variety of riding experiences to visitors.

### ***Outdoor activities including air sports***

Three commercial activity providers are based within the AONB, offering residential and day activities, to a range of clients from families to stag parties. Activities, offered include canoeing, climbing, mountain boarding, quad biking, riding and archery and take place at various sites across of the Shropshire Hills and beyond.

The Long Mynd has become very popular as a location for a range of aerial activities, including gliding, paragliding, hot air ballooning and hang gliding. The Midland Gliding Club, one of the oldest clubs in the UK, operates year round, seven days a week March to November, offering wave, thermal and ridge soaring for novice and accomplished pilots. Glider pilot training courses run throughout the summer. Private clubs, such as the Long Mynd Soaring Club, are also active in the area.

Other activities offered locally include several fishing lakes, golf courses, an archery club and shooting range.

### ***The food and drink offer***

Ludlow, with its annual Food Festivals and markets, specialist Food Centre and two Michelin-starred restaurants, underpins the reputation of the destination for fine food and excellent local produce. The range of quality food and drink produced across the area has increased substantially in recent years and is available in many local pubs, eating places, shops and farmers markets.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, through its 'Buy Local' initiative, has been actively engaged in promoting the use of local products, including locally produced food and drink, to businesses and to visitors. The 2010 Directory includes thirteen places to eat and ten local food and drink businesses selling direct, who are members of the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme. Local to Ludlow is actively engaged in promoting use of produce from within 30 miles of the town; this includes the whole of the Shropshire Hills area as well as significant parts of Herefordshire, Wales and Worcestershire.

There are six microbreweries in the Shropshire Hills, creating a cluster of interest in real ale. As well as the major events in Ludlow, food and drink events are held in a number of towns, such as Cleobury Country Food and Ale Trail, Clun Valley Beer Festival.

Agricultural shows are an important tradition within the area, including the Minsterley Show and the Burwarton Show. Acton Scott Historic Working Farm offers a special opportunity to get a feel for traditional agriculture and has recently been showcased in BBC TV's *Victorian Farm*. Regular Farmers' Markets are held in Ludlow (now weekly), Bishop's Castle, Craven Arms, Knighton and Much Wenlock.

There are some concerns about inconsistency in quality of food across all establishments, especially in the mid-price range. It is important to ensure that all visitors leave the area with a highly favourable impression of the food and drink offer.

## 2.3 Tourism delivery structures and services

### *Key networks and organisations in tourism delivery*

In 2010, the Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board was restructured. This was accompanied by the creation of four sub-County Destination Development Partnerships (DDPs), one of which is the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP. Shropshire Council has set out its strategic vision for the DDPs, but this new structure is still at a very early stage and the group has yet to develop into the functions and roles envisaged.

As proposed, the overall role of each DDP will be to support the tourism sector and develop the tourism offer within their particular destination. They will do this within a strategic framework which has yet to be developed by the Tourism Strategy Board.

Following a report to Shropshire Council's cabinet, a consultation paper circulated in September 2010 suggested that the DDPs would carry out a series of functions with the overall aim of *'improving the co-ordination of tourism businesses, public sector assets and voluntary groups, thus leading to a higher quality offer to visitors to the area and the generation of wealth<sup>2</sup>'*.

Specific functions that were indicated included:

- Co-ordinating information within the destination
- Influencing external marketing
- Acting as a link with those responsible for the provision of services and facilities
- Learning and sharing best practice
- Working more closely with Visitor Information Centres
- Developing a better Sense of Place
- Receiving and sharing information and research.

Shropshire Council has recently announced the creation of a new Visitor Economy service within the Business Growth and Prosperity Group, the structure of which will shortly become clear. Currently, two full-time tourism officers are located within the Economic Development Team, sharing responsibility for the county on a geographic basis. A team of Community Action Officers works across the county. Responsibilities include support of the Unitary Authority's Local Joint Committees, and there are instances of their involvement in tourism issues where this is seen as a local priority. Shropshire Council has an active Museum Service, whose responsibilities include Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, as well as museums in Ludlow and Much Wenlock. The Council is also responsible for the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre in Craven Arms. The Countryside Access team has been responsible for developing and delivering investment in long distance recreation routes and promoted routes which now form a significant and integrated network across southern Shropshire.

Until recently, the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership supported a dedicated Recreation, Tourism and Products Development Group. With the formation of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP, it was decided that it no longer made sense to

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<sup>2</sup> Consultation on the formation of Destination Development Partnerships, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Tourism Strategy Board, 2010

maintain a separate Working Group and that its activity should be merged with that of the new DDP.

Current AONB Partnership delivery priorities which impact on tourism include the various projects under the 'Buy Local' initiative, the Walking with Offa and Walking for Wellbeing projects, and various management partnerships for key landscape areas within the AONB. The AONB Partnership is the delivery body for two grant programmes which have supported individual community and business projects, some of which benefit tourism: the Sustainable Development Fund and LEADER in the Shropshire Hills. The AONB Partnership has adopted a Sustainability Policy and Action Plan in support of its explicit subsidiary purpose to promote sustainability development, through managing its own resources and through influencing the actions of others.

Shropshire Tourism UK Ltd was established in 1995. Since 2002, it has been a not for profit company limited by guarantee, established for the benefit of its 509 private sector member businesses (around one half of which are in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP area). The company objectives are to promote tourism and to provide a representative voice for the tourism industry in Shropshire and the surrounding area, and the company delivers return on investment to its membership, through marketing arrangements, business support and selling commercial services. Core activities include destination marketing - on and off line; print and brochure production; membership support, advice and representation; marketing and business support, advice and services; and IT Services – websites, systems, e-marketing. Shropshire Tourism also act as data stewards for EnglandNet.

The majority of Shropshire Tourism's marketing activity is focussed on awareness raising, orientated around three of the identified tourism drivers for the county, Shrewsbury, Ironbridge and Ludlow. This activity is responsible for generating a significant amount of coverage in the UK press, around half of which is centred around the Michelin Stars, countryside and food connections of south Shropshire.

Shropshire Council has an annual Service Level Agreement with Shropshire Tourism for the provision of certain tourism services. The budget for 2011/12 has seen the level of this funding reduced by 54% on 2010/11. This funding is intended primarily to help pay for the cost of editorial in the main Shropshire brochure, and the cost of a PR campaign for 6 months.

Shropshire Hills Tourism is the licensed trading name for South Shropshire Tourism Ltd, a not for profit company limited by guarantee which is dedicated to supporting and encouraging tourism development and promotion in South Shropshire and the surrounding area. Membership is offered as a joint scheme with Shropshire Tourism Ltd. and there are currently around 250 members. In 2010, the signing of a licence agreement to use a version of the Shropshire Hills logo and the trading name of Shropshire Hills Tourism and a subsequent re-branding exercise brought the organisation into a closer association with the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and area.

As well as general liaison and representing the interests of their members, their main responsibilities include production of the Ludlow and Shropshire Hills brochure and oversight of the associated website, which is hosted by Shropshire Tourism. The activities of Shropshire Hills Tourism are primarily achieved through income from membership and sale of advertising, partnership activity and a Service Level Agreement with Shropshire Council. They have also supported production of the

Shropshire Hills Events booklet and the Shropshire Hills and Severn Valley Discovery Map (a joint publication with Bridgnorth and District Tourist Association).

Each market town has developed its own independent arrangement for the organisation and promotion of tourism. Bishop's Castle, Church Stretton, Bridgnorth and Cleobury Mortimer each has a dedicated tourism group for their town and surrounding hinterland, while others work through the local Chamber of Trade (Ludlow) or more general business network (Craven Arms).

### ***Support for tourism activity***

There has been considerable reliance on regional funding to support a programme of tourism activity in the County in recent years. In 2008 a Destination Management Partnership Plan was prepared to provide a strategic framework for investment in the Shropshire and Telford Visitor Economy for 2008 to 2011. The resulting programme, supported by Advantage West Midlands, has just come to an end. During 2010/11, this has overlapped with a programme of investment supported by Rural Development Programme England (RDPE), which to date has been primarily focussed on Much Wenlock. These two programmes have supported, and continue to support, Shropshire Council and their partners in delivering a programme of tourism investment across the county.

Programmes supported by AWM through the DMP have included walking route promotion and development, Sharing our Shropshire (local product knowledge for tourism businesses), training in the use of social media and PR contracts for national press campaigns for general tourism and for food activity, and a Sustainable Tourism Business Grant Scheme. This programme is now closed. As well as the RDPE in Much Wenlock, the RDPE has funded a 3-year DMP programme, Welcome to the Countryside, covering the whole of rural Shropshire. It has supported rural marketing schemes, Discovery Maps, support for sales of local products etc. £50K is available in 2011/12, the last year of the programme.

AWM has also been able to support projects through its Natural Assets programme, including making significant funding available to the Walking with Offa project.

One of the successes of AWM was the Rural Regeneration Zone, which covered some of the most deprived and isolated parts of Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, including virtually the whole of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow. Its strategic objectives contributed to rural tourism in a number of ways. Its major investments included Ludlow Food Centre and, between 2006 and 2010, its programme of Sustainable Tourism Grants, Rural Enterprise Grants and Redundant Building Grants have together represented a significant investment in tourism and related services. Add to this a raft of investment in environmental technologies and skills development, and the RRZ has provided a strong platform on which the emerging Marches LEP can build.

Some tourism services which had previously been delivered by the County or District Councils were not carried through to the new Unitary Authority, including the Tourism Research Unit.

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has a number of programmes which offer support to visitors (Shropshire Hills Shuttles) or to tourism businesses ('Buy Local' initiative including Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme, 'Buy Local' web directory and Discover Local project). A programme of development activity in connection with



walking tourism is currently supported with Natural Assets funding, as part of the cross-border walking promotion and development project, Walking with Offa. The AONB Partnership has taken the lead in the proposed Stiperstones – Corndon Landscape Partnership scheme which, if successful, will deliver a range of outcomes including new dimensions to the visitor offer.

Opportunities have been taken to support initiatives in individual towns, including Bishop's Castle Festival and Events Officer (LEADER), Church Stretton Marketing Plan (South Shropshire District Council), Much Wenlock - activity associated with the 2012 Olympics (DMP) and the Rea Valley Cycleway proposal investigated and promoted by ReaVEN. Specialist groups have also gained funding to extend their offer, for example South Shropshire Farm Holiday Group has received RDPE funding for themed itineraries under the banner Shropshire Gold.

It has recently been announced that Rural Enterprise Grants are no longer to be made available by Defra. The Shropshire Tourism Business Advice Service available through Business Link for many years finished two years ago.

Shropshire Tourism offers a range of marketing, website, IT and more general business advice and services to their members.

### ***Marketing and information provision***

We saw in the earlier section on the sub-regional context that a number of players are involved in delivering tourism support services and actions. We set out below a summary of current and recent actions and services.

Shropshire Tourism provides a website for the whole of Shropshire [www.shropshiretourism.co.uk](http://www.shropshiretourism.co.uk), together with a Shropshire and Welsh Borders brochure to promote the whole county, including 13 pages of editorial and a separate 2pp map of places to visit. The 2011 brochure ran to 36pp, with 21pp supported by private sector advertising. The print run was 30,000 and there is a small, but reducing, budget for direct advertising and also for distribution. A reduced copy of the brochure can be downloaded from the website. A double page spread on Ludlow and the Shropshire Hills majors on food, while retail opportunities in some other of the market towns are featured along with Shrewsbury. Individual accommodation entries are colour coded by area, linked to a map which uses 'South Shropshire' to label the area covered by Shropshire Hills Tourism. At least half the standard entries are from the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, while enhanced advertising is more likely to come from other parts of the County. Shropshire Hills Tourism take a ¼ page advertisement which features the Ludlow and Shropshire Hills brochure and website.

Shropshire Hills Tourism, supported by Shropshire Tourism and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, produce a dedicated annual destination guide for Ludlow and The Shropshire Hills. The redesigned 2011 brochure was given a print run of 25,000, a slight reduction on previous years, with paid for distribution of 8,000 copies. This is a substantial 44pp publication, with copy for the various constituent areas provided by the AONB Partnership and local tourism groups, a listing of festivals and events, advertising from the larger attractions, activities and events, and accommodation entries. This is supported by a dedicated visitor website for the area ([www.visitsouthshropshire.co.uk](http://www.visitsouthshropshire.co.uk) or [www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk](http://www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk)), maintained by Shropshire Tourism under contract to Shropshire Hills Tourism. A printed copy of the brochure can be requested or downloaded in its entirety from the Ludlow and Shropshire Hills website although it does not appear to be available directly from

Shropshire Tourism's own website. Although a link exists from Shropshire Tourism's website to the website for Ludlow and Shropshire Hills, it is not made at all obvious or easy to find.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has recently redeveloped its own website, resulting in more comprehensive and easily accessible information for visitors to the AONB. The majority of content is about management of the AONB and activity of the Partnership, but most of the searches reaching the site are about the Shuttle Bus service, things to do etc. It is intended to upgrade and develop the visitor information on the website. A substantial programme of events is published annually by the AONB in partnership with the National Trust, Discovery Centre, Acton Scott Historic Working Farm etc. This includes many local events, walks, talks and short courses organised by the partners across the area and throughout the year. The publication appears reasonably early in the year and takes the form of a more general printed guide to places to visit and things to do in the AONB, based around four main areas of countryside, as well as an events listing. Material and events are selected for their fit with overall AONB Partnership activity and priorities.

A Discovery Map for the Shropshire Hills and Severn Valley, including a wider range of attractions and activities, is produced by Shropshire Tourism on behalf of the two area tourism associations with support from a number of sources, including the AONB Partnership, and the publication is based around a map which features the AONB.

Local tourism groups and/or Chambers of Trade in each of the market town are each involved with producing a plethora of local visitor guides and providing individual town websites.

Visitor information services are provided through Visitor Information Centres operated by Shropshire Council in some but not all of the market towns. Ludlow has a dedicated VIC, with year round opening including summer Sundays. Arrangements are in place for the shared use of appropriate service facilities in Church Stretton and Much Wenlock, where opening hours are a little more limited in winter. The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre is open daily all year; a visitor information service is provided although for some reason the centre is not included in the official list of Visitor Information Centres for the County. Over the border in Knighton, a Tourist Information Centre is located in the Offa's Dyke Centre. Elsewhere, in Bishop's Castle, Clun and Cleobury Mortimer, Visitor Information Points are provided through ad hoc arrangements with commercial premises or community facilities, although no such arrangement is in place for some towns.

Shropshire Council is involved in providing information about opportunities for walking, cycling and riding, including dedicated websites [www.shropshirewalking.co.uk](http://www.shropshirewalking.co.uk) (currently under further development), [www.shropshirecycling.co.uk](http://www.shropshirecycling.co.uk) and [www.shropshireriding.co.uk](http://www.shropshireriding.co.uk), together with a Discover Shropshire website covering a broader range of information.

## **2.4 Tourism performance and the visitor response**

Information on tourism performance and visitors to the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow is available from a range of sources, including the 2011 survey of enterprises, a visitor survey in 2007, economic impact assessments in 2005, research commissioned by the former Shropshire Tourism Research Unit, and VisitEngland research and intelligence.

### ***The volume and value of tourism***

In 2005, Shropshire Tourism Research Unit commissioned a series of reports on the Volume and Value of tourism in the County, and in the individual Districts. The opportunity was also taken to apply the same desk placed methodology to the Shropshire Hills AONB. Although there is some overlap between South Shropshire District and the AONB, the different geographic areas have different characteristics which emerge in the figures.

Tourism in South Shropshire was worth £116.7m and supported approximately 3,500 jobs in total<sup>3</sup>, representing 21% of the value of tourism to the whole of Shropshire. 37% of the value of tourism in South Shropshire was generated by overnight visitors, who made up 10% of the visitors.

Tourism in the Shropshire Hills AONB was worth £126.9m and supported approximately 2780 jobs in total<sup>4</sup>, representing 23% of the value of tourism to the whole of Shropshire. 23% of the value of tourism in the Shropshire Hills AONB was generated by overnight visitors, who made up just 3% of the visitors.

It can be seen that day visitors, especially day visitors to the countryside, were of relatively greater importance to tourism in the AONB than in the South Shropshire District.

The importance of tourism to southern parts of Shropshire is especially great as it is one of just a small number of economic sectors that are appropriate to the rural economy in this special landscape.

More recent figures for overnight tourism in the county of Shropshire as a whole are available from the series of data from the United Kingdom Tourism Survey and the International Passenger Survey. These demand-side figures have recently become available at a county level, based on averaging annual data for 2006-2009. These figures indicate an annual spend for Shropshire of £146m by domestic overnight visitors and £34m by international visitors. This somewhat lower figure than the 2005 figure for overnight visitors of £215.6m almost certainly reflects a different approach to measurement rather than a downward trend.

### ***Visitor profiles***

The Shropshire Visitor Survey 2007 was analysed separately for those visitors who were interviewed at a range of locations across the Shropshire Hills AONB. The results indicate:

- A relatively high dependence on day visits (62% of all visitors)
- Strong representation of repeat visitors (83% of all visitors, 62% of staying visitors)
- A high representation of couples amongst staying visitors (49%), with a strong focus (55%) on those aged 45+

Comparing results with those for the County as a whole indicates:

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<sup>3</sup> South Shropshire Tourism Economic Impact Assessment 2005, Heart of England Tourist Board,, 2007

<sup>4</sup> Shropshire Hills AONB Area Tourism Economic Impact Assessment 2005 Final Report, Heart of England Tourist Board, 2007

- A high representation of ABC1s amongst visitors to the Shropshire Hills AONB (74% in the AONB; 66% for Shropshire as a whole)
- A reasonable length of stay (4.5 nights), which can perhaps be explained by a significant proportion of staying visitors using non-serviced accommodation (38% in the AONB; 27% for Shropshire as whole)
- Walking/hiking as the activity most frequently undertaken (80%) and the most important main activity (57%) in the AONB. The proportion of visitors to the AONB undertaking walking as their principal activity is substantially higher than for the county as a whole, where it is just 12%.

33% of all overnight UK visitors across the County included walking amongst activities enjoyed during their stay.

Evidence from our enterprise survey is generally in line with the 2007 Visitor Survey, indicating that the customer profile of visitors to the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow includes a high proportion of couples (64% of staying visitors are couples), a good spread between first time visitors and repeat visitors (3 out of 10 staying visitors are first time visitors), and some tendency towards short breaks (3 out of 5 overnight trips are 1-3 nights).

The National Trust has developed a methodology for segmenting their visitors, based on motivation (from social to stimulating) and mindset (from confident and self-sufficient to strongly influenced by the opinion of others). Findings from a 2008 survey in Carding Mill Valley can be set alongside a national profile of visitors to National Trust properties, as shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Visitors to Carding Mill Valley by National Trust segment**

National Trust segment	Carding Mill Valley	All National Trust properties
Out and Abouts	16%	25%
Explorer Families	16%	22%
Curious Minds	43%	16%
Home and Family	-	14%
Kids First Family	-	11%
Live Life to the Full	11%	9%
Young Experience Seekers	1%	3%

Visitors to Carding Mill Valley are more likely to be looking for something more challenging and stimulating from their day out than National Trust visitors in general: 'Curious Minds' and 'Live Life to the Full', segments which are strongly represented at Carding Mill Valley, are both at this end of the motivation spectrum. Families in general are under-represented at Carding Mill Valley although those Explorer Families that are present are again positioned towards a stimulating Mindset.

It is not possible to say to what extent visitors to Carding Mill Valley can be taken as representative of visitors to the wider destination of Shropshire Hills and Ludlow. However, it is reasonable to expect that there will be a broad similarity.

### ***Visitor response to the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow***

Investigation of the 2007 Visitor Survey results across the whole County suggests that there are important differences between the activities and likes of different kinds of visitors. For example, Table 2.2 indicates unprompted responses to what visitors across the County like about Shropshire.

**Table 2.2 Activities and likes of visitors to Shropshire, by visitor segment**

	Total	Day Visitors	Touring UK	Overnight UK	Overseas Visitors
Rural/Countryside/Nature	23%	19%	24%	32%	25%
Scenery/Views	15%	14%	15%	21%	15%
Shops/Choice of/type of	15%	17%	13%	9%	12%
Peaceful/quiet/relaxed	13%	12%	10%	19%	7%
Historical / old	12%	9%	17%	13%	32%
Buildings/architecture	7%	6%	11%	7%	23%

Source: Shropshire Visitor Survey 2007

Across all categories, the countryside/rural/nature featured heavily as did the scenery/views.

- Day visitors stated **rural/countryside/nature (19%)**, **shops/choice of (17%)** and **scenery/views (14%)** as the top three elements of the county.
- Touring UK visitors stated that they liked the **rural/countryside/nature (24%)**; **historical/old (17%)** and thought the area had **good scenery/views (15%)**
- Overnight UK visitors liked the **rural/countryside/nature (32%)**, the **scenery/views (21%)** and that the area was **peaceful/quiet/relaxed (19%)**.
- Overseas visitors liked the **historical/old (32%)** aspect of the county, the **rural/countryside/nature (25%)**, and the **buildings/architecture (23%)** in the county.

The 2008 Shropshire Tourism Market Review made a number of suggestions about the positioning of Shropshire, including:

- Countryside and countryside activities (especially walking) probably merit more prominent coverage in both the web and brochure. The countryside is one of Shropshire's major assets and walking as an activity in Shropshire is as popular (if not more) than visiting an attraction and almost as popular as shopping.
- 'Rest and relaxation' will vary in the degree of activity, and for many people will involve gentle to moderate walking.
- Food and drink are also major strengths and should continue to be emphasized.
- Surprising, undiscovered, varied (in terms of landscape and walking offer) are strong messages for the county.
- The use of green and organic messages should be given more consideration. There are attractive associations to be made but these need to be supported by a reality and there needs to be clarity in messages.
- Attributes in relation to the landscape – beautiful, varied, rugged and gentle – should be included in the positioning and messaging of Shropshire as a destination.

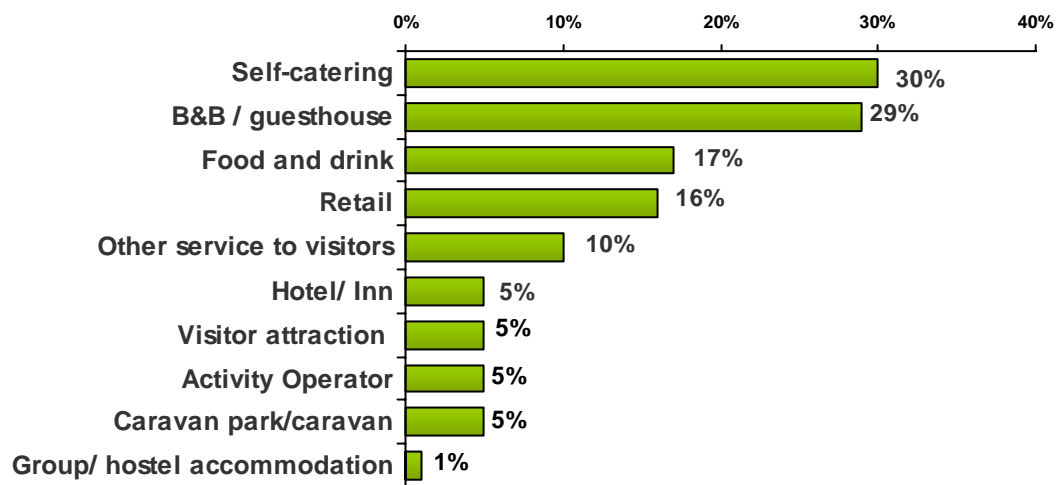
## 2.5 Enterprise needs and aspirations

### *Economic performance and outlook*

The 123 survey respondents appear to be a good reflection of the spread, size and quality of tourism businesses known to be present in the area. Representation from self-catering and smaller serviced accommodation was roughly equal and high, while only a very small number of hotels and caravan sites were present. There was quite

a strong response to the survey from food and drink and retail enterprises. This is shown in Figure 2.1

Figure 2.1 Survey respondents by category of business



Results from the enterprise survey suggest that:

- The tourism sector in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow has been standing up pretty well to the recession. More than twice as many tourism enterprises have seen a growth in business in the last three years (43%) as have seen a decline (19%).
- However, a significant number of enterprises indicate that further growth in business is seen as essential (23%) or necessary (22%) for them, with 41% saying that it would provide them with welcome additional income.
- One third of tourism enterprises are looking for more business in every single month of the year, rising to two thirds of businesses in January, February, March and November.
- Quality grading was high, with strong representation from enterprises graded 4\* or higher.
- The landscape of the Shropshire Hills is considered as very important in attracting customers to the area by a very large majority (82%) of enterprises, while the market towns (77%) are felt to be almost as important.
- Amongst respondents who were involved in any tourism association or network, over one half were members of Shropshire Tourism or Shropshire Hills Tourism.
- Awareness of the Shropshire Hills as an AONB is high, recognised by every enterprise responding to the survey.
- There was a strong showing of members of the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme amongst those responding to the survey and a high degree of commitment to improving the environmental management of businesses and, in particular, of the use of local produce.
- 32 businesses were members of Walkers Welcome and 19 were members of Cyclists Welcome.

### **Barriers and influence on business**

Over one half (56%) of enterprises had proposals or aspirations to develop or expand. The main barriers to improved performance and growth were seen as a combination of not enough tourists and increasing operating costs.

Planning restrictions on new development were seen as significant or very significant by a minority of enterprises (23%), while lack of capital was seen as a more significant barrier.

The ability to recruit suitable staff was considered very significant or significant by 24% of businesses, although it is important to remember that many enterprises may not employ staff at all.

### ***Priorities seen for the destination***

The enterprise survey asked tourism businesses to score a whole range of ways in which the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow might be managed and promoted for economic and environmentally sustainable tourism, first for the current performance of the area as a destination, and second as an indication of the importance to their business.

The three areas in which businesses thought that the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow currently performs best as a destination were: conserving the area's landscape and wildlife; identification and promotion of local produce; and information on where to go, what to do, post-arrival.

Further analysis of the full list of actions enables the identification of the performance gap, the lag between the importance ascribed by businesses to an action and the perception of how well it currently performs in the destination.

Actions where the gap is greatest at the moment, and therefore seen by businesses as a high priority, include:

- Providing basic visitor services (eg car parking/toilets)
- Attracting visitors at less busy times of year
- Providing and promoting public transport
- Managing promotional campaigns for the area
- Spreading visitor spending across the area.

A more detailed selection from the results is shown in Appendix One.

## **2.6 Challenges and opportunities**

A wide range of views was expressed by individual consultees, in writing and through one-to-one interviews, as well as at local meetings and the final stakeholder workshop.

Key points are summarised below.

### ***Product strengths and challenges***

- The visitor offer of the Shropshire Hills is diverse and complex; there is a need for this to be better joined up, intellectually and physically.
- The natural assets of the Shropshire Hills are seen as a major strength and well managed, but widely considered to be underplayed in the promotion of Shropshire.
- The role of Ludlow in relation to the wider area of the Shropshire Hills works two ways: its recognition outside the area certainly attracts new visitors to the

Shropshire Hills but does it attract too much attention at the expense of the wider destination?

- The market towns are felt to have a strong impact on visitors, most often positive (character, friendly, quality of built environment, retail experience etc.) but occasionally negative (care of public realm, empty shops).
- Across the whole area, there is a common concern with the importance of connecting individual towns with the surrounding hills. This involves raising awareness of the proximity of the different experiences on offer and also creating physical connectivity.
- Food, historic heritage and events are seen as significant drivers of visits.
- Certain businesses are capable in their own right of bringing visitors to the Shropshire Hills and do not rely on destination marketing. Examples include Acton Scott Historic Working Farm; Upper Norton (Holiday Property Bond); the Hurst (Arvon Foundation); and some individual food establishments.
- Within southern Shropshire, there is widespread recognition of the importance of walking opportunities within a stunning landscape as a driver of visits, with a desire for this to be strongly reflected in the promotion of Shropshire.
- The range of experiences based on and around the landscape, countryside traditions and rural skills combine to give a strong visitor offer including opportunities for challenging physical activities as well as recreational, or vocational, learning.
- The combined richness of both natural and cultural heritage is a great strength but difficult to convey. There is felt to be a need for this to be somehow reflected in a single identity for the area.

### ***Performance and sustainability***

- Awareness of Shropshire as a whole, and of the Shropshire Hills in particular, is perceived as low despite a relatively central location and good access to centres of population.
- There is considerable uncertainty amongst tourism businesses over the reliability of the existing market for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow in a time of recession.
- Seasonality is an issue for many businesses, especially for businesses with high costs of investment to recover. The area is well-placed to welcome visitors out of season, although many visitor attractions are closed in winter.
- There is some concern that the reputation of the destination and the high quality achieved by some tourism providers can be let down by inconsistency in quality of the whole visitor experience.
- The need for balance and mutual support between the needs of the industry, communities and the environment is well understood by tourism businesses.
- The countryside is seen as under-used and, with the exception of a very small number of sites on particular days of the year, as capable of being enjoyed by a greater number of visitors. However, peace and quiet is seen as a precious asset which requires careful management.
- Good progress has been made on embedding sustainability in the tourism offer, including through the support of the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme.
- Scarce or infrequent public transport is a limiting factor for some tourism businesses and towns wishing to promote accessibility and strengthen their environmental credentials; there is a continuing need to manage movement around the destination through increasing the availability and appeal of alternative means of travel to the car (public transport, walking, cycling).



- There is a need to improve connection and communication so that all those involved across the area in any aspect of tourism can work together for mutual benefit.

## **2.7 External influences on the market and product**

It is important for the tourism strategy to look externally at a range of factors that are influencing the market and potential response from destinations. These are summarised below.

### **Recession and domestic holidaymaking**

The economic recession and public sector cuts will have an effect on the supply and demand of tourism over a number of years. On the supply side, restrictions of public sector spending on infrastructure, marketing and business support point to the need to strengthen engagement by the voluntary and private sectors. On the demand side, there are signs that people are resisting losing their holidays but rather are changing their travel patterns, providing opportunities for the domestic market. Domestic holiday tourism nights in England experienced an uplift of 19% in 2009; this has dropped back in 2010 but levels are still well above anything seen in recent years. However levels of spending may have reduced, with an increase in interest in less expensive facilities offering good value; growth has been particularly strong in trips involving self-catering accommodation, and caravan and camping.

### **Countryside holidays**

Holidays to the UK countryside have been on the rise. Holiday trips to the countryside increased 22% between 2006 and 2009, and were more likely to be 4+ nights than all trips (44% cf 36%). Recent research from Visit England found that longer breaks and countryside destinations deliver the best-rated experiences, and that holidays involving outdoor leisure pursuits and exploring the countryside are rated most highly. Countryside destinations are seen as delivering especially well on good quality accommodation, unspoilt countryside, welcoming and friendly people and a good range of local produce. Visitors are seen as motivated by authenticity and sense of place.

### **Population dynamics**

The UK population is growing slowly but becoming older. Empty nesters of the baby boom era have been brought up to travel and will be reluctant to give this up, but may have to work longer to fund their retirement and have more limited discretionary spending power. At the other end of the spectrum, there is some evidence that younger (18-34 yr olds) in particular have been switching to domestic holidays.

### **The search for activities and experiences**

Attitudes towards holiday taking are changing and consumers are wanting to get more value out their leisure time and pack more in. There is a trend to being more adventurous on holiday, seeking and trying out new activities, including different outdoor sports as well as walking and cycling. Some people are looking for experiences tailor-made to their own interests, even within the same family group.

### **Green and ethical influences**

There has been a rise in the ethically motivated consumer and an increased interest in environmental issues. People want to feel good about their choices. In only a small minority of cases is environmentally and socially responsible travel dictating holiday choice, but for many it is now an additional factor taken into account when

other needs are met. Research by VisitEngland in 2010<sup>5</sup> found that the majority of consumers are happy to accept functional sustainable elements as part of their holiday, such as re-using towels or accepting a room with a shower rather than a bath. Over half would choose accommodation with a green award. More directly, there is a notable increase in positive interest in wildlife, partly stimulated by media coverage.

### **Local distinctiveness**

In the face of globalisation and concentration, visitors are likely to become more attracted by destinations that can demonstrate their differences and special qualities and which offer visitors the opportunity to experience them. VisitEngland research<sup>6</sup> found that over half of consumers would choose accommodation supplying local food. On the other hand, brands are becoming increasingly important, conveying messages quickly and providing reassurance and familiarity in an era of seemingly limitless choice, suggesting the need for brands which convey locally distinctive values.

### **The evolving internet**

The internet now dominates holiday choice and information delivery. The growth of Web 2.0 technology, travel networking websites and social media have important implications for customer feedback, reviews and broadening the scope of 'word of mouth' marketing.

### **Mobile technology**

This provides a new dimension for more instant information delivery within the destination as well as ways of enhancing the visitor experience through creative interpretation applications. Lack of fast broadband connections and access to mobile networks is an issue in parts of the Shropshire Hills.

### **Climate change**

Extremes and unpredictability of weather conditions will affect basic conditions for tourism. This may have a positive or negative impact on different seasons, altering travel patterns. The effect of mitigation policies and measures, including meeting national carbon reduction targets, will also influence supply and demand.

### **Barriers to travel**

Traffic congestion will get worse which may result in an increase in travel costs through plans for road pricing and other initiatives. The real environmental cost of flying may lead to further rises in fares and taxes which will affect both inbound and outbound tourism. As an antidote to this, 'slow travel' by public transport, on foot or by bike or horse may become an attractive proposition in its own right. Research by VisitEngland<sup>7</sup> found that the majority of visitors claim that they would be more likely to use public transport to travel to their destination or to travel around when on holiday if sufficient incentives were available (reduced cost/greater convenience/better information). Increasing fuel prices may become even more significant factor in the choice of travel mode.

### **Competitive destinations**

There is increasing competition in the UK and overseas between local destinations which have their own web presence. Those that are able to present strong brands and products, supported by partnership working between the public and private

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<sup>5</sup> Sustainability – Consumer Research, Summary of Findings, VisitEngland, 2010

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Sustainability – Consumer Research, Summary of Findings, VisitEngland, 2010

sectors, will be the most successful. Of 36 'Attract Brands' identified by VisitEngland, only Birmingham and that part of the Peak District which is in Staffordshire, are in the West Midlands.

## 2.8 SWOT analysis

Based on the above assessment and knowledge and opinion gained from the consultation, the following summary analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for sustainable tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow over the coming five years should be reflected in the strategy moving forward.

<b>Shropshire Hills and Ludlow as a tourism destination</b>	
<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stunning and varied upland landscape with extensive views</li> <li>• Attractive historic towns and pretty villages</li> <li>• Historic landscape features (hill forts/castles/mining heritage) associated with border heritage and geological diversity</li> <li>• Good rail access to A49 corridor</li> <li>• Extensive access network, including long distance promoted routes</li> <li>• Excellent local food and drink producers</li> <li>• Lots of local festivals and events</li> <li>• Wide range of accommodation choices</li> <li>• Improving quality of accommodation offer, with strong presence of 4* enterprises</li> <li>• High national profile for Ludlow</li> <li>• Network of local tourism groups/associations</li> <li>• Many distinctive visitor attractions, with special emphasis on built heritage</li> <li>• Environmentally conscious businesses and some great environmental/low impact tourism offers</li> <li>• Network of Visitor Information Centres/Points (but some gaps)</li> <li>• Interesting wildlife (no iconic species but some special habitats/sights)</li> <li>• Tranquillity and dark skies</li> <li>• Many arts/crafts/skills courses</li> <li>• Parts of the area within easy reach of large population centres</li> <li>• Diversity/variety of the area (based on underlying geology)</li> <li>• "Untouristiness", authenticity and friendly people</li> <li>• Shropshire Hills Shuttle Buses</li> <li>• Relatively inexpensive – good value for money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry fragmented - most tourism businesses very small and busy, some borderline viable</li> <li>• Some lifestyle businesses – not all aspire to maximise business or wish to engage</li> <li>• Public transport access to much of the area is poor and alternatives including taxis are also limited in some areas</li> <li>• Variability of country pubs; some very good but others poor and struggling</li> <li>• Limited accommodation for larger groups (more small group potential)</li> <li>• Lack of relationship with any of Visit England 'Attract Brands'; low awareness nationally of Shropshire as a whole</li> <li>• AONB not as well known as National Parks and some other scenic areas</li> <li>• Diversity difficult to encompass within one identity for the area.</li> <li>• Residual issues with variable quality of some accommodation</li> <li>• Fragmented offer – limited packaging currently</li> <li>• Festivals and events very dependent on volunteers and not always well publicised</li> <li>• Limited funds for marketing outside county.</li> <li>• Limited alignment of Shropshire PR with strengths of Shropshire Hills</li> <li>• Seasonal visitor patterns (worse in some areas than others)</li> <li>• Joint working and communications can be challenging – difficult to get businesses to work together</li> <li>• Some parts of the area are relatively remote (but this can be seen as a strength)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively limited wet weather options</li> <li>• Issues re online skills and capacity</li> <li>• Areas of poor access to broadband, mobile phone signal</li> <li>• Few overseas visitors – varied nationalities and distribution</li> <li>• Withdrawal of support for visitor services such as public conveniences</li> <li>• Lack of recognition of the importance of tourism in some parts of the area</li> <li>• Lack of engagement from retail and catering sectors</li> <li>• Limited visibility of environmental/low impact tourism offers</li> <li>• Ludlow not well integrated with its surrounding landscape and other towns</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market town revitalisation programme (subject to investment priorities of individual towns)</li> <li>• Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme/Walking with Offa as Phase 1</li> <li>• Recent and new partnership arrangements for management of significant and extensive landscape areas</li> <li>• Stiperstones NNR chosen by Natural England as one of 15 Destination NNRs</li> <li>• Outstanding major funding applications (HLF etc.) are successful</li> <li>• Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, should it choose to engage with tourism issues</li> <li>• Association with family of protected areas along the border as fellow holders of European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas</li> <li>• Public awareness of area increased through TV/film exposure (eg Acton Scott Historic Working Farm/Wroxeter Roman Villa/Atonement)</li> <li>• Public awareness of area increased through association of Much Wenlock with 2012 Olympics</li> <li>• Increasing importance of authenticity and sense of place in attracting and satisfying visitors</li> <li>• Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme further develops its role as a driver of sustainability and sense of place in general, and use of local produce in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncertainty over future pattern of domestic tourism demand</li> <li>• Outstanding major funding applications (HLF etc.) are not successful</li> <li>• Intrusive development outside (or even inside) AONB eg wind turbines, large agricultural buildings</li> <li>• Withdrawal/reduction of public services (eg public toilets/maintenance of rights of way/public transport/information/interpretation) impacts on provision for visitors/visitor satisfaction</li> <li>• Over-dependence on contribution of community/volunteers – becomes a burden</li> <li>• Re-structuring of tourism support and delivery services at all levels results in less well organised/supported sector</li> <li>• Political decision to re-visit sale of public forests and/or National Nature Reserves</li> <li>• Competition from other parts of Shropshire attracting investment/attention eg Shropshire Way focus now in north of county, National Trust to Dudmaston</li> <li>• Deterioration of understanding and co-ordination between public and private sectors</li> <li>• Erosion of services important to local communities (eg pubs) and possible collapse of vulnerable local economies</li> </ul>

<p>particular</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Domestic overnight tourism holding up nationally in small market towns better than other locations</li><li>• AB overnight trips in UK have been least affected by recession; ABC1s strongly represented amongst visitors to Shropshire Hills</li><li>• Shropshire Walking website development, which will include new map-based information on visitor services</li><li>• Specific potential developments eg Wenlock Quarries</li></ul>	
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## 3 STRATEGY

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This section presents the overall strategic direction for tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow from 2011 to 2015. It is informed closely by the analysis contained in the previous section. It is written to be in line with the requirements of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and the current policy context for tourism in England and the local area.

### 3.1 Policy context

#### *The European context*

The European Union's **Political Framework for Tourism in Europe** (2010) emphasises competitiveness plus sustainability of destinations. It calls for stronger images, product diversification and innovation in destinations and measures to promote sustainability and tackle seasonality. It builds on the European Commission's earlier work on sustainable tourism policy and action<sup>8</sup>.

The **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas** is recognised as an exemplary framework for sustainable tourism in destinations.

The Charter has two underlying aims:

- To increase awareness of, and support for, Europe's protected areas as a fundamental part of our heritage, that should be preserved for, and enjoyed by, current and future generations.
- To improve the sustainable development and management of tourism in protected areas, which takes account of the needs of the environment, local residents, local businesses and visitors.

This strategy has been designed to meet the requirements of the Charter. The Charter requires that each park has:

- A stakeholder forum to guide tourism, including representative of the park, tourism businesses, local communities and conservation interests
- A sustainable tourism strategy and five year action plan
- Actions which reflect the Charter principles.

The ten principles of the Charter are as follows:

1. To involve all those implicated by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management.
2. To prepare and implement a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area.
3. To protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development.
4. To provide all visitors with a high quality experience in all aspects of their visit.
5. To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area.

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<sup>8</sup> *Action for More Sustainable European Tourism*, European Commission Tourism Sustainability Group, 2007

6. To encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area.
7. To increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism.
8. To ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents.
9. To increase benefits from tourism to the local economy.
10. To monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts.

The Charter also encourages protected areas to recognise tourism enterprises which pursue sustainability and are committed to the park's objectives and strategy.

### ***The national context***

The **Government Tourism Policy**, published by DCMS on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2011, confirms the importance of tourism to the growth agenda in delivering jobs and growth across Britain and sets out an agenda for cross-Government working. The policy recognises that England must broaden its offer so that other parts of the country can match the performance of London. VisitEngland has responded by stating its intention to ensure continued improvement of the visitor product throughout England. A new All-England Marketing Strategy will be seeking to deliver a step change in consumers' attitudes and propensity to holidaying in England.

VisitEngland has adopted a **Strategic Framework for 2010-2020**. The overall vision for the Framework is *'to maximise tourism's contribution to the economy, employment and quality of life in England'* with a target for growth of 5% on average year on year over ten years.

The Strategic Framework aims to achieve four independent objectives:

1. To increase England's share of global visitor markets.
2. To offer visitors compelling destinations of distinction.
3. To champion a successful, thriving tourism industry.
4. To facilitate greater engagement between the visitor and the experience.

There is an especially good fit for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow with the second and fourth objective. Given current volumes of overseas visitors, southern Shropshire is least well placed to contribute to the first of these objectives.

As part of the process of moving forward on the Strategic Framework, earlier this year Visit England put a suite of draft action plans out for consultation. Consultation closed in mid-March and the revised plans are expected to be published in June 2011. These emerging national plans indicate issues and priorities which local destinations should perhaps consider in their own policy formulation, and also help local destinations to identify which strengths of their own are likely to put them in a good position to benefit from, and contribute to, any new emphasis in national support for tourism product and marketing. Two in particular, the Wise Growth Action Plan and the Rural Tourism Action Plan, have a potential bearing on the sustainable tourism strategy for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow.

The **Wise Growth Tourism Action Plan** (draft) has a vision of *'growing tourism responsibly in a finite world, creating resilience and prosperity for all'*. It takes a broad view of sustainable tourism, seeking to see all tourism policies embrace these values.

Six objectives have been identified, as follows:

1. Ensure Wise Growth is the building block for all tourism plans in England in both public and private sectors delivering action not just rhetoric.
2. Improve the understanding and communication of sustainability to ensure that Wise Growth in tourism can be fully realised by a variety of stakeholders.
3. Establish mechanisms that enable the effective engagement of visitors and residents in cherishing the places they visit and live.
4. Improve the resilience of businesses and destinations through the dissemination of appropriate tools and programmes.
5. Articulate the business case for Wise Growth throughout the visitor economy through an effective process of dissemination and interpretation.
6. Measure, report and communicate the impacts of our sector with transparency to encourage Wise Growth.

The **Rural Tourism Plan** (draft) has been developed 'to drive improvement in ...this core area... of the English holiday experience.'<sup>9</sup> Its Vision '*to grow the value of tourism in rural areas to support the economy and local communities and contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment*' is very well suited to the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow as a destination. As a sector of the tourism industry which is already demonstrating good growth, rural tourism is expected to make a strong contribution to the overall growth target for tourism in England.

Three objectives have been identified, as follows:

1. To diversify and modernise rural tourism products to generate more year round visitor experiences and business opportunities suited to local environments and communities.
2. To increase consumer awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the products and experiences available in rural areas.
3. To ensure rural economies and communities, through a practical and reasonable mechanism, understand and contribute to the protection and conservation of rural tourism assets.

The Rural Tourism Action Plan recognises that designated landscapes, such as the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, are rural tourism assets and points out the dependence of the tourism economy on the special qualities of place that provide the context and setting for many rural tourism enterprises.

### ***The regional context***

Regional programmes and programmes determined at a regional level (Advantage West Midlands (AWM), Natural Assets, Rural Development Programme England

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<sup>9</sup> [www.visitengland.org/england-tourism-industry/gov\\_tourism\\_policy/](http://www.visitengland.org/england-tourism-industry/gov_tourism_policy/) Seen 20/04/2011



(RDPE)) have provided the majority of discretionary funds for tourism support and investment in recent years.

Regional organisations are in a state of flux, with the closure in March 2012 of Advantage West Midlands (AWM), the Regional Development Agency, and the transfer of economic development and social and physical regeneration to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and other successor bodies. Other regional agencies which impact on tourism, such as Defra and the Arts Council, have undergone re-organisation or experienced reduction in available budgets.

The West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy (2008) identified the Shires, led by Shropshire and Herefordshire, and the Shire Towns, including Ludlow, as key place brands in the West Midlands. Of the four Market Growth Opportunities identified for the region, three apply strongly to the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow: Food and Drink; Culture (including heritage); and Festivals and Events. However, the planned closure of AWM leaves the strategy without a champion.

The Shropshire Hills and Ludlow will be included within the new Marches LEP, which is still in its early stages of development with little as yet available by way of official indication of its future direction. However, it is anticipated that tourism will be one of the sectors with which it will engage. Visit England have been proactive in presenting tourism opportunities available to the new LEPs. As part of British Tourism Week, representatives of all of the new LEPs across England were invited to the Cambridge Summit 2011 to hear the Prince of Wales and the Minister for Tourism set out their support and commitment to tourism, while key figures from Visit England set out the benefits of integrating tourism into local economic planning and the tools in place to support LEPs.

An additional regional activity has been the cross-border activity associated with the Strategic Regeneration Programme which was established in 2009 with funding from Natural England, Advantage West Midlands and West Midlands Regional Assembly in England, and Welsh Assembly Government in Wales, to assess the opportunities to develop a more sustainable rural economy based on the high quality natural and cultural aspects of Offa's Dyke and the surrounding landscape.

One thematic intervention identifies the potential to strengthen the existing tourism offer in the England-Wales border areas, creating a distinctive sustainable tourism offer that supports and promotes the local brands.

A special role is given to the four protected areas in 'Offa's Country' and specific objectives include:

- To increase cooperation between Local Action Groups, the Protected Landscapes organisations and the National Trail both within and beyond Wales by exchanging best practice, discussing ideas and identifying opportunities where joint working can address issues and achieve added value outcomes.
- To work with project partners to improve the quality of the sustainable visitor experience across Offa's Country, with easier access and information, interesting interpretation, a range of excellent outdoor activity opportunities and good quality facilities.
- To develop a common approach to the application of the 'Walkers are Welcome' programme; undertake a joint programme of exchange visits, networking events and associated training programmes to achieve added value and maximum benefit of partnership working.

- To use joint working to produce a communications and associated action plan for Offa's Country as well as a public transport study and sustainable transport information within the specified area to share best practice.

### ***The sub-regional context***

Shropshire Council has been in place as a unitary authority for two years. There has been no new tourism strategy for Shropshire since 2004. However, policy development at a higher level has begun to indicate the future direction of tourism policy in the County.

In December 2010, Shropshire Council published an assessment of economic conditions in the County, **Spotlight on the Shropshire Economy**. The importance of tourism to the Shropshire economy is shown to be relatively greater than it is to the regional or national economies, and also to that of any of its statistical neighbours other than Devon or Dorset. Figures are presented which demonstrate the particular importance of tourism in the south of the county, where it accounts for more than one in 10 workplaces and for 12.8% of employment.

The 'extremely important' contribution of tourism is acknowledged, and the Shropshire Hills AONB is specifically recognised as 'a very valuable tourism destination'. Four aspects of the county are singled out for special mention as contributing to the county's tourism offer, of which one is the County town of Shrewsbury; the remaining three are of particular significance to the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow: the landscape, the network of historic market towns, and the reputation for high quality food and drink. Amongst opportunities for the economic future of the County, the report points out that its tourism and leisure potential could be further exploited by extending the holiday season, encouraging visitors to stay longer and spend more, and by developing more niche markets to widen Shropshire's appeal. The food and drink sector is seen as a particular strength, and there is a special window associated with the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games. Identified weaknesses include low awareness of Shropshire generally, the inadequacy of broadband connections and speed, and the lack of a universal mobile phone network.

The **Shropshire Core Strategy**, adopted in 2011, provides the first indications of policy direction for tourism in Shropshire. This is the principal document of the Shropshire Local Development Framework and has the principle of sustainable development at its heart. Tourism is recognised as an important part of the local economy, based on its appeal as a tranquil rural area with attractive countryside and high quality local food products, where a range of leisure activities such as walking and cycling can be enjoyed.

A more detailed exposition of the overall vision for 'A flourishing Shropshire' highlights the ambition to raise the profile of the county as a tourism destination, capitalising on its unique landscape and heritage assets without damaging their value for residents and visitors. Specific reference is made to maintaining and managing the quality of the landscape, geodiversity and biodiversity of the Shropshire Hills AONB. One of the 12 strategic objectives relates to diversification of the rural economy, including sustainable tourism, 'ensuring that development proposals are appropriate in their scale and nature with the character and quality of their location'.

Finally, the **Countryside Access Strategy** for Shropshire 2008-18 has a primary objective to 'increase and improve opportunities for everyone to access Shropshire's

hills, woodlands and watersides and to balance this with conserving what makes them special.'

### **Shropshire Hills AONB context**

The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty covers almost one quarter of the county of Shropshire. The AONB national designation conveys a principal purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty, but AONBs must also promote sustainable development, meet the demand for recreation and take account of the economic and social needs of local communities. Their work is carried out through the AONB Partnership, which co-ordinates delivery of the **Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan**.

The current plan runs from 2009 to 2014, and Objective 18 outlines the desired approach to tourism development: for the Shropshire Hills *'To develop and support sustainable tourism strongly linked to the landscape of the Shropshire Hills, including policy, facilities and services, and approaches to marketing.'* However, other objectives of the Management Plan have potential influence on the shape of tourism. For example, Objectives 27 and 33 in relation to raising awareness of the special qualities of the AONB, developing sense of place and strengthening the 'Shropshire Hills' identity; Objectives 14, 15 and 17 in relation to local food production, supply chains, consumer demand and connection to the landscape; and Objectives 25 and 26 in relation to environmentally sound leisure and recreation activity, combined with reducing dependence on the private car.

## **3.2 Target markets**

A number of factors determine the identification of target markets for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow. These include:

- Fit with the strengths, products and location of the destination
- Growth trends and potential
- Ability to reach and influence cost effectively
- Relevance to the strategic objectives.

A market research study undertaken by TEAM Tourism in 2005 provided insights into Shropshire's leisure tourism markets and motivations. The key pulls to the county were identified as Ironbridge, Ludlow and Shrewsbury, followed by the Shropshire Hills. It was recommended that destination marketing activity should focus on staying (short break/additional holiday) visitors and that the core target market for Shropshire should be 'rest and relaxation Traditionals'. This group was described as typically 46 – 64, post family, and ABC1.

In 2008, TEAM was invited by Shropshire Tourism Research Unit to revisit their findings in the light of any subsequent changes that may have occurred. The Shropshire Tourism Market Review suggested that two further target market segments, Discoverers and Cosmopolitans, should be considered. These two segments were described as having a similar life profile to Traditionals, but looking for an increasingly active experience.

There is a strong fit with current marketing segmentation for England. The three priority segments from the ArkLeisure model identified in the recent draft marketing strategy for England are Cosmopolitans, Discoverers and Traditionals. This offers an opportunity for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow to consider how they can gain benefit

from this wider promotion to encourage consumers to get out and about and enjoy England.

**Cosmopolitans (57% ABC1 Adults):**

18% of UK population. Segment most likely to have taken an English holiday or break in past 12 months. Strong, active and confident individuals who do what they want rather than follow any particular fashion. Cosmopolitans desire things that are new and different and provide them with new challenges, both physical and intellectual. They enjoy active holidays, holidays with a theme, getting off the beaten track. Cosmopolitans are younger, more likely to be under 45, and interest in sustainable holiday behaviour is high amongst this group.

Thematic profile for their last break: City breaks (37%), **Countryside (36%), Events (24%)**

**Discoverers (54% ABC1 Adults):**

13% of UK population. Independent of mind and least likely to be worried about what others might think. Function far outweighs style as a purchase driver. They value good service, live a relatively relaxed pace of life and enjoy intellectual challenges. Discoverers enjoy a mix of activities and are as likely to visit museums, as they are wildlife attractions and funfairs as well as sporting events and eating out.

Thematic profile for their last break: **Outdoor leisure and countryside (37%), Seaside/coast (37%). Small towns also scored highly**

**Traditionals (43% C1C2, 36% DE):**

11% of UK population. Traditionals are relatively self-reliant. Functionality is far more important than fashion. They are also often modest spenders, slow to choose expensive alternatives. They value good service, by which they mean personal recognition and attention. They live life at a relaxed pace and enjoy intellectual challenges, arts and culture.

Thematic profile for their last break: **Heritage and history (39%), Countryside (51%)**

The following target markets are proposed for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow for 2011 – 2016:

***Primary target markets***

- **Domestic short breaks and holidays - Couples post-family**  
A flexible market, containing all three of the above attitudinal segments. Can be high spending and prepared to travel at all times of the year on multiple trips. Empty-nesters and early retired perhaps most active. Enjoy gentle exploring, walking, cycling, nature, gardens, cultural heritage. Quality of accommodation, food and service is important. Couples travelling together with others in small groups of friends can be important. This loyal market will make repeat visits once they find somewhere they enjoy.
- **Domestic short breaks - Couples pre-family**  
Cosmopolitans and Discoverers looking for a more active weekend break, combining outdoor activities with good food and quality accommodation. Can be high spending and looking for different experiences and alternatives to a European break. Ludlow is likely to appeal, and also some events. Enjoy active walking and cycling, aerial activities, local food and drink. The regional market will be important. May be less likely to make repeat visits but satisfied customers

are highly likely to recommend to networks of friends, including use of social media.

- **Day visitors**

A relatively stable market, important for generating year round business in local shops and places to eat. Looking for heritage attractions, events, pubs, good food, small towns with places to walk. The market includes local as well as regional residents within a travel time of up to one hour. Special emphasis should be placed on those who can arrive by train, visiting a market town with a railway station, and on group travel to visitor attractions.

### ***Secondary target markets***

- **Domestic short breaks and holidays – Families**

A limited market currently in the Shropshire Hills, but increasingly attractive to families with younger children who enjoy spending time together in the outdoors. Self-catering and camping holidays will be important, and eco-friendly accommodation will particularly appeal to some families taking lifestyle decisions which focus on wellbeing and the environment. The regional market with shorter travel times will be important here. Attracting families is important for growing future loyalty to the destination. Adherence to school holidays is a disadvantage strategically, but families can be attracted for short breaks out of season.

- **Niche markets**

Local specialist providers take much of the responsibility for targeting their own customers, but the destination can lend support to this activity through presentation of complementary images and messaging.

#### *Dedicated walkers*

This important niche market will enjoy several days the Shropshire Hills, with walking in as the main purpose of their visit. They may follow a long distance route, walking from place to place, or take several long walks from one base. Not all will be loyal to the Shropshire Hills, taking similar walking holidays in other locations. Satisfied clients of local walking operators may well be tempted to return for a future holiday in the area.

#### *Young active singles and groups of friends*

This is a largely weekend market driven by enthusiasm for specialist activities such as mountain biking or airsports. Growing interest, especially amongst female friends, in riding breaks. Looking for sociable places to stay overnight, including group accommodation, camping and pubs.

#### *Singles and couples looking for active learning experiences*

This is a growing market of individuals looking for opportunities to learn new skills in the company of new people. Can also be attractive to couples wanting to spend time together doing something different, or learning something that they can use in future. Largely weekend but people will make time during the week for an opportunity that they can't get elsewhere. Interest in residential courses, but nearby accommodation also attractive to couples.

Although the above markets have been identified as the main targets with long term potential, this does not mean that other potential visitor markets should be ignored. In particular, the area should take advantage of the upcoming opportunity to seek

exposure in overseas marketing linked to the promotion running into 2012 of Much Wenlock as the birthplace of the modern Olympics.

Table 3.1 indicates the performance of each of the proposed target markets against the four factors suggested at the beginning of this section for consideration in their selection.

**Table 3.1 Performance of proposed target markets by factors in their selection**

<b>Factor to consider</b>	<b>Fit with strengths, products and location of destination</b>	<b>Growth trends and potential</b>	<b>Ability to reach and influence cost effectively</b>	<b>Relevance to strategic objectives</b>
<b>Target market</b>				
Domestic short breaks and holidays – couples post-family	Strong across range of product	Good, loyal market	PR and traditional means	Good fit in general
Domestic short breaks – couples pre-family	Good, with special strength in events, activities and local food	Potential to build loyalty for future visits, including families	Word of mouth and social media. Events promotion.	Good fit, particularly with local food objective. Potential spending power fits with supporting local enterprise.
Day visitors	Good. Strong on heritage, attractions and market towns, but transport issues (traffic impact) and influenced by weather	Influence of recession - increasing number of day visits. Particularly important regional market, with good access to centres of population.	Local/regional media and offers, including incentives to use public transport	Less good fit: lower potential to generate income and potential traffic issues. Sustainable access objective especially important to this segment.
Domestic short breaks and holidays - families	Good with some weaknesses eg wet weather options and family eating	Growth market, driven by staycation effect. Particular interest in non-serviced accommodation. Strong potential in regional market for near to home stays.	PR, especially linked to lifestyle, family product (including Acton Scott Historic Working Farm) and unusual accommodation	Good fit with aspects of hills experience, and raising awareness of sustainability issues
Dedicated walkers	Strong fit with flagship product of walking routes in outstanding and varied landscape	Steady growth in interest in, and positive experience, of walking offer across UK	Specialist operators. Press interest, specialist and general travel.	Potential for mid-week and extended season to support local enterprise
Young active singles and groups of	Good, with special strength in mountain biking and airsports, although not well	Strongly growing market, with potential to increase	Strong potential for use of social media	Strong fit with hills experience but care needed in

friends	packaged/promoted	overnight stays		relation to promoting sustainable access and management.
Singles and couples looking for active learning experiences	Diverse range of interesting products, although not well packaged/promoted	Growing market for easy to access experiences	Strong potential to interest press, including specialist media	Especially important to focus on activities which strengthen the hills experience

### 3.3 Underlying aims

#### **Aims**

The World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Environment Programme define sustainable tourism as 'tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities'.<sup>10</sup> The following aims for the strategy are presented:

Primary aim:

- To develop, manage and promote the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow as a high quality sustainable tourism destination, in keeping with its focus on a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Associated aims:

- To provide all visitors with a fulfilling and enjoyable experience of the Shropshire Hills and neighbouring market towns.
- To foster a prosperous tourism and food industry, providing secure year round jobs.
- To enhance the quality of life within local communities and support for local services.
- To increase appreciation and understanding of the special landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage of the area and support for their conservation.
- To minimise negative impacts of tourism on the environment.

### 3.4 Guiding principles

Consultation and analysis has shaped the following overall approach and priorities for the Strategy and Action Plan.

#### ***Building an integrated destination, linking the towns and the hills (AONB)***

The area is currently quite fragmented but has great potential to pull together and match better known rural destinations elsewhere in England based on high quality,

<sup>10</sup> World Tourism Organisation and United Nations Environment Programme, *Making Tourism More Sustainable* (2005)

designated landscapes. A key is the unspoiled and accessible upland countryside *combined with* a number of small towns full of character and individuality. The approach should involve building awareness of the area as a whole while strengthening linkages between the constituent parts.

### ***Ensuring effective partnership working between stakeholders at all levels***

The thrust of tourism policy in England is towards partnership working at the destination level. This is also a requirement of the EUROPARC Charter. The new Destination Development Partnerships in Shropshire reflect this. Many of the towns have demonstrated good community involvement in tourism at the most local level. The opportunity now is to strengthen linkages between these more local groupings, within the context of a cohesive destination and alongside the AONB to which they all also relate. There is a need to build a strong DDP for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, with effective engagement of the private sector, public sector, conservation, heritage and community interests. Vertical linkages to marketing and business support services within Shropshire and to wider area partnerships should be maintained and strengthened.

### ***Growing tourism spending year round and throughout the area***

This should be a strategy for growth, addressing the need to underpin business viability and maximise opportunities to strengthen the local economy through tourism. Emphasis should be on increasing visitor spending, with growth in visitor trips, length of stay and spend per head. Consultation has emphasised the need to focus in particular on generating more spending at less busy times of the year. The strategy should also seek to spread tourism spending across the area, within all the market towns and the wider countryside, while reflecting the capacity and needs of each.

### ***Bringing out opportunities to enjoy the area's special qualities and distinctiveness***

Successful destinations are increasingly those that are able to offer distinctive experiences in line with the interests of their potential markets. The area already has a number of strengths, notably with respect to food, landscapes, the built environment, historic heritage, events, walking and other rural activities. It is well placed to appeal to a wide market seeking a richly rural experience, both active and passive. The approach should involve adding value to the attractions and experiences on offer and making them more appealing and accessible.

### ***Being ambitious about the sustainable aspects of tourism***

The strategy should adhere strongly to the principles of sustainable tourism, minimising negative impacts on the environment and local communities and where possible providing positive benefit to them. Shifting to low carbon is a strategic priority of the AONB Management Plan and there are excellent examples of tourism businesses and whole communities where this has been embraced. Highlighting opportunities for visitors wishing to minimise the carbon footprint of their holiday represents a chance to target a growing market, to champion best practice and to attract interest to the Shropshire Hills as a destination with an excellent reputation for innovation in energy reduction and renewable technologies. At the same time, making a strong contribution to the wellbeing of local communities and the conservation of the area's environment and heritage is in the long term interests of



the tourism sector itself. This is a priority of the AONB Management Plan and a requirement of the EUROPARC Charter, but the principles are also directly relevant to the market towns and were widely supported during consultation.

### ***Providing a quality experience for all visitors***

Quality should be a watchword of the strategy. Ultimately, economic success depends on providing a level of quality that matches or exceeds visitor expectations and leads to repeat visits and recommendations. The area should also ensure that the needs of all visitors are met, without discrimination, which is a requirement of the Charter. In general, the quality of tourism enterprises in the area appears quite high, but there is still room for further improvement and more consistency. Maintenance of the quality of visitor infrastructure and the public realm remains an ongoing challenge.

## **3.5 The vision**

This simple vision, backed up by the principles outlined above, sets out a direction for everyone involved in the strategy to work towards.

By 2016:

*The Shropshire Hills and Ludlow will become established as a sought after rural destination, based on its special combination of outstanding landscapes and historic market towns. Businesses, communities and visitors will celebrate and care for the place, its heritage and the wider environment.*

## **3.6 Strategic objectives**

The analysis presented in the previous chapter, together with the context, principles and vision outlined above, has led to the identification of the follow seven strategic objectives to guide tourism delivery in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow over the next five years.

### **1 RAISING AWARENESS**

*To strengthen the identity of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow and raise awareness of it as a leading rural tourism destination  
(Charter Principles 5, 9)*

### **2 DELIVERING THE HILLS EXPERIENCE**

*To conserve the distinctive landscapes of the Shropshire Hills and provide and creatively promote a wide range of opportunities to experience and enjoy them  
(Charter Principles 4, 5, 6, 7)*

### **3 DELIVERING THE MARKET TOWNS EXPERIENCE**

*To ensure that each market town makes the most of its distinctive location and character, provides a quality experience and acts as a gateway to the Shropshire Hills  
(Charter Principles 5, 7, 8, 9)*

### **4 DELIVERING THE LOCAL FOOD EXPERIENCE**

*To capitalise on the established position of the area as a centre of excellence for its food, based on quality local produce  
(Charter Principles 4, 5, 9)*

## **5 ORIENTATING AND INFORMING VISITORS**

*To ensure that all visitors are aware of the range of experiences and activities available across the area by providing readily accessible information and interpretation*

*(Charter Principles 4, 5, 8, 10)*

## **6 PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE ACCESS AND MANAGEMENT**

*To encourage and promote actions by visitors and tourism providers which benefit the natural heritage and the wider environment*

*(Charter Principles 3, 7, 10)*

## **7 SUPPORTING LOCAL ENTERPRISE**

*To build the contribution of tourism enterprises to the local economy, increasing business success and ensuring consistency in the quality of the tourism offer*

*(Charter Principles 4, 9)*

## 4 ACTION

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This section takes the seven strategic objectives and identifies areas for action under each of them.

### 1 RAISING AWARENESS

**To strengthen the identity of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow and raise awareness of it as a leading rural tourism destination**

#### ► 1.1 Agree core destination values and messages

A process of distilling and succinctly describing what the destination is seeking to project provides an important basis for future marketing and development. This should identify:

- the area's core values, which should reflect the strengths of area and the priorities of this strategy
- a set of messages, in the form of sentences and short descriptive text, which encapsulate the agreed values.

The messages should be used consistently in destination publications and online and taken up and further developed by individual businesses to tell their own stories.

#### ► 1.2 Agree and disseminate a visual identity and supporting text

This should include:

- A visual identity. This should reflect and build upon the current corporate identity of the Shropshire Hills AONB. It could incorporate a market town element, maybe linked to the landscape through use of a castle or church tower, generalised or recognisable as Ludlow.
- A short strap-line that reflects the values and messages.
- Guidelines on their use.

#### ► 1.3 Assemble a good photo collection

Current photography of the area tends to be static. New photographs should be collected which reflect the different elements and themes related to the core values. They should include shots with people and actions, provide new angles, clearly put over the sense of place and reflect the changing seasons throughout the year. A clear brief should be prepared on what is required, with shots acquired through:

- Obtaining rights on existing material (Virtual Shropshire; commercial photo libraries; etc.)
- Commissioning professional photographers and/or briefing clubs, courses etc.
- Systematic in-house photography and encouraging organisations in the DDP to share photographs.
- Holding a photographic competition.

► **1.4 Improve the branding and performance of the existing website to operate as a high profile website for the destination**

The current destination website for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow has two domain names: [www.visitsouthshropshire.co.uk](http://www.visitsouthshropshire.co.uk) and [www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk](http://www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk). Despite an attempt to increase use of the latter, to reinforce the move to a more consistent use of 'Shropshire Hills' in connection with the destination, the former remains more visible and performs better on searches. The website also needs to be reviewed and redesigned website to meet user needs and expectations (it is still based on a printed publication). The site itself needs clearer navigation, persuasive propositions, easy searching and key themes. It is important to:

- Ensure that it can be easily updated by Shropshire Hills Tourism or those acting on their behalf
- Introduce consistent use of 'Shropshire Hills', phasing out reference to 'South Shropshire' on [www.visitshropshire.com](http://www.visitshropshire.com), in the text and in links to further information.
- Increase the visibility of [www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk](http://www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk), including on [www.visitshropshire.com](http://www.visitshropshire.com), and improve performance of [www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk](http://www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk) in searches.
- Build in easy to find links both to and from Shropshire-wide and AONB sites, and to town, attraction and individual business sites, including inserting widgets (e.g. on forthcoming events) into them.
- Ensure it performs well in searches on relevant keywords
- Introduce more ways to book and buy immediately.
- Introduce more changing content – with news, offers, features.
- Consider introducing user-generated content, through integrating existing platforms.
- Ensure that the site offers a number of simple ways to establish on-going communication - e.g. through user-friendly sign ups for e-newsletters, RSS feeds
- Offer ways for people to share content through inclusion of social media tools such as Facebook 'Like' button, Retweet options
- Showcase events, ideally by incorporating them within the homepage design, with a user friendly interface which allows users to both browse and search for events
- Include good quality stimulating imagery that fits with the destination's values and key messages
- Include images reflective of all seasons and highlight out of season themes, offers and events.
- Undertake some user testing so that the website is known to be user-friendly.

► **1.5 Develop and implement an online marketing strategy**

It is important that the online presence of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow is considered as a whole and does not simply focus on the main destination website. It is recommended that a detailed strategy be developed, covering:

- Policies and approaches to social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) and user-generated content sites (e.g. Tripadvisor).
- Integration of the destination website with other online channels
- Driving visits directly to, or providing a clear route for navigation to, the destination's own website.

- How content on the destination will be seeded to third party websites and forums and to stakeholders' web presences
- Policy towards use of online ambassadors/bloggers
- Monitoring and response mechanisms

► **1.6 Maintain a suite of destination print**

A main destination brochure remains a valuable tool in defining and presenting the destination and can be supported by additional material that may be used both before and during visits (see also Objective 5). Enterprises should be encouraged to support the print. A simple distribution plan should be prepared and followed, together with a clear arrangement to fulfil interest and enquiries. The main current items, which should be continued but reviewed annually to keep abreast of changing need, include:

- The Ludlow and Shropshire Hills destination guide
- The Shropshire Hills events booklet
- The Shropshire Hills and Severn Valley Discovery map.

Additional print has a supportive promotional role, including material on the towns (see Objective 2), outdoor activities etc. High quality, memorable saleable items, such as guidebooks and postcard series, should be encouraged.

► **1.7 Pursue an active PR campaign**

The primary promotional activity should centre on PR, to generate coverage of the destination both in travel media but also in mainstream news and feature media and creating material for web promotions and social media feeds. This should involve:

- Constantly generating and looking for story-lines, such as new product, events, personalities, awards, anniversaries, quirky angles, etc.
- Paying particular attention to stories which reflect the destination's values, target markets and strategic priorities, including year round interest.
- Feeding stories to existing PR services, including those established for Shropshire.
- Considering commissioning additional PR services if necessary.
- Having a clear mechanism to enable readers to convert interest into specific enquiries and purchases.

► **1.8 Establish and maintain a presence in Shropshire promotions and work with neighbouring destinations**

The promotion of The Shropshire Hills and Ludlow as a destination should complement and add to the promotion of Shropshire, and benefit from it, rather than competing with it.

Opportunities to pursue include:

- Seeking continued and strong coverage of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow within the promotion of Shropshire, including links to the website and other material and products.

- Ensuring that interest generated in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow can be fulfilled with a clear and direct offer of information, on the web or in print, on the destination itself.
- Working on joint marketing activity with neighbouring destinations, including Shrewsbury, Ironbridge/Severn Valley, Herefordshire, Powys, and the other protected areas along the England-Wales border (Wye Valley, Brecon Beacons, and Clwydian Range).

► **1.9 Pursue opportunities in selected target markets**

Promotional messages, products and activity should be partly focused on target markets identified within this strategy. This should use the above processes but also pursue more direct contact with targeted interest groups and media.

Opportunities include:

- Promotion of year round breaks to regional markets across the West Midlands.
- Family markets with a known interest in outdoor experiences and low impact lifestyles.
- Promotions to selected niche markets, including gourmets, walking groups, cycle clubs, geologists and rail enthusiasts.

**2 DELIVERING THE HILLS EXPERIENCE**

**To conserve the distinctive landscapes of the Shropshire Hills and provide and creatively promote a wide range of opportunities to experience and enjoy them**

► **2.1 Give priority to maintaining a high quality landscape and environment as a primary resource of sustainable tourism**

This strategy fully recognises the importance for tourism of the natural beauty of the Shropshire Hills. A wide range of activities, by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Shropshire Council (as planning authority as well as resource manager), conservation interests, land managers, and others in maintaining the quality of the landscape and environment, are highly significant for tourism. A number of relevant issues and activities are of particular concern within the context of the European Charter. Many fall within the framework of the AONB Management Plan rather than this strategy. However, in the particular interests of tourism and enjoyment of the hills, attention is drawn to the following activities:

- Prevention of unsightly development which will damage scenic quality.
- Maintenance of a clean, tranquil environment and dark skies - avoiding pollution, degradation and disturbance of air, water, land, habitats and communities from discharges, solid waste, noise, light and other impacts.
- Continuation of land management and farming practices which maintain the landscape quality and heritage.
- Restoration and conservation projects which enhance the landscape and biodiversity.

Actions concerning the impact and contribution of tourism itself are covered under Objective 6.

► **2.2 Provide and promote opportunities to experience the distinctive landscapes and heritage of different parts of the Hills**

A particular strength of the Shropshire Hills for tourism is the character and variety found within the four landscapes areas (Wenlock Edge and The Wrekin; Clun Forest and Valley; Long Mynd and The Stiperstones; Clee Hill and Corvedale) and different landscape types, enhanced by a distinctive land use heritage. In order to encourage exploration and longer and repeat visits, a number of initiatives and actions should be supported to bring out this variety. Particular opportunities include:

- Improving the experience of The Wrekin, building on the work of the Wrekin Forest Partnership on restoration, access and interpretation, including stronger links to Wellington - now a Walkers are Welcome town.
- Enhancing visitor interest in the Clee Hill, supporting the Clee Hills Partnership, the various Trusts and landowners in their work on the heritage and wildlife of the area.
- Bringing out the rich heritage interest in the Stiperstones, Corndon and Snailbeach area, making the most of the proposed Landscape Partnership Scheme there.
- Making more of the area's woodlands, including ridge woods such as Wenlock Edge with its extensive views. In carefully selected locations, this could include providing more varied ways of enjoying woodland – e.g. fungal forays, bushcraft, roped access, simple, small-scale forest accommodation.

► **2.3 Maintain and promote a varied range of walking experiences available all year**

Walking is a major activity in the area, ranging from short strolls in attractive locations, to day and half day walks and full walking holidays. Actions to further enhance its contribution to tourism include:

- Bringing out different characteristics of each walking area and route – linking to heritage, geology, wildlife etc., using a variety of old and new interpretation techniques.
- Ensuring that all promoted walks, but also other rights of way, are well maintained, especially in the light of infrastructure activity moving to other parts of the county.
- Providing and promoting more guided walks. Strengthen the number, training, listing, and specialisms of walk leaders and processes for contacting them.
- Providing and promoting routes offering easy access for all users, and taking opportunities to incorporate least restrictive access options when carrying out rights of way maintenance and improvements.
- Supporting and linking walking festivals – increasing capacity, coordination, cross-promotion, and introducing new events at less busy times of year.
- Encouraging individual businesses to participate in Walkers Welcome, learn about the walking opportunities and develop their own walks for guests.
- Bringing all the remaining towns (including Knighton) into the network of Walkers are Welcome towns and promoting this as a combined destination strength.

- Extending geocaching as a way of interpreting some areas – eg a trail on Titterstone Clee like that on the Long Mynd.

► **2.4 Maintain and promote a range of cycling and mountain biking opportunities, for access and enjoyment**

Mountain biking, cycle touring and casual cycling on and off road are growing markets influenced by the provision of facilities and information. The area is well placed to cater for all of them. Action should include:

- Encouraging more businesses to cater for and assist cyclists –providing facilities and information, linking to cycle hire operators, joining Cyclists Welcome, etc.
- Promoting existing routes more, including the Six Castles route.
- Designing and presenting routes and information to be more appealing to casual cyclists seeking less demanding cycling.
- Supporting and encouraging established cycle hire and holiday operators who continue to introduce many new visitors to Shropshire.
- Promoting and holding more cycling events.
- Developing strategic routes, especially those that are traffic free – Shrewsbury-Minsterley, Much Wenlock-Craven Arms and Craven Arms-Bishops Castle, updating feasibility studies where necessary.
- Targeting users of the Land's End – John O'Groats route.
- Extending the influence of the Long Mynd Mountain Bike Forum, working with the National Trust and responsible cycle operators to promote and monitor use of the Long Mynd trail map.
- Promoting mountain biking and forest trail use at Hopton Wood, Eastridge Woods, Mortimer Forest and Bury Ditches, pointing new users to appropriate facilities.
- Introducing electric bikes as a novel way of touring, with trial sessions for businesses followed by strong promotion.
- Encouraging cyclists and mountain-bikers to stay longer and to reduce car travel.

► **2.5 Further develop and promote the potential of the area for horse riding**

The Shropshire Hills are good riding territory. The bridleway network has been improved over the last decade with initiatives such as Ride UK routes, improvements to the Jack Mytton Way and the new Blue Remembered Hills bridleway. There are several riding centres where visitors can ride and a network of B&Bs which can accommodate horses as well as riders (Marches Horse Trails), plus groups of volunteers who clear routes and report problems. However action is still needed to:

- Upgrade infrastructure, improve routes in specific locations and research and establish missing links in routes.
- Create or lengthen long distance routes for riders including linking over the border into Wales.
- Promote the area more strongly for equine tourism.

► **2.6 Facilitate pre-booked and on-demand access to a range of outdoor activities and experiences**



The destination has a wide range of outdoor activities which visitors can try including gliding, paragliding, hot air ballooning, archery, shooting, fishing and geocaching as well as riding and mountain biking. There are also several activity centres offering a range of options including high ropes, BMX, climbing, canoeing and orienteering, some focusing on the children and schools market. However activity operators are generally small and very focused on their own businesses and there are few examples of joint working between activities or packaging activities and accommodation. Actions to pursue include:

- Improving local accommodation providers' knowledge of available activities through familiarisation visits and taster sessions.
- Strengthening cooperation between activity operators, including joint promotion and cross-selling
- Providing a brokering service covering a wide range of activity options accessible in advance or at short notice in the area. This might involve operators offering allocations or regularly updated availability information. One option might be to locate this in the Discovery Centre or an outdoor shop.
- Strengthening coverage of activities on the destination website and through PR
- Extending the range of activities that are promoted, especially for the less sporty, such as rowing boats on the river at Ludlow.
- Strengthening links between accommodation providers and outdoor event organisers.

► **2.7 Provide opportunities to experience and understand the area's geology and wildlife**

The area is one of the most diverse geologically in the UK and has been called the birthplace of geological terminology. It is the geology which underlies the landscape and wildlife and also the historic exploitation of the rocks and minerals. While there are no iconic species associated with the area, there are many opportunities to view wildlife. Action should include:

- Extend the number of self-guided and guided walks and events themed on geology and wildlife, including year round interest
- Enrich people's understanding of landscapes and wildlife through improved interpretation of the underlying geology
- Improve the knowledge of hosts about key wildlife viewing opportunities and give them the confidence to share their more local knowledge
- Extend the 'dark skies' offer, building on 'Stars in your Skies', exploring links to the observatory at Knighton and encouraging accommodation providers such as Country House Hideout at Acton Scott to provide a telescope and information.
- Support and promote the proposed new National Trust initiative for the Wenlock Quarries.

► **2.8 Promote opportunities to engage creatively and practically in rural and cultural heritage themes and activities linked to the landscape**

The Shropshire Hills have provided inspiration for people over the centuries and are currently home to a wide range of artists and craftspeople. There is

potential to promote the destination's profile for traditional and creative skills. Action could include:

- Making more of the national renown of the Arvon Centre (writing) Westhope College (textiles) and Acton Scott Historic Working Farm (traditional skills), through PR, links to accommodation etc.
- Promotion under a collective banner such as 'Creative Breaks in the Shropshire Hills'
- Developing conservation activities and courses such as coppicing, hedge-laying etc., with practical benefits for the traditional landscape
- Investigating interest in an annual open studios trail.
- Creating a comprehensive website with bookable product, possibly through development of the 'Buy Local' website, and providing clear links to nearby accommodation

### **3 DELIVERING THE MARKET TOWN EXPERIENCE**

**To ensure that each market town makes the most of its distinctive location and character, provides a quality experience and acts as a gateway to the Shropshire Hills**

#### **► 3.1 Develop the unique identity of each town in relation to the destination brand**

By using a common approach to presentation and consistent messages while highlighting the distinctive features of each individual town, the market towns can do more to complement each other and together contribute to the whole feel of the destination.

This can be achieved by:

- Ensuring that each market town can easily be recognised as part of the wider destination of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow.
- Working together within the Destination Development Partnership to develop use of their own USPs, retaining individuality but creating a sense of belonging to the wider landscape of the Shropshire Hills.
- Considering the distinctive offer that each can make in relation to a set of common aspects, including heritage, food and drink, events, walking and associations with particular parts of the Shropshire Hills.
- Collaborating on a common approach to certain aspects of presentation, within the overall framework developed for the destination.
- Building active co-operation between the towns, sharing best practice on what is successful and identifying opportunities for cross-promotion.

#### **► 3.2 Provide effective information material for each town**

For each market town to play its part in welcoming visitors, each should provide a set of devices to inform and orientate visitors, designed to a common standard. This should offer visitors:

- Easy access to clear pre-visit information, at least via the web.
- A map showing the layout of the town, highlighting parking arrangements (short and long stay), public conveniences, and a Visitor Information Point or Centre with opening hours.
- 24-hour access to a display of information.

- Clear information about access by public transport (where possible) and by road.
- Clear information about facilities accessible to those with limited mobility.
- Clear signing on arrival by car/bicycle or on foot.

► **3.3 Provide a high quality of visitor facilities, services and amenities**

First impressions, the feel and look, of a market town can be key to the way that visitors feel about their arrival in an area and it is important that issues are tackled in each town to ensure that the visitor arrival is a good experience. The sense that this is a place where people live and work and which is loved and cared for can create an immediate feeling of welcome and of community. It encourages visitors to want to linger and to share in this sense of belonging.

Aspects which contribute to a favourable impression include:

- Good, welcoming signing and attractive approaches to the town.
- Fine streetscapes, including well-maintained facades, especially shopfronts.
- A well-managed public realm, with clean streets and an absence of litter.
- Well maintained and tidy public areas (eg stations, parks and squares) which demonstrate regular care and attention.
- Public toilets which are regularly cleaned and well-maintained.

The proposed Ludlow Conservation Area Revitalisation Project offers the opportunity to undertake repair and enhancement work to Ludlow Town Walls and the Castle Gardens.

► **3.4 Deliver a creative experience of the town's heritage, through sites, trails and interpretation**

Each market town has its own story to tell, and most have something in place which allows visitors to share in their special heritage, including at least one historic property which is open to visitors. Ludlow has particular strengths here, having a fine assemblage of historic properties which dominate the town, are highly visible and have extensive opening hours. Ludlow and Much Wenlock both have museums which are supported by Shropshire Council, and Ludlow and Cleobury Mortimer have interpretation plans in place. The heritage offer in general is heavily dependent on the interest, knowledge and support of the local community.

Actions to encourage more visitors to explore and enjoy the heritage aspects of the market towns include:

- Increasing access to historic properties through a more regular and co-ordinated pattern of opening hours on more days of the year.
- Raising the profile of at least one 'must do' heritage offer associated with each town
- Supporting and advancing redevelopment/restoration plans for Much Wenlock museum, Bishop's Castle Town Hall and certain aspects of the Ludlow Conservation Area Revitalisation Project which relate to The Buttercross.

- Assessing the heritage story of each market town and how it is told, involving local communities in identifying new opportunities to tell their stories, including heritage trails, guided walks, first person interpretation, events and new technologies such as podcasts or QR codes.
- Retaining the individuality of each community while, through the use of interpretation experts, ensuring a consistently high standard and a common approach in each town to enable cross-promotion.

### ► **3.5 Coordinate and promote a programme of events between the towns**

Events can be especially important in attracting new visitors and encouraging visits at a particular time. Festivals and events are a great strength in the area, with almost all the market towns staging events which attract visitors. Ludlow has established a particularly high profile for its events, but others (for example Bishop's Castle Walking Festival, Clun Green Man) are also widely known and attract new and regular visitors to the area. Benefits to the destination are especially great when the particular event reinforces not only the identity of the town but also key strengths of the area as a whole, for example Ludlow Food Festival, the Long Mynd Hike or Craven Arms Arts Walk.

Actions to consider include:

- Reviewing the programme of the events, looking for opportunities to introduce new events at less busy times of year and also identifying potential clashes.
- Inviting event organisers to consider whether their particular event could cope with, or even benefit from, a shift from its regular slot in the calendar to a conventionally less busy time of the year or the week.
- Encouraging event organisers to collaborate, through advance planning, sharing best practice, cross-promotion and common promotion. The role of the Bishop's Castle Festival Officer has proved to be highly valuable to Bishop's Castle and Clun in this respect and there may be opportunities to widen this.
- Planning new events around destination strengths, ideally bringing together elements of the landscape, food and drink, and activities.

### ► **3.6 Encourage and support a distinctive retail experience**

One of the joys of the market towns in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow is the strong presence of independent retailers on their high streets, celebrated by movements and campaigns such as Clone Towns (new economics foundation) and Cittaslow. Markets are also a regular feature of many of the towns. Visitors especially enjoy specialist and independent shops and seeing and buying items which have been locally sourced and are distinctive of the area. Visitor spending strengthens business viability, increasing the opportunity for local residents to buy local and reduce miles associated with the purchase of food and other goods.

Actions include:

- Building on the success achieved by Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, with their 'Buy Local – be sustainable' campaign, and also 'Local to Ludlow', exploring ways to gain maximum benefit, for example by aligning promotion.

- Considering whether any of the towns could benefit from a Business Improvement District or similar approach, offering support for infrastructure or a shopfront enhancement scheme.
- Encouraging web-listings of retail businesses, as well as printed booklets as produced for Ludlow.

► **3.7 Provide clear access links between the towns and the countryside**

Although the market towns are well located to act as gateways to the Shropshire Hills AONB, the connection between the two is not always appreciated or made apparent. In future, it should not be possible to visit any one of the market towns without being made aware of the proximity of outstanding countryside, especially the hills, or where and how to access them. Conversely, those who are enjoying some time in the hills should be aware of the proximity of visitor services offered by neighbouring market towns.

This will involve:

- Highlighting at least one obvious and easy to use passage between each town and its neighbouring hills, improving physical connections where necessary.
- Promoting the Shropshire Way as an excellent link between most gateway towns and the Shropshire Hills AONB.
- Promoting at least one circular walk and cycle route based on each of the market towns which showcases the local countryside.
- Highlighting opportunities to use the Shropshire Link bus service.
- Paying special attention to Ludlow which almost certainly attracts the highest number of visitors but is least well connected to the Shropshire Hills of all the market towns. This may entail a spectrum of opportunities, including highlighting town locations with the best views of the hills, encouraging visitors to explore the countryside around the edge of the town, including the rivers and Mortimer Forest, and promoting the opportunity to take the train to Craven Arms and return on foot along the Shropshire Way.
- Using the opportunity for Much Wenlock to connect to the Shropshire Hills AONB through the proposed 'Marathon' routes
- Investing in key sites, such as Rectory Wood in Church Stretton, which can provide an enjoyable passage on foot between town and countryside.

**4 DELIVERING THE LOCAL FOOD EXPERIENCE**

**To capitalise on the established position of the area as a centre of excellence for its food, based on quality local produce**

► **4.1 Promote and develop the area's high profile food events, spreading their reach across the area and the year**

Since 1995, when Ludlow Marches Food and Drink Festival began, Ludlow and the surrounding area have developed a national reputation for high quality events focussed on food and drink produced locally, in and around the Marches. The seasonality of food and drink products lends itself well to a

calendar of events and, over time, the calendar has been filling out with events in new locations and at new times of year.

Activity to encourage includes:

- Drawing up a year round calendar of food and drink events in and around the Shropshire Hills, including agricultural shows, smaller events, and guided activities and embracing activity at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm.
- Actively promoting this calendar of food and drink events to new visitors, through destination channels, local food outlets and directly to visitors at the main Ludlow festivals.
- Supporting and encouraging activities, such as those featured in the events booklet for the Shropshire Hills, which celebrate locally distinctive and wild foods with strong links to the local landscape.
- Highlighting opportunities to combine active recreation with enjoyment of local food and drink, such as the Magna Longa.
- Encouraging the introduction of a small number of carefully targeted events to encourage new visits at less busy times of year. The advent of Ludlow Spring Festival in 2009 has successfully demonstrated how this can be achieved.

► **4.2 Maintain and seek to expand the presence of food outlets of national renown**

Ludlow is well known as the home of two Michelin-starred restaurants. Demand is high and it can be difficult to get a table at short notice, suggesting room in the marketplace for others with a high reputation for their cuisine. There could be a particular opportunity for good food at moderate prices, such as is recognised by Michelin Bib Gourmand but currently not represented in Shropshire. Some individual producers and retail outlets have developed their reputation through association with renowned chefs, and through exposure at the Ludlow Food Festival.

Essentially, this will be driven by the market but support can be offered through highlighting opportunities offered by a combination of strong local produce and high consumer demand, and by showcasing the Michelin-starred chefs and their cuisine.

► **4.3 Raise the quality and accessibility of catering available throughout the area for all budgets**

The reputation of the area for good food rests not only on high profile restaurants, but on the eating experiences of visitors on a day by day basis. There is a special need to make sure that expectations are exceeded and especially that mid-range catering does not disappoint. The aim is to have good quality food at all price ranges across the whole destination. The proposed training kitchen at Ludlow College has been designed to fill a workforce gap in hospitality in the south Shropshire area, but this is just one of a number of initiatives to pursue.

Others include:

- Giving promotional advantage to a set of catering establishments identified objectively as achieving a certain level of quality and demonstrating regular and creative use of local produce. Examples from elsewhere include the Broads Quality Charter, based on paid for

inspections, and the Flavours of Herefordshire awards, based on a written entry and judges' visit. In both cases, successful establishments are promoted online and through an annual booklet.

- Drawing attention to the public availability of 'Scores on the Doors' as a proxy for customer care and attention to detail.
- Including independent accreditations, such as AA Rosettes, in entries in published guides.
- Including listings of retail food and catering businesses in the main destination guide for Ludlow and Shropshire Hills
- Encouraging accommodation proprietors to make regular visits to local eating establishments and to base informal recommendations on shared information.

► **4.4 Promote a range of opportunities for visiting, experiencing and purchasing from local food and drink suppliers**

This is a great strength for the area as many opportunities exist to explore food and drink outlets around the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, but information is fragmented. The main action required is improved co-ordination, backed up by a combined effort at creative promotion including cross-selling. More could be made of links to the local landscape, especially the traditional pattern of grazing beef cattle and sheep, and any special association with rare and traditional breeds.

Activity includes:

- The Discover Local project, and the 'Buy Local – be Sustainable' campaign, which provides an important vehicle for the promotion of individual businesses.
- Occasional farm visits which are arranged; this activity could be further encouraged and more could also be made of Open Farm Sunday.
- The Ludlow Food Centre, which provides a good one-stop showcase for local produce and offers opportunities to see in-house production of some food products.
- The many towns which host Farmers Markets on a regular basis.
- Special trails which have been devised, such as Stretton Area Food Trail and the Shropshire Real Ale Trail
- Innovative events which combine walks with special food stops, such as Magna Longa and Cleobury Country Food and Ale Trail; there may be scope to introduce additional events with a similar format.
- Celebrating the concentration of breweries in the area with events such as Clun Valley Beer Festival, Bishop's Castle Real Ale Festival and a focus on beer at the Ludlow Spring Festival; there may be scope for a dedicated Shropshire Hills brewery and beer guide.

All visitors, including day visitors, can enjoy these experiences, including the purchase of food and drink for immediate consumption and as gifts to take home. There is a particular opportunity to promote strongly to visitors who are staying in self-catering accommodation, including campsites, and to draw their attention to local ingredients and recipes.

► **4.5 Strengthen the availability and creative use of local produce in catering outlets**

The Discover Local project, which is focused on local and traditional produce which helps to conserve and enhance the Shropshire Hills AONB, will provide a series of events and business workshops which will draw attention to the opportunities to make more and better use of local produce. Local to Ludlow has similar ambitions in relation to food and drink produced within 30 miles of the town,

Impact can be strengthened by:

- Taking opportunities to encourage the involvement of catering outlets and to introduce them to local suppliers; a Meet the Buyer session is to be re-introduced to Ludlow Food Festival this year.
- Including a strong focus on local produce, with opportunities to celebrate and promote best practice, in any scheme to encourage improvement in the quality of catering establishments.
- Strengthening the linkage between the outdoor environment through creative PR, playing on links between dark skies and Michelin stars, or working up an appetite and walking off a good meal.
- Introducing a Shropshire Hills Breakfast scheme to B&Bs and hotels.
- Encouraging the collection of traditional recipes and the development of new recipes which make great use of local produce in season.
- Featuring local outlets making great use of distinctive and seasonal local produce, such as Shropshire Fidget Pie and whinberries, in stories which are fed to the press.

## **5 ORIENTATING AND INFORMING VISITORS**

**To ensure that all visitors are aware of the range of experiences and activities available across the area by providing readily accessible information and interpretation**

### **► 5.1 Maintain an effective network of VICs and information points across the area**

The destination is well served with information outlets, having a major Visitor Information Centre (VIC) in Ludlow, VICs combined with other services in Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Much Wenlock and Knighton, and visitor information points (VIPs) in Bishops Castle, Cleobury Mortimer, Clun and informally at the Bog Centre. Although information access and use has changed in recent years, this network continues to provide a valuable function and is appreciated by businesses and visitors. It should be maintained and strengthened, through:

- Maintaining the existing network and securing current opening hours
- Providing training and familiarisation about the area for staff and volunteers
- Encouraging maximum support from, and engagement with, businesses local to the centres
- Strengthening the visible presence of the centres/points and signing to them
- Investigating the possibility of adding an information point at Minsterley, to act as a gateway from the north west.
- Gathering feedback from the centres about their visitors and their needs.



► **5.2 Maintain an effective system of information gathering and dissemination**

Effective tourist information requires a well coordinated system for collecting information and making it available where it is needed. Action to strengthen the process includes:

- Reviewing the systems for gathering and updating information on tourism facilities and services and ensuring it is made available for use in all relevant print and electronic media
- Setting and adhering to early deadlines for the provision and publication of information on events, especially those happening in the low season, to ensure sufficient exposure of them in advance
- Maintaining timely and efficient distribution of information material to the VICs, VIPs and other outlets within the area and further afield, with increased coordination between all those providing information
- Maximising on the opportunity presented by the new Shropshire information and interpretation centre opening in Shrewsbury Music Hall in 2012, which has a particular objective of spreading information about the whole of the county.

► **5.3 Maximise on opportunities for visitor orientation and interpretation presented by the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre**

The Discovery Centre is a valuable asset – not all AONBs have a dedicated interpretation centre in a central location such as Craven Arms. It should seek to strengthen the performance of its original role as a shop front for the AONB and the best starting point for a visit to the area. This could be helped by:

- Stronger promotion of the centre outside and within the area
- Application of new technology, apps etc – planning a visit using computers on site. Providing additional services, such as taking bookings for events and activities
- Adding to the experiences at the centre, including further developing the Onny Meadows, with land art, sculpture and more activities themed around exploring the landscape in a variety of ways.

► **5.4 Ensure that accommodation hosts are well placed to orientate their visitors**

Hosts and local people are often best placed to recommend activities and tell the stories of the area but they need local knowledge to do so. The 'Sharing Our Shropshire' and 'Discover Local' courses have started this process and received positive feedback. More businesses should be encouraged to attend such training or read up themselves, which may require incentives. Action might include:

- Launching a Shropshire Hills Ambassadors scheme (or a linked scheme for the Friends of the Shropshire Hills) which delivers several days training on a choice of subjects
- Providing those completing the course with a certificate on completion and recognition that they can use in their marketing (like the Brecon Beacons Ambassadors scheme)

- Strengthening knowledge on walking opportunities, supported by the 'Walking with Offa' programme.

► **5.5 Strengthen the effectiveness of identity and directional signing**

Clear signposting is essential for visitors most of whom will not know their way around the destination. This includes brown and white tourism signage, ordinary road signs and also advertising signing. Problems currently include certain gaps in signage, signs in poor repair (eg Ludlow town signs on A49), updates required when facilities move (eg tourist information in Craven Arms), dirty signs which are difficult to read and illegal and poor quality signage. This should be addressed by:

- Undertaking a comprehensive review of signing, including collecting and collating a list of signposting issues and improvements required from local tourism groups, businesses, attractions etc.
- Developing a prioritised list of action in co-ordination with the Highways Authority.
- Putting pressure on any businesses with particularly poor or unsightly signage to ensure cleaning and repairs are undertaken
- Improving provision of Shropshire Hills AONB boundary signs.

► **5.6 Expand the use of creative i.t. based information and interpretation tools**

In the future it will become increasingly important to enable visitors to access the destination's website and other information through mobile devices when in the area and to be able use them to enhance their enjoyment of their visit through creative and dynamic interpretation. This will require:

- Pressing for quick provision of full Broadband and 3G coverage in the destination
- Developing a range of local apps, GPS based walks and itineraries and access to on-site electronic interpretation.

► **5.7 Provide for visitors with special information needs**

Information should be user focused, not simply driven by the product. It is important to identify experiences well suited to particular types of market and provide the type of information that they require to meet their particular needs. The European Charter in particular calls for attention to be paid to disabled and disadvantaged visitors.

Relevant action includes:

- Working with disability groups to review the presentation of all existing information and provided dedicated information material (print or webpages) geared to visitors with different needs.
- Building links to the pool of accommodation operators offering facilities for those with impaired mobility.
- Making sure information is available on visit and activity options for people on low budgets
- Identifying experiences particularly suited to families with young children.

## **6 PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE ACCESS AND MANAGEMENT**

**To encourage and promote actions by visitors and tourism providers that benefit the natural heritage and the wider environment**

### **► 6.1 Pursue visitor management actions that reflect the AONB Management Plan**

The Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan sets out five strategic priorities for management of the protected area which should also guide considerations of tourism. Although they clearly apply within the boundary of the AONB, they should also be embraced by the wider Destination Development Partnership for the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow and embedded in this sustainable tourism strategy.

For this particular objective, special attention should be paid to visitor management actions which contribute to:

- Valuing, conserving and enhancing what we have
- Shifting to low carbon
- Adapting for the future, working alongside nature

Local Priorities for each Area of the AONB indicate an approach to tourism which is considered appropriate to that area.

- In specific locations, visitor numbers or movements may need to be controlled or managed in order to reduce pressure on the environment through erosion or disturbance.

### **► 6.2 Develop and promote creative day visit and holiday options based on public transport**

The promotion of tourism should aim to minimise car travel. Parts of the destination are well served by public transport, with access by rail especially good through the central spine of the area. There are opportunities to:

- Encourage and support those businesses and communities which are well located with respect to good public transport access to design specific green days out and to develop the notion of Slow Travel with short break options that can be reliably offered on a regular basis.
- Make a special point of involving tourism facilities which have sought to reduce the impact of their operations, to create entire visits associated with low carbon emissions.
- Work with train operators to develop incentives and promotions to rail users in target markets.
- Ensure that timetable information, including seasonal changes, is provided as soon as it becomes available and is well publicised.
- Highlight these options within general destination print and online.
- Pay particular attention to markets in the North West and in South Wales, with easy access to the mainline rail service.
- Give serious consideration to the aspiration of Church Stretton to develop a transport hub/information centre close by the railway station, to support visitor arrivals and transfers.

► **6.3 Encourage and assist tourism enterprises to promote public transport options to their guests**

Generic approaches to public transport access do not work well with a tourism industry that is scattered and fragmented. However, individual businesses are in a position to investigate the most appropriate and convenient way for visitors to gain access to their services by public transport and also to suggest car free days out based on their premises.

- Share information with guests prior to arrival as well as during their stay.
- Accommodation operators to keep up to date public transport information available for guests and suggest day trip options by train or bus.
- Promote services such as the Heart of Wales Line (HOWL) as travel experiences in their own right, celebrating Slow Travel.
- Arrange a familiarisation day out on HOWL for accommodation operators.
- Work with Heart of Wales Line to raise awareness of the areas which it serves, developing an enticing window gazer to tell the story of the landscape.
- Accommodation, attractions and events to offer discounts to those arriving by public transport.
- Event organisers to promote arrangements for arrival by public transport, including transfer arrangements where necessary.
- Encourage take-up by anticipating practical requirements, such as pre-arranged cycle hire, taxi pick-ups or local food boxes.

► **6.4 Maintain, expand and promote the use of the Shropshire Hills Shuttle buses**

The Shropshire Hills Shuttle Buses, now managed by the AONB Partnership, are well established as a concept but have been dependent on annual funding arrangements, with just one service operating in 2011. Advantages include traffic reduction in sensitive landscapes, low carbon travel, sense of discovery, social experiences and access for those with impaired mobility.

Opportunities include:

- Reinstating lost services and establishing a collective network of services under one recognised label.
- Reintroducing the Wenlock Wanderer, linked to the Olympic Games in Much Wenlock in 2012 with a future option to serve the Wenlock Quarries as they are developed.
- Aiming a service at the high volume of visitors to Ludlow, linked to the Clee Hills or to Clun/Bishop's Castle.
- Taking a long term view of the future of the network, branding the services more strongly, securing market support and being ambitious about establishing the area as a destination for sustainable tourism.

► **6.5 Pursue other innovative forms of alternative transport provision**

Specific and individual needs for journeys often require a particularly flexible solution, which might include:

- Offering drop-off or pick-up services to link with public transport or support linear walks, through use of taxis, Shropshire Link buses or removing barriers to tourism providers making use of a private car to carry guests.
- Promoting low carbon forms of transport, offering visitors the opportunity to trial new approaches, including the hydrocar and electric bikes.

► **6.6 Expand and support the proportion of enterprises pursuing sustainable tourism management**

Additional support should be given to the growing number of tourism providers who have sought to reduce the environmental impact of their facilities through design, refurbishment, investment in infrastructure and thoughtful management practice. Many businesses are leading the way to more sustainable living, while providing a special or unusual holiday experience. They play an important role in demonstrating the success of the area in introducing new technologies, encouraging reduced energy demand and promoting sources of renewable energy considered appropriate in and around an area protected for its landscape value.

- Support tourism businesses already participating in the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme in following a programme of continuous improvement aimed at reducing their impact on the environment and encourage them to seek additional recognition through the national Green Tourism Business Scheme
- Keep the door open for additional businesses taking first steps in sustainable design and management.
- Encourage more tourism businesses to invest in green technologies; profile exemplar businesses and signpost sources of information, including demonstrations of woodland management for biomass; demonstrate links to, and lessons from, local industrial heritage eg early hydro-power.
- Build on the success of the Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme to highlight a collection of visitor experiences based on facilities incorporating features designed to minimise their impact on the environment.

► **6.7 Pursue options to generate support from visitors and enterprises for conservation**

Individual tourism businesses already have the opportunity to join or otherwise support a local conservation organisation or project, and to provide a channel for their visitors to engage with their activities and current projects. This is to be encouraged, but there may be an opportunity to introduce a more formal 'visitor payback' scheme as operated by some other protected areas, inviting visitors to make a voluntary contribution or imposing a small charge which goes towards a landscape or nature conservation project or projects.

- Explore the options available for a destination-wide scheme, evaluating the possible benefits to the AONB.

## **7 SUPPORTING LOCAL ENTERPRISE**

**To build the contribution of tourism enterprises to the local economy, increasing business success and ensuring consistency in the quality of the tourism offer**

### **► 7.1 Raise the quality of service in tourism enterprises**

Quality is paramount for success of the destination and individual enterprises, at all price ranges. In particular, there is a need to improve quality of mid-range accommodation and catering establishments. Action includes:

- Encouraging participation in quality assurance schemes
- Promoting good practice as examples to others, through familiarisation trips etc.
- Local PR for businesses that win awards
- Encouraging investment in improvements and upgrading
- Training (see below)

### **► 7.2 Develop and deliver relevant business advice and skills training**

Service quality and business success can be assisted by advice and training, for business managers, staff and potential employees, provided that this is well targeted to their needs and reaches those who can most benefit from it. Action required includes:

- Working with groups of businesses to identify needs and tailor training to meet them
- Finding ways of reaching certain businesses that tend not to engage
- Expanding and promoting hospitality skill training courses and Ludlow College and other institutions, with the involvement of enterprises.

It is important to keep abreast of changing skills and training needs; topics raised during consultation for this strategy included:

- Marketing – especially new technology, e-marketing, online booking and social media
- Attracting low season business – offers, products and promotions
- Sense of place and local knowledge
- Practical advice on improving customer service, quality and sustainability
- Targeted advice to pubs on maintaining business in difficult times
- General hospitality skills for staff

### **► 7.3 Encourage creative business to business networking**

Much can be achieved by encouraging local businesses to work together - to learn from and support each other and develop collective approaches. This can be facilitated by:

- Promoting membership of the local tourism association and town groups (see next Chapter)
- Encouraging collaborative groupings within sectors – e.g. local activity providers
- Strengthening local supply chains linking enterprises (for food, see Objective 4)
- Encouraging enterprises to put together joint offers
- Encouraging cross-referrals when a business is full

- Using new media to communicate within networks – e.g. tweeting availability

► **7.4 Establishing positive dialogue between investors and planners**

The Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan provides some guidance on the types of tourism development most suited to the area, requiring this to meet a high standard of environmental sensitivity and sustainability. It identifies some types of more intrusive development that are less likely to be supported. However, it is important that the planning and development control process is encouraging of appropriate new development and does not put off innovative investment, while still respecting this policy. This can be helped by:

- Running some joint awareness sessions between planners, tourism businesses and landowners to strengthen understanding of the issues and processes
- Encouraging early dialogue between developers and planners on individual projects
- Avoiding formulaic decisions and reflecting the circumstances of each project.

► **7.5 Encourage investment in innovative tourism products that relate well to the area's character and appeal**

In general, the business outlook for tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow is positive and many enterprises have reported recent growth. The destination's character and strengths, market trends and, in some cases, gaps in existing provision suggest that particular opportunities may exist with the following types of development, although this is certainly not an exclusive list:

- Good quality accommodation of all types and sizes in suitable locations with high quality design appropriate to the location and the area and excellent environmental performance.
- Innovative forms of camping and eco-friendly self-catering units, but also traditional small camping sites
- Farm based accommodation which secures, or otherwise contributes to, the future viability of a landholding.
- High quality guesthouses and boutique hotels, providing local character and produce
- More accommodation in places where there is little at the moment or demand is high e.g. Cleobury Mortimer, Minsterley, B&B in Ludlow
- Diversified catering and other products attached to local pubs
- Activity centres that extend and diversify opportunities available in the area, including environmental activities, craft activities inspired by the landscape and activities which promote health and wellbeing based on sense of place.

## 5 IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

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The previous section set out a range of priorities for action. Together they form a framework action plan for the five year period 2011 – 2016. This chapter considers the necessary structures for overseeing and coordinating the implementation of the plan and provides an indication of the resources and major stakeholders implicated by the actions. Finally it identifies the processes for monitoring the impact of tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow and for reviewing the strategy.

### 5.1 Structures for coordination and action

The development of this strategy and action plan has confirmed the great opportunities for tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow as a special destination with much to offer visitors based on its natural beauty, historic heritage and rural qualities linked to food and activities. A number of actions have been identified. Now is the time to work together to deliver them and to help the area truly make the most of its potential.

The destination already has in place a number of delivery structures, most of which are not present in other competing destinations. These include:

- An AONB Partnership and team experienced and active in managing the rural resource for recreation and tourism, working with small enterprises, pursuing sustainability and delivering products and information to visitors.
- Tourism groups in most of the market towns, some of which have been very active in relating to local business, local residents and other interests alongside tourism in the management and delivery of their tourism offer.
- Shropshire Council, which despite budget cuts and re-organisation, has restated its commitment to active support for the visitor economy and also provides very relevant services in areas of rural regeneration, countryside access, arts and other fields.
- An existing tourism trade association covering and focussed on the exact area of the destination, in the form of Shropshire Hills Tourism.
- An experienced team providing marketing and business support services for Shropshire in the form of Shropshire Tourism Ltd.

#### ***The role of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP as the coordinating body***

There needs to be a body that takes overall responsibility for bringing this all together, providing coordination, directing and overseeing delivery. The newly formed Destination Development Partnership is ideally placed to be that body and it is timely that this structure has been introduced in Shropshire.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas requires that the tourism strategy for protected areas, which may cover the destination in which they are located, is agreed by and implemented through a stakeholder partnership which includes the protected area body and representatives of the tourism trade and community and conservation interests. The DDP can fulfil that requirement.

This places a considerable responsibility on the DDP. It will need to be well structured, with partners firmly committed to its success. It will require:



- Clear terms of reference
- An executive group that is able to focus on delivering the coordination process
- A governance process that reflects the partnership make up
- A communication process that is largely dependent on the partners keeping their various members, constituents and stakeholders well informed
- Regular meetings, supported by an active Chair and secretariat.

*Terms of Reference are currently in preparation.*

Human resources will be needed to:

- Support the functioning of the DDP
- Work on the actions set out in this strategy.

The latter will be provided in part by identifying resources already available to the organisations identified above, strengthened wherever possible by resources sought specifically to support a particular action. However there may also need to be some additional resources, dedicated to the DDP, to develop new activity as well as to support the running of the partnership.

There are various options as to how a dedicated presence might be sustained at the destination level. This could come from:

- A commitment to the destination area from a higher level;
- Bringing together resources and efforts of businesses and communities from within the destination; or
- A combination of the two.

Ideally, the equivalent of a full time officer would be made available to fulfil this task. This may involve the allocation of, and commitment to, clearly specified staff time from Shropshire Council and/or other partners. This is an issue for the Partnership to address.

The DDP will need to link closely with the Shropshire and Telford Tourism Strategy Board, to ensure alignment of strategic activity with the county level. There will also need to be some co-ordination with other DDPs or equivalent structures in neighbouring areas, (including Shrewsbury, Wellington/Telford/Ironbridge and the Severn Valley, mid-Wales and Herefordshire), especially for the benefit of some locations on the margins between areas.

### ***The key position of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership***

The protected area is central to the strategy and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership will play a key role in implementation, where there is a good fit with their focus on the AONB and their own responsibilities and priorities.

Bodies concerned with the natural environment and historic heritage, at a national, regional and local level, have a particularly important role to play. These include government bodies and agencies, such as Natural England and English Heritage, and non government organisations such as the National Trust and Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

### ***The importance of Shropshire Council and other partners***

Shropshire Council has a strong role to play, notably in the provision and maintenance of infrastructure and public facilities, as a provider of support services

and as the planning authority for the area. The new Visitor Economy Team, set within Business Growth and Prosperity, will be well placed to offer overall support to the DDP in implementation of the strategy and action plan, as well as making a direct contribution to delivery of certain actions.

Other partnership bodies will also be very important, and the area is well placed to benefit from any tourism initiatives that may be established by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

### ***Engagement of the private sector***

It is important that a separate trade body continues to exist at the destination level, which can represent the interests of its members and work within the Destination Development Partnership to deliver the strategy. Decisions on the function and resourcing of the DDP should also take into account the requirements of Shropshire Hills Tourism.

### ***Engagement of the market towns***

Tourism groups in the individual market towns require human resource support in order to be successful. This frequently relies on voluntary activity, in some cases with the support of the town or parish council. By working more closely together within the context of the DDP, new opportunities to pool or share resources and obtain support for their activities may arise. A decision will be required about how to engage with those market towns, such as Knighton and Wellington, which are not involved with the DDP.

## **5.2 Implementing the action plan**

The five year action plan is summarised in the table that follows. This indicates:

- The level of priority of the action – high priority shown by a star (\*).
- The year or years in which it might fall – indicating when main concentration of effort should happen.
- An indication of the level of financial resources that may be required for each step as follows:
 

Low	Under £15,000
Medium	£15,000– £75,000
High	Over £75,000
- Key agencies to implement the action, starting with the lead agency

### ***Key to abbreviations used in the table***

AONB	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	MTs	Market towns
CBs	Conservation bodies	NT	National Trust
DDP	Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP	PS	Private sector
FC	Forestry Commission	SC	Shropshire Council
HBs	Heritage bodies	SHT	Shropshire Hills Tourism
LEP	Marches LEP	ST	Shropshire Tourism Ltd
LL	Local to Ludlow	VE	VisitEngland

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Financial Implication</b>	<b>Key Agencies</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>RAISING AWARENESS</b>				
1.1	Agree core destination values and messages	*	1	Low	DDP, AONB, SHT
1.2	Agree and disseminate a visual identity and supporting text		1-2	Med	DDP, AONB, SHT
1.3	Assemble a good photo collection		2-3	Med	DDP, AONB, SC, ST
1.4	Improve the branding and performance of the existing website to operate as a high profile website for the destination	*	1-5	Med	DDP, AONB, SHT, ST
1.5	Develop and implement an online marketing strategy		1-5	Low	DDP, SHT, ST
1.6	Maintain a suite of key destination print		1-5	Med	DDP, AONB, SHT, ST,
1.7	Pursue an active PR campaign	*	1-5	Med	DDP, AONB, SHT, SC, ST, VE
1.8	Establish and maintain a presence in Shropshire promotions		1-5	Med	DDP, ST, SC
1.9	Pursue opportunities in selected target markets		2-5	Med	DDP, AONB, SHT, ST, VE
<b>2</b>	<b>DELIVERING THE HILLS EXPERIENCE</b>				
2.1	Give priority to maintaining a high quality landscape as a primary resource of sustainable tourism	*	1-5	Low	AONB, SC, CBs, NT, FC
2.2	Provide and promote opportunities to experience the distinctive landscapes and heritage of different parts of the Hills	*	1-5	High	AONB, SC, CBs, NT, FC
2.2	Maintain and promote a range of high quality, varied walking experiences available all year	*	1-5	High	SC, AONB, CBs, NT, FC
2.4	Maintain and promote a range of cycling and mountain biking opportunities, for access and enjoyment		2-5	High	SC, AONB, NT, FC
2.5	Further develop and promote the potential of the area for horse riding		3-5	High	SC, AONB, NT, FC
2.6	Facilitate pre-booked and on-demand access to a range of outdoor experiences	*	2-5	Low	AONB, DDP, PS
2.7	Provide opportunities to experience and understand the area's geology and wildlife		3-5	Med	AONB, CBs, NT, HBs
2.8	Promote opportunities to engage creatively and practically in rural and cultural heritage themes and activities linked to the landscape		3-5	Low	PS, AONB, DDP, NY, HBs
<b>3</b>	<b>DELIVERING THE MARKET TOWN EXPERIENCE</b>				
3.1	Develop the unique identity of each town in relation to the destination brand	*	1-2	Med	MTs, DDP, SC
3.2	Provide effective information material for each town		1-5	Med	MTs, DDP, SC
3.3	Provide a high quality of visitor facilities, services and amenities	*	1-5	High	SC, MTs, PS

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Financial Implication</b>	<b>Key Agencies</b>
3.4	Deliver a creative experience of the town's heritage, through sites, trails and interpretation	*	2-5	High	MTs, SC, PS, HBs, NT
3.5	Coordinate and promote a programme of events between the towns		2-5	Med	MTs, DDP, AONB, SC, SHT
3.6	Encourage and support a distinctive retail experience		3-5	Med	MTs, SC, PS
3.7	Provide clear access links between the towns and the countryside		2-5	Low	AONB, MTs, SC
<b>4</b>	<b>DELIVERING THE LOCAL FOOD EXPERIENCE</b>				
4.1	Promote and develop the area's high profile food events, spreading their outreach across the area and the year		1-5	Med	DDP, SHT, ST, LL, PS, LEP
4.2	Maintain and seek to expand the presence of food outlets of national renown		3-5	Low	PS, DDP, SHT, LL LEP
4.3	Raise the quality and accessibility of catering available throughout the area for all budgets	*	2-5	High	PS, DDP, SHT, ST, LL, LEP
4.4	Promote a range of opportunities for visiting, experiencing and purchasing from local food and drink suppliers		2-5	Low	PS, DDP, AONB, SHT
4.5	Strengthen the availability and creative use of local produce in catering outlets	*	1-5	Med	PS, DDP, AONB, SHT, LL, LEP
<b>5</b>	<b>ORIENTATING AND INFORMING VISITORS</b>				
5.1	Maintain an effective network of VICs, visitor centres and information points across the area	*	1-5	High	SC, AONB, DDP, MTs
5.2	Maintain an effective system of information gathering and dissemination	*	1-5	Med	DDP, SC, ST, SHT, AONB, VE
5.3	Maximise on opportunities for visitor orientation and interpretation presented by the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre		2-3	Med	SC, AONB
5.4	Ensure that accommodation hosts are well placed to orientate and assist their visitors	*	1-5	Med	SHT, DDP, PS, AONB, SC
5.5	Strengthen the effectiveness of identity and directional signing		3-5	High	SC, AONB
5.6	Expand the use of creative i.t. based information and interpretation tools		3-5	Med	DDP, AONB, ST
5.7	Provide for visitors with special information needs		3-5	Low	AONB, MTs, DDP
<b>6</b>	<b>PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE ACCESS AND MANAGEMENT</b>				
6.1	Pursue visitor management actions that reflect the AONB Management Plan	*	1-5	Low	AONB, SC, NT, FC, CBs, SHT
6.2	Develop and promote creative day visit and holiday options based on public transport	*	2-5	Low	PS, AONB, DDP, SHT, SC
6.3	Encourage and assist tourism enterprises to promote public transport options to their guests		1-5	Low	DDP, SHT, SC, AONB, PS
6.4	Maintain, expand and promote the use of the Shropshire Hills shuttle buses		2-5	High	SC, AONB, DDP, SHT

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Financial Implication</b>	<b>Key Agencies</b>
6.5	Pursue other innovative forms of alternative transport provision		3-5	Med	SC, AONB, PS
6.6	Expand and support the proportion of enterprises pursuing sustainable tourism management	*	1-5	Med	DDP, AONB, SHT, SC, CBs
6.7	Pursue options to generate support from visitors and enterprises for conservation		3-5	Med	AONB, CBs, DDP, SHT, PS
<b>7</b>	<b>SUPPORTING LOCAL ENTERPRISE</b>				
7.1	Raise the quality of service in tourism enterprises		1-5	High	DDP, SHT, ST, PS
7.2	Develop and deliver relevant business advice and skills training		2-5	Med	DDP, SHT, ST, LEP
7.3	Encourage creative business to business networking		1-5	Low	DDP, SHT, ST, LEP
7.4	Establish positive dialogue between investors and planners		3-5	Low	SC, AONB, DDP, SHT, LEP, PS
7.5	Encourage investment in innovative tourism products that relate well to the area's character and appeal	*	1-5	High	PS, SC, AONB, DDP, LEP

### 5.3 Indicators

A set of indicators is required for use in monitoring the performance and impact of tourism over the period 2011-16. The ideal is to make use of information that is collected for other purposes, but with the withdrawal of the Regional Development Agency and uncertainty about future responsibilities for tourism, it is difficult at this point in time to envisage what opportunities there will be for this.

It will be important for partners to consider how feasible it is to share information that they are collecting for their own purposes.

Possibilities include:

#### ***Volume and spread of tourism***

- UKTS three year rolling average of visitor trips, nights and spending in the county and region.
- Opening times of attractions
- Annual attendance figures at events
- Visits and enquiries to Visitor Information Centres
- Traffic and user counts at main locations (monthly).
- Number of tourism development projects receiving planning permission.

#### ***Visitor satisfaction***

- Percentage of visitors satisfied in general and with types of facility/service.
- Proportion of repeat visitors.

### ***Tourism enterprise performance and satisfaction***

- Accommodation occupancy rates and visitor numbers at attractions and main sites (monthly as indicator of seasonality).
- Enterprise performance - increase or decrease compared to previous year(s).
- Proportion of enterprises with quality certification.
- Number of tourism enterprises from Shropshire Hills and Ludlow in membership of Shropshire Tourism Ltd and Shropshire Hills Tourism.
- Percentage of enterprises satisfied with management and marketing of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow

### ***Environmental impact***

- Records of air and water quality
- Levels of litter in key sites
- Proportion of visitors arriving by public transport
- Passenger numbers using Shropshire Hills Shuttle Buses
- Number of enterprises in Green Tourism Business Scheme or equivalent environmental certification.
- Number of enterprises taking environmental management measures such as recycling.
- Number of enterprises in membership of Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme.
- The area of SSSIs in favourable condition.

## **5.4 Monitoring**

Monitoring processes will involve a combination of surveys, utilisation of external data sources, observation and less formal and structured feedback.

### ***Overall volume and value of tourism***

The current series of UKTS data is sufficiently robust for VisitEngland to be releasing three year rolling average figures at a county level. However, this will not provide a clear picture of activity at the level of the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow destination.

### ***Visitor feedback surveys***

There may be an opportunity for DDP partners to collaborate on collecting feedback from visitors on a systematic basis, using a common set of core questions.

### ***Performance and opinion of tourism enterprises***

An opportunity should be found to repeat a part of the enterprise survey conducted as part of the development of this strategy, focusing on questions relating to business performance.

### ***Physical checks on visitor flows and impacts***

Those responsible for the management of heavily visited or sensitive sites should be encouraged to monitor, and if possible share information about, visitor flows and resulting impacts.

## **5.5 Strategy review**

The Shropshire Hills and Ludlow DDP should take overall responsibility for the strategy. Many of the actions will be led by Shropshire Council and the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, along with other organisations. Annual action plans should be prepared based on this five year strategy and action plan.

Actions undertaken should be recorded and reported to the DDP.

This strategy and action plan will form a key part of the application for the EUROPARC European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. In 2016 a new strategy and action plan should be prepared and will form the basis for renewal of the Charter.

## APPENDIX ONE

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Enterprise survey 2011 – scoring of various destination management activities by

a) importance to the success of tourism businesses in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow and

b) performance of Shropshire Hills and Ludlow as a sustainable tourism destination.

**Table A.1**

**Top 10 – importance to the success of tourism businesses in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, most important first**

Attracting visitors to the area in general
Upkeep and appearance of the market towns
Identification and promotion of walking routes/trails
Conserving the area's landscape and wildlife
Information on where to go, what to do, post-arrival
Attracting visitors at less busy times of year
Destination website for Shropshire Hills/Ludlow
Information on where to go, what to do in the area, pre-arrival
Provision and promotion of events
Identification and promotion of local produce

**Table A.2**

**Top 10 – performance of tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, strongest first**

Conserving the area's landscape and wildlife
Identification and promotion of local produce
Information on where to go, what to do, post-arrival
Range and quality of visitor attractions
Provision and promotion of events
Identification and promotion of walking routes/trails
Provision and operation of information centres
Upkeep and appearance of the market towns
Attracting visitors to the area in general
Interpretation / promotion of the area's natural heritage / wildlife



**Table A.3**

**Weakest 10 – performance of tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow, weakest first**

Providing and promoting public transport
Providing basic visitor services (eg car parking/toilets)
Reducing visitor pressure on certain key areas
Attracting visitors at less busy times of year
Local provision of tourism career/skills training
Identification of AONB boundaries
Spreading visitor spending across the area
Research into visitors and visitor trends
Managing promotional campaigns for the area
Improving visitors' understanding of the effect of their behaviour on the environment

**Table A.4**

**10 factors where gap is greatest between importance and performance, ranked by gap descending**

Providing basic visitor services (eg car parking/toilets)
Attracting visitors at less busy times of year
Providing and promoting public transport
Managing promotional campaigns for the area
Spreading visitor spending across the area
Improving visitors' understanding of the effect of their behaviour on the environment
Attracting visitors to the area in general
Signposting
Destination website for Shropshire Hills/Ludlow
Helping tourism enterprises to improve knowledge of the area to pass on to guests