



SHROPSHIRE HILLS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY 2018 - 2023

'Working to promote environmentally positive tourism in the Shropshire Hills'

Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership

January 2018



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This document has been produced by Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership on behalf of the Destination.

It is available digitally at: www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/aonb-partnership/sustainable-tourism-charter

1. Foreword

This strategy aspires to make the Shropshire Hills stand out as a rural holiday and daytrip destination, while retaining its essence and qualities. Managing tourism sustainably is about carefully balancing the needs of the area's economy and community with the need to keep it special.

Our visitors are attracted here by outstanding landscapes, delightful market towns, fresh air, good food, outdoor challenges, simple comforts and feeling part of an authentic rural community. We want them to know that the places they cherish will be cared for in the same way for their children and their children's children.

This goal cannot be achieved by one organisation alone. That is why this strategy's main theme is working in partnership. Tourism in the area is coordinated by the Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership. We will work with the businesses on the front line, and with organisations at a local, county, national and even international level. The Shropshire Hills are a jewel in Shropshire's crown, a place to be enjoyed and treasured.

The ideas, priorities and actions set out in this plan have come from many conversations. We look forward to working with you to put it into effect.

Paul Davis Chair of Shropshire Hills Tourism

Phil Holden Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Manager and Chair of Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership¹

¹ For details of the Destination Partnership, see page 5



2. Introduction

Tourism has changed a lot in the last five years. There are new challenges to face and new opportunities to explore. This strategy picks up from where the 2011-16 Shropshire Hills & Ludlow Sustainable Tourism Strategy left off. It is a new Destination Plan for the Shropshire Hills area, following the guidelines set out by Visit Britain. It establishes the priorities and sets the direction for the next five years.

[The importance of tourism in the Shropshire Hills](#)

A study in 2011 stated that tourism was worth over £501² million to Shropshire's economy and provided over 15,000 jobs. A further study³ indicated that over £211 million of this was spent by visitors in southern Shropshire⁴. This represents 28% of all employment in tourism in the county and is equal to 4,403 jobs⁵.

Tourism is vital to the economy of the Shropshire Hills. Many small businesses and farms depend on the opportunities tourism brings. Tourism is the lifeblood of many of our

market towns. Money spent by visitors helps keep our communities together.

Tourism is part of our landscape's future. The Shropshire Hills are an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. People come to enjoy our clean air, unspoiled open spaces, stunning views, dark skies, wildlife, rich heritage, traditions and vibrant culture.

Our landscape is special, highly valued and should be carefully managed. This strategy is supported by the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan. It is also the foundation for the AONB Partnership's application for continued recognition as a sustainably managed destination under the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

Recognised for excellence

The Shropshire Hills AONB is a member of the Europarc Federation, and in 2011 was awarded its '[Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas](#)'.

The Shropshire Hills is one of only seven AONBs of the 38 in England and Wales to have obtained the Charter. We hope that by renewing the Charter accreditation we can continue to benefit from a raised profile and reputation for the area, along with learning from a broad international network.

This strategy will help us renew our membership and maintain our international reputation.



² Shropshire Tourism

³ Shropshire Tourism / The Research Solution (TRS)

⁴ Includes Bridgnorth and Severn Valley

⁵ FTE Full time equivalent

What makes the Shropshire Hills a special place to visit?

If asked to describe our destination people often use the following adjectives: Unspoiled, tranquil, uncommercial, beautiful, and inspiring. Many are surprised by the quality and accessibility of our landscape. Many others describe it as an undiscovered gem. It is undeniably special. In 1958, its specialness was recognised when it became one of the UK's first Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The destination itself extends beyond the AONB to include our market towns. Like our hills, these are all individual, unassuming, but delightful places. They all have the ability to charm you, slow you down and unwind you. Then at festival time, it's a completely different vibe!

Among the folds of our landscape, we have an extraordinary wealth of places to visit. It is a landscape studded with ancient roads, barrow mounds and hillforts. We have some of the finest medieval castles and manors anywhere in England and our industrial story mirrors the industry of Ironbridge.

Added to that, for many, our most fascinating story is our origin, spelt out by our world-renowned geology.

But, most recognisably, the thing that makes our visitors really stop and gasp, is the quality of our views.



© Jordan Mansfield



© Paul Davis



© Richard Howell

3. Who is the 'we' in this strategy?

The Shropshire Hills

The Shropshire Hills destination consists of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and surrounding area. This includes the market towns of Ludlow, Bishop's Castle, Clun, Cleobury Mortimer, Craven Arms, Church Stretton and Much Wenlock. Ludlow is the most well-known of our towns having a reputation for fine food and the Arts. The Shropshire Hills Destination benefits from Ludlow's popularity and seeks to work with and alongside its Destination Partnership.

Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership

The delivery of this plan will be overseen by the Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership. The Partnership steers the sustainable development of tourism in the Shropshire Hills. It has 32 members including: Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, National Trust, Shropshire Hills Tourism, Destination Ludlow, Shropshire Tourism, Ludlow, Church Stretton, Bishop's Castle, and Much Wenlock Town Councils, English Heritage, and Shropshire Gold.

Its membership seeks to represent everyone who has a stake in the area's visitor economy, from B&B providers and other small businesses to national conservation bodies. For more about the Partnership see Appendices 1 & 4.

Working together

Tourism can work more effectively, and more sustainably, if everyone involved works together. This strategy is all about improving co-ordination, communication and collaboration, and working towards shared priorities and actions. We want you to contribute your ideas to the strategy and your actions to its delivery.

The 'we' is all of us

*'Coming together is a beginning;
keeping together is progress;
working together is success.'*

4. Our vision

The Shropshire Hills is a nationally recognised, sustainably managed tourism destination, valued for its outstanding landscape, wealth of visitor experiences and important contribution to the economy of Shropshire.

5. Aim of this strategy

To guide tourism activity that develops, manages and promotes the Shropshire Hills as a high quality sustainable tourism destination.

6. Strategic objectives

The following objectives have been prioritised through consultation with the Destination Partnership members and other tourism partners:

- i. To orientate and spread visitors across the area and through the season
- ii. To support the visitor economy through promoting year round events and activities, local businesses, food, drink and crafts
- iii. To work closely with businesses, attractions, communities and other tourism bodies

- iv. To increase enjoyment and understanding of our outstanding landscape's nature and heritage
- v. To promote the area's outstanding qualities for enjoyment, health and wellbeing whilst safeguarding them for the future



Church Stretton is known as the 'Heart of the Shropshire Hills'

7. Action plan

The following action plan sets out the planned priorities for the next five years. It starts with our aim:

“To guide tourism activity that develops, manages and promotes the Shropshire Hills as a high quality sustainable tourism destination.”

Objective 1: To orientate and spread visitors across the area and through the season

Reviewing and improving destination signage

It is important for any destination to have efficient signage, even in the age of sat navs and Siri. Better signage means efficient journeys, lower fuel use, happier visitors and greater footfall for businesses. The Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership are not responsible for signage, however we can help influence policy and implementation. We can also help businesses and communities who want to improve visitor orientation. In addition, many of our most treasured places can be tucked-away in hard to find places. This means that the easier to find places get more visitor pressure. It may also mean that visitors are missing some of our most inspiring places.

We see our Visitor Information Centres (VICs) as vital to our visitor experience. They create the face-to-face bespoke services so valued by

visitors. They are also valued by our communities.

- We will work with partners to ensure our signage is fit for purpose
- We will work with the business community, attractions and visitor information centres to help inform, engage and orientate visitors
- We will support visitor services across the area

Promoting greener ways to travel

We will support the work of the Shropshire Hills Shuttles Management Group to:

- Promote the Shropshire Hills Shuttles to local businesses and our visitors
- We will work with transport partners and providers to encourage greater use of public transport
- We will promote car sharing schemes such as Co Wheels
- We will promote cycling and walking holidays
- We will promote the bus and train network as an alternative to using cars for exploring the area wherever possible



The Shropshire Hills Shuttles are one of our sustainable tourism flagships. The service shows how we can work together to provide greener opportunities for visitors. It attracts green travellers and is valued by the communities it serves. It is managed by Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership for the National Trust, Shropshire Council and Natural England. Its aims are to:

- Grow the service, providing buses on busy weekdays as well as weekends and bank holidays during the peak seasons
- secure more carbon efficient vehicles
- develop monitoring and ticketing systems allowing more informed decisions about use and route planning
- develop further ideas for sponsorship and donations, reducing subsidies
- encourage more local involvement in the service's management



We will seek ways to promote and adopt new technologies for greening travel by:

- Promoting the use of hybrid and electric vehicles and greener fuel options
- Supporting the installation of EV charging points
- Developing relationships with businesses and local interest groups such as Stretton Climate Care and Green Shropshire Xchange

Promoting year round activities and events

Brexit, increasing costs of travel, and concerns about the security of holidaying overseas has led to a boom in 'staycations'. More people are choosing to holiday in the UK. Inbound tourism has also increased as visitors from the US, Australia and elsewhere have taken advantage of the weakness of the Pound. These two factors lead naturally to opportunities to grow the visiting season. Our ambition is to be seen as a year-round destination.

- We will develop and promote a year-round calendar of events and activities through print, digital and social media

Spreading visitor use across the area and through the seasons

The 2017 Shropshire Hills Tourism Business Survey told us that spreading visitor use across the destination and lengthening the season should be priority actions for the destination. This would not only help reduce pressure on honeypot sites, it would also ensure that expenditure from visitors could reach more of the area. In addition, the market towns are an essential part of the offer with the capacity to absorb more visitors. Promoting both is important to sustaining the economies of our towns and more isolated rural communities.

- We will work to put the promotional spotlight on less known locations and iconic places, celebrating the diversity of the landscape and its characterful historic market towns, whilst helping to take pressure off better-known locations
- We will maintain web and print media designed to help visitors navigate, find and be inspired by our harder to reach places
- We will promote community activities and events across the destination

Our Great Outdoors

The Shropshire Hills area is blessed by some of the finest walking in the county. Walking is one of our most popular outdoor activities; there is also a wealth of places to bike and ride. Offa's Dyke Path National Trail and the Shropshire Way represent the cream of the walking experiences. The Jack Mytton Way also makes some of our best viewpoints and wildest places available to off-road bikers and riders.

In addition, the Shropshire Hills boasts over 90% of the county's open access land. This includes all of our best-known hills.

Added to this richness of outdoor experiences are a wealth of wildlife areas. These include the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve and many smaller more intimate local nature reserves.



Promoting environmentally positive tourism in the Shropshire Hills

Objective 2: To support the visitor economy through promoting year round events and activities, local businesses, food, drink and crafts

Promoting green businesses and services for a better environment

To be a truly sustainable destination we need to have the support of a greener thinking business community. The Shropshire Hills Sustainable Business Scheme (2008-2017) showed what could be achieved when businesses work together for a greener environment. It also showed that thinking green and acting sustainably benefits businesses by reducing costs and increasing profits. In many ways, what was once a new idea has now become mainstream. However, businesses working together toward a better environment is still a good idea.

- We will launch a new membership scheme promoting green business products and services
- We will work with others to promote information and opportunities that help businesses prosper by being greener

Understanding your product is essential to successful sales. We believe that many local businesses would prosper through first-hand experience of what the area has to offer. We

also believe that this will add value to the visitor experience and businesses' ability to provide a high-quality personalised service.

- We will promote our area's best qualities to our business community through open days, workshops, events and networking opportunities.

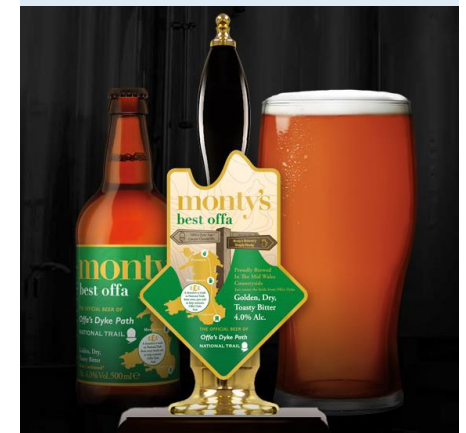
Objective 3: To work closely with businesses, attractions, communities and other tourism bodies

Demonstrating how we make a difference

Our recent survey of the business community has shown that there is considerable confusion about how tourism in the destination is managed. Businesses are unlikely to have heard of the Destination Partnership or its work. In addition, the county is emerging from an unsettled period in tourism management. In this time, we have seen a reduction in communication, funding, resources, support and skills. This has led to tourism being underrepresented to decision makers.

Our Cultural Offer

We have considerable cultural richness. Numerous listed buildings define our market towns and ancient monuments grace our landscape. There are few places with such diversity. They are the backbone of our cultural offer. They define our landscape and visitors' experience of it. Our events and festivals are inspired by and celebrate these riches. From walking to arts & crafts, many draw inspiration from ancient stories, places and people. Local food and drink producers use our legendary places to promote their finest products. Our museums and Acton Scott Historic Working Farm allow visitors to explore the relics and stories of the past as well as stunning geological and natural collections.



The statement within the 2017 Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy⁶ prioritising investment in tourism is very welcome. We need to ensure that decision makers are aware of the support that we can offer in the delivery of the Growth Strategy.

- We will grow the contacts, influence and reputation of the Destination Partnership as the central focus for tourism in the Shropshire Hills
- We will promote the work of the Destination Partnership and its members to local tourism businesses
- We will promote the Destination Partnership to the Local Enterprise Partnership and other strategic local partnerships and organisations
- We will work proactively with other destinations, AONBs and Visit Britain, promoting the Shropshire Hills, sharing best practice and developing ideas collaboratively

Objective 4: To increase enjoyment and understanding of our outstanding landscape's nature and heritage

Engaging with our landscape and heritage

Visitors greatly value the experience of connecting with people, places and wildlife. Powerful connections create strong emotional bonds. The internationally acclaimed interpreter Sam Ham describes this as 'loving leading to caring'. The ability of powerful experiences to change attitudes and behaviour through engaging with people emotionally has been well proven. It has been a central principle of the global conservation movement for many years. Structured interpretation has the capacity to develop visitors' sense of place. It draws together the most appropriate and powerful forms of communication, whether written, digital, artistic, spoken, acted, re-enacted, sung or just 'felt'. But, it is most powerful when it's delivered by people, to people, with passion, skill and enthusiasm.

- We will develop a destination interpretation plan and seek funding to resource its delivery.

⁶ <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/business-support/economic-growth-strategy-2017-2021/>

Managing the impact of visitors on the environment

The Shropshire Hills does not attract the same number of visits as other similar rural tourism destinations such as the Peak District and Yorkshire Dales. However, some of its best-known locations regularly get significant numbers of visitors. Carding Mill Valley, the Wrekin and the Stiperstones are the most popular sites for day visitors of all ages across a range of activities. The Long Mynd has become particularly popular with day visitors and outdoor enthusiasts. Other locations such as the Stretton Hills are very popular with walkers as well as walking and orienteering event enthusiasts.

The need to manage visitor pressure in these areas is becoming more acute.

- We will encourage a partnership approach to address visitor pressure issues
- We will also work to ensure that the need for managing visitors is understood and widely supported
- In addition, we will work with the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust to create opportunities for the public and business community to support restorative work through charitable giving

Managing the impact of visitors on people's lives

Traffic, inconsiderate parking, littering and fly tipping has an adverse effect on the lives of people in the communities closest to our busiest places. These issues also affect the quality of the environment and visitor experience. Partner organisations like Shropshire Council, National Trust, Natural England and Shropshire Wildlife Trust have considerable expertise in dealing with these issues. They also have the powers necessary to make changes on the ground.

- We will continue to work with our destination management partners and local communities to highlight and help address these issues where they arise
- We will work with transport partners and providers to encourage greater use of public transport
- We will promote access links to the countryside from towns, villages and appropriate countryside sites
- We will promote cycling routes and self-guided trails from our market towns and public transport routes.
- We will support initiatives that seek to generate income from visitors to help manage key sites

Managing visitors together

In 2016, on the busiest days of the year, it was estimated that over 1,000 cars were being turned away from Carding Mill Valley because the car park was full. The National Trust, Church Stretton Town Council and the AONB Partnership worked together to solve issues of overcrowding. Actions include:

- Reducing promotion
- Better information online about when the Valley is likely to be busy
- Distribution of the new Church Stretton Town Guide showing other places to park and walk from in the town
- Promoting other areas through 'Great Days Out in the Shropshire Hills' leaflet map
- Offsite parking controls

These measures are having a positive impact on visitor pressure.



Objective 5: To promote the area's outstanding qualities for enjoyment, health and wellbeing whilst safeguarding them for the future

One of the biggest challenges facing tourism in Shropshire that has emerged in the past five years is a loss of coordination. The Shropshire Hills are one of four recognised⁷ destinations within the county. Visitor studies have consistently shown that UK market awareness of Shropshire is comparatively low. Some destinations within the country (such as Ludlow and Ironbridge) are better known than the county. However, even if people have heard of them, they don't necessarily know where they are. Recent work for us by Gravity Consulting (2017) identified that it is likely that awareness of the Shropshire Hills as a destination is also considerably lower than of other similar rural destinations. This is consistent with previous studies.

Creating an 'Outstanding' destination

We will produce a new marketing plan that engages, inspires, coordinates and differentiates our unique destination.

It will define the Shropshire Hills as a stand out destination. It will maximise the benefits

derived from association with Ludlow, Ironbridge and Shrewsbury whilst building its own reputation. It will promote our distinctive qualities and maximise social media as a way of reaching visitors. This will aim to engage with them, encouraging them to enjoy and care more about our unique destination.

The new marketing plan will create ways to work with local tourism providers to communicate our shared values and messages to their customers. It will identify funding and support to develop web, e-commerce and social media skills within the sector.

Help others to help ourselves

Ludlow has been a successful independent destination for many years. We recognise its distinctive brand and celebrate its success. We believe both Ludlow and the Shropshire Hills benefit significantly by working closely together.

- We will work together, improving our access to funding and markets and maximising our resources

Coordinate our offer and messages

- We will use the marketing plan to bring together all of our partners in the adoption

⁷ By Visit Britain

of a brand that represents them and speaks to our visitors

- We will seek to develop the Shropshire Hills brand so that businesses and partners see it as essential to them and their recognition within the destination
- We will work to create a more joined up approach to digital marketing of the area

Show off the beauty and uniqueness of the Shropshire Hills

We need to work on what differentiates us from other destinations. It is not enough to say we have nice hills and open spaces. Today's audiences are increasingly interested in unique opportunities and personal experiences.

- We will develop resources and improve methods of showing off the very best of our destination.

Making more of what we've got and recognising its value

Three of the most important aspects of our tourism industry are our outdoor infrastructure, wild places, and cultural assets. They need to be recognised in the same way that industrial units, supply lines and communications are recognised for manufacturing and engineering. Without

them, we would not have a working tourism product.

- We will ensure that the value of our rights of way and open spaces, wildlife and heritage sites is communicated to the LEP⁸ and other economic planning partners
- We will work with our partners to promote and support the safeguarding of these important natural and cultural sites and attractions.
- We will work with others to help put our county's cultural and natural sites in the spotlight for inbound tourism
- We will support our communities and local businesses to make the strongest connections to our landscape's stories, promoting sense of place through food, drink, creative arts, crafts and celebration.

A valued Charter

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas will become central to our reputation.

- We will use the Charter to inspire businesses and our visitors to leave a greener footprint in the Shropshire Hills

⁸ Local Enterprise Partnership

Promoting environmentally positive tourism in the Shropshire Hills

Be a bigger part of the whole

Our destination represents over a quarter of the County's tourism offer.

- We will work to present a consistent and coordinated offer, working in partnership at a county level and beyond

Developing a reputation

It is unlikely that the Shropshire Hills will ever compete with the UK's top rural destinations. However, it has a lot to offer.

- We will build a reputation that celebrates the undiscovered, undeveloped, uncommercial, natural and relaxed pace of the Shropshire Hills

Helping visitors find and enjoy the good stuff

Studies show that increasingly, visitors tend not to plan their visit. They want to work out where they are going and where they are staying, but want to live in the moment when they are here. They have a 'fear of missing out,' i.e. going home having missed something good in the next village or valley. Providing up to date digital information is therefore vital. Also vital is having a vibrant, sharing culture on social media. However, not all our visitors are 'digital natives' and in some areas access to a mobile signal is patchy. We need to maintain our presence throughout our destination

in traditional visitor centres, and with printed leaflets, flyers and posters.

- We will support our business community to produce effective promotion both digitally and in print
- We will support our network of visitor information centres to provide the best service. We will promote Shropshire Hills Tourism, Virtual Shropshire, Shropshire Tourism and Buy-From Shropshire as being the best places to communicate directly with visitors through engaging web content and social media.

Maintaining a high quality landscape

Our landscape and market towns are relatively underdeveloped. Our high streets are full of independent shops, often trading from historic buildings. The views and open spaces of our Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty are largely uncluttered by large housing developments, caravan sites and factories. Our traditionally farmed landscape is an attraction in its own right. Many of our visitors value this 'unspoiled' character. It's one of the principle things that attracts them.

- We will support our partners who work to maintain the unspoiled character of our landscape and market towns.

'Sustainable Development is the pathway to the future we want for all. It offers a framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship and strengthen governance.'

Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations 2007 - 2016



8. Next steps – making it happen

This is an ambitious strategy. It sets out the priorities and the actions to address them. The only resources the Destination Partnership has for delivery is the energy and enthusiasm of its partners. Once this document is agreed, the next steps will be as follows:

- Supporting and encouraging partners who deliver actions
- Bringing partners together to lead on key activities
- Identifying and signing up champions and partners within the DP and the wider Shropshire tourism network
- Working up details for each action, with further consultation where necessary
- Setting criteria for success

All of the actions within this strategy will be coordinated and monitored by the Destination Partnership. Progress will be reported at an

annual tourism event that promotes and celebrates the industry within the destination and County.



Our historic market towns are a significant part of the destination's attraction for visitors

Appendix 1. Destination Management and other Tourism Organisations in Shropshire

Shropshire's key destinations are Shrewsbury, Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, Ludlow and The Shropshire Hills. They are supported and promoted by the following organisations:

Shropshire Hills Destination Partnership oversees the sustainable development of tourism in the Shropshire Hills. It has 32 members including Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, National Trust, Shropshire Hills Tourism, Shropshire Tourism, Ludlow, Church Stretton, Bishops Castle and Much Wenlock Town Councils, English Heritage and Shropshire Gold (for a full list see Appendix 4)

Shropshire Hills Tourism is the official destination marketing body for the Shropshire Hills and is a not-for-profit membership organisation. The organisation has been running for nearly 30 years, and was previously the South Shropshire Tourism Association. In 2016, SHT became independent from Shropshire Tourism. It currently has 167 members listed on its website⁹.

Shropshire Council is recognised by Visit England as a Destination Management Organisation. Responsibility for tourism rests within the Infrastructure and Communities department. They work to influence policy concerning jobs and economic growth and promote economic value of the county's unique cultural offer. In addition, Outdoor

Partnerships lead activity concerning access to the outdoors and management of the county's rights of way network and areas of open access. The Museum Service runs Acton Scott Historic Working Farm a popular attraction in the Shropshire Hills.

Shropshire Tourism is 'the official not-for-profit destination marketing organisation for Shropshire, with over 500 private sector members including accommodation providers, attractions, activity businesses, wedding and conference venues, shops, food and drink businesses and event organisers.'¹⁰

Shropshire Tourism work together with Bridgnorth & District Tourism Association to promote tourism in the Bridgnorth and Severn Valley area.

Visit Ironbridge is the official destination marketing body for the Ironbridge Gorge. The Gorge is the best-known and most popular destination in Shropshire. Ironbridge Gorge is also promoted by Discover Telford.

Shrewsbury Business Improvement District (BID) is a company tasked with making Shrewsbury 'a better town to do business, visit, work, and spend time in'. From 2013-2018 £1.6 million will be invested to improve the town's commercial environment for over 500 businesses and organisations in Shrewsbury town centre. Priorities and

⁹ www.visitshropshirehills.co.uk

¹⁰ www.shropshiretourism.co.uk

projects range from marketing and promoting the town, access and car parking, as well as business support activities.

Discover Telford is the overarching marketing organisation for the Telford and Wrekin areas including Ironbridge Gorge and the Wrekin. As the Wrekin is also part of the Shropshire Hills AONB, it is also part of the Shropshire Hills Destination.

Destination Ludlow Partnership was set up in 2016 in response to the availability of RDPE¹¹ funding. Ludlow itself is an established destination with a national reputation for fine food.

Appendix 2. Policy context

National and Local Policy:

As of autumn 2017, Visit Britain is working to secure the Tourism Sector Deal under the government's new **Industrial Strategy**¹².

The **Strategic Framework for Tourism in England 2010-2020**¹³ still stands, along with the **Rural Tourism Action Plan**¹⁴ coming under this.

The National Association for AONBs has an Accord on tourism that has established a more collaborative working relationship with Defra and Visit England¹⁵. There is also a

national group of AONB Officers working on Sustainable Tourism issues.

The Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-19¹⁶

The plan includes key themes and priorities that support the work of the Destination Partnership; they are 'Helping our local communities thrive in a more sustainable way' and 'Promoting personal enjoyment, understanding and participation'.

'Supporting enjoyment and a visitor economy in harmony with the AONB' is one of the six delivery priorities for the AONB Partnership.

Countryside Access Strategy for Shropshire 2008-2018

This strategy provides considerable support for the policies in this document. It supports and promotes sustainable travel, conservation and sustainable tourism. It also demonstrates the importance of the rights of way network and open access land to the visitor economy of the county.

The strategy, will be replaced in 2018 by the Shropshire Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-2028. Which will continue to champion the aims of the 2008-18 aims to: *'Provide a well maintained and promoted path network that encourages*

¹¹ Rural Development Programme England – Development Fund

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/industrial-strategy>

¹³ http://www.visitengland.com/sites/default/files/downloads/strategic_framework_for_tourism_document_1.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.stmem.com/downloads/company-documents/Rural-Tourism-Action-Plan-2010-2020.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/images/NAAONB-Defra-VisitEngland-Working-Towards-Sustainable-Tourism-in-England-July-2012.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/a-special-place/management-plan/>

walking, horse riding and cycling, providing opportunities for sustainable rural tourism and other local economic benefits’.

The Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy 2017-2021¹⁷

This strategy highlights the importance of the tourism economy for short and medium term action.

‘Assist the tourism and visitor economy sector partners to promote Shropshire as a destination and maximise the built and natural heritage assets throughout the county.’

It sets out the intention to invest in the growth potential of the visitor economy (and heritage-based businesses) especially with respect to innovation and technology.

‘There will be a strategic view of the visitor economy for Shropshire and the wider Marches area; this will be an opportunity to develop strategic linkages and a coherent approach to marketing the County on a national and international scale.’

Appendix 3. A snapshot of our visitors

Research over the last 12 years has consistently shown that our core visitor market fits the ‘rest and relaxation Traditionals’ profile. They are typically post family, couples, aged 46-64, in the ABC1 socio-economic brackets. However, the rise in activity holidays and day trips also shows the Shropshire Hills as relevant to what was described as the

‘Discoverer’ market profile. These were ABC1 adults who were as likely to visit a museum as a wildlife attraction, enjoy outdoor leisure activities and are attracted to the countryside and small towns.

In 2016, Visit England’s Project Lion redefined their domestic visitor segmentation into five groups. These were based on gender, age, lifestyle, social class and region.

Using this updated approach our core audience segment can be described as

‘Regular short breakers, day walkers, cyclists and outdoor enthusiasts, cultural tourists, skill, crafts and new experience seekers, nature enthusiasts and foodies’

The 2012-17 Tourism Strategy also recognised two further market segments described as Discoverers and Cosmopolitans. These two audience segments have similar life profiles to Traditionals but with a bias towards more active experiences.

Appendix 4. The role of the Shropshire Hills

Destination Partnership

The Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Partnership brings together tourism businesses, public bodies and community representatives. This forum supports sustainable

¹⁷ <https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/media/6087/economic-growth-strategy-for-shropshire-2017-2021.pdf>

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development in tourism and a higher quality experience for visitors.

The Destination Partnership's roles include:

- coordinating visitor information
- influencing marketing and promotion
- coordinating services and facilities
- sharing best practice
- supporting visitor information centres
- developing the area's sense of place and identity
- identifying and addressing issues concerning visitor management
- researching and gathering information
- maintaining links to other Destination Management Organisations and tourism partners within the county and beyond.

In addition, the Partnership is the forum for the area's participation in the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. The 2011-17 Sustainable Tourism Strategy put the Destination Partnership on a very strong footing. It enabled the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership to secure the European Charter.

It also :

- Established the destination as a new geographical unit, with a business association linked to the AONB
- Developed the area's branding
- Promoted recognition for walking and landscape as a driver for tourism in the area

- Created interest and activity among businesses to work more sustainably

The Destination Partnership Members

Bishop's Castle & Clun Tourism CIC
Bishop's Castle Town Council
Bridgnorth & District Tourism Association
Church Stretton Town Council
Cleobury Country Tourism Group
Destination Ludlow Partnership
English Heritage
Herefordshire Tourism
Ludlow Assembly Rooms
Ludlow Town Council
Much Wenlock Town Council
National Trust
Offa's Dyke Path National Trail
Shropshire Churches Tourism Group
Shropshire Council
Shropshire Gold
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre
Shropshire Hills Tourism
Shropshire Tourism
The Bog Visitor Centre
Upper Norton Holiday Property Bond

Appendix 5. Destination SWOT analysis

Strengths

1. Quality of our landscape and its designation
2. Local produce and small producers
3. Established Destination Management Organisation
4. Dedicated local tourism business membership organisation¹⁸
5. High quality local food and drink offer
6. Established variety of festivals and events
7. Rich cultural heritage assets and stories
8. Talented and diverse range of local artists, crafts people and writers
9. Easy access from the West Midlands
10. Central rail and bus links connected to Ludlow, Church Stretton, Craven Arms and Shrewsbury
11. High visitor loyalty
12. Diverse offer of characterful landscapes & market towns and villages
13. Excellent location for outdoor recreation
14. Comprehensive, well managed Rights of Way network
15. Large areas of Open Access
16. Large areas of landscape managed for conservation and recreation
17. Strength of neighbouring destinations – Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Ironbridge, Severn Valley
18. Underdeveloped and unspoiled by commercialism
19. Established and well understood short-break and day visitor market
20. Excellent track record of cooperation & promotion of sustainable tourism activity

Weaknesses

1. Destination relatively unknown
2. Awareness of Shropshire low
3. Integration with other DPs
4. Limited promotion of Shropshire
5. Limited coordination of the county as a destination
6. Very competitive domestic tourism market
7. Strong competition from similar destinations
8. Available support strongly weighted towards capital investment and 'hard' outputs
9. Very limited funding available for destination marketing activity
10. Investment directed towards individual businesses but not collaborative activity by DMOs
11. Rural car dependence
12. Poor mobile coverage for data traffic
13. Patchy free Wi-Fi provision
14. Relatively poor Wi-Fi speeds
15. Uncoordinated online offer – too much 'noise'
16. Distribution network for printed media relying on good will
17. Small business owners perceive a lack of strategic coordination and support
18. Lack of high-end accommodation provision
19. Lack of local research into visitors' needs and visiting trends

¹⁸ Shropshire Hills Tourism

Opportunities

1. Staycation market, glamping and caravanning boom
2. Continued popularity of good quality local food, gastro-experiences and small producers
3. Engagement through social media campaigns, blogging, review sites and bespoke printed media
4. Working with Shropshire Council and LEP through the 'Shropshire Economic Strategy'
5. Increasing small business confidence in the use of social media for promotion and engagement
6. Fuel tax on air flights, Brexit and other issues effecting domestic overseas travel & resulting in increased inbound tourism
7. Funding for carbon-friendly business development
8. Revitalised will for cooperation across the County
9. Recognition of visitor economy as important part of Shropshire economy by the Local Enterprise Partnership and Council
10. Replacement of EU funding with more bespoke UK Government funding
11. Greater recognition of landscape benefit to public health and wellbeing
12. Growth in wellbeing and 'new skills' markets
13. Growth in cycling and other activity markets
14. Collaborative marketing and knowledge sharing within National Association for AONBs
15. Links to a wider network of protected landscapes through European Charter
16. Increasing use of electric, driverless and self-drive transport

Threats

1. Increasing pressure on honey-pot sites
2. Road and rail infrastructure developments along the A49 corridor
3. Ageing market
4. Drive for economic growth at the expense of the resource
5. Loss of EU funding
6. Lack of investment and support for public transport
7. Brexit diverting investment away from tourism
8. Rising costs for small businesses
9. Competition from stronger destinations
10. Domestic and industrial development eroding landscape quality and rural nature
11. Creeping commercialism
12. Limited engagement with the Local Enterprise Partnership
13. Small business transience