



**Shropshire Hills  
National  
Landscape**



**Shropshire Hills  
Sustainable Tourism Strategy  
and Action Plan  
2024-29**

December 2023

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Carding Mill Valley, Church Stretton

## Introduction

This Strategy aims to guide the future development of tourism in the Shropshire Hills to be sustainable. Sustainable tourism is defined by the UN Environment Program and UN World Tourism Organisation 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.”*

Balancing these needs will only be achieved through partnership.

The Strategy has been developed by the Shropshire Hills National Landscape team and Partnership, working with partners including the business sector. This is the third sustainable tourism strategy for the Shropshire Hills and reflects changes since the previous ones. There have been changes in organisations in the tourism sector. The bar of sustainability has been raised with the climate and nature crises and requirements of net zero. The Covid pandemic highlighted the value of relatively natural landscapes for people’s health and wellbeing and changed patterns of use.

The Strategy coincides with the renaming of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as National Landscapes, to create a more welcoming and coherent network of these areas across England and Wales. The Strategy will support re-evaluation by the Europarc Federation for its Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

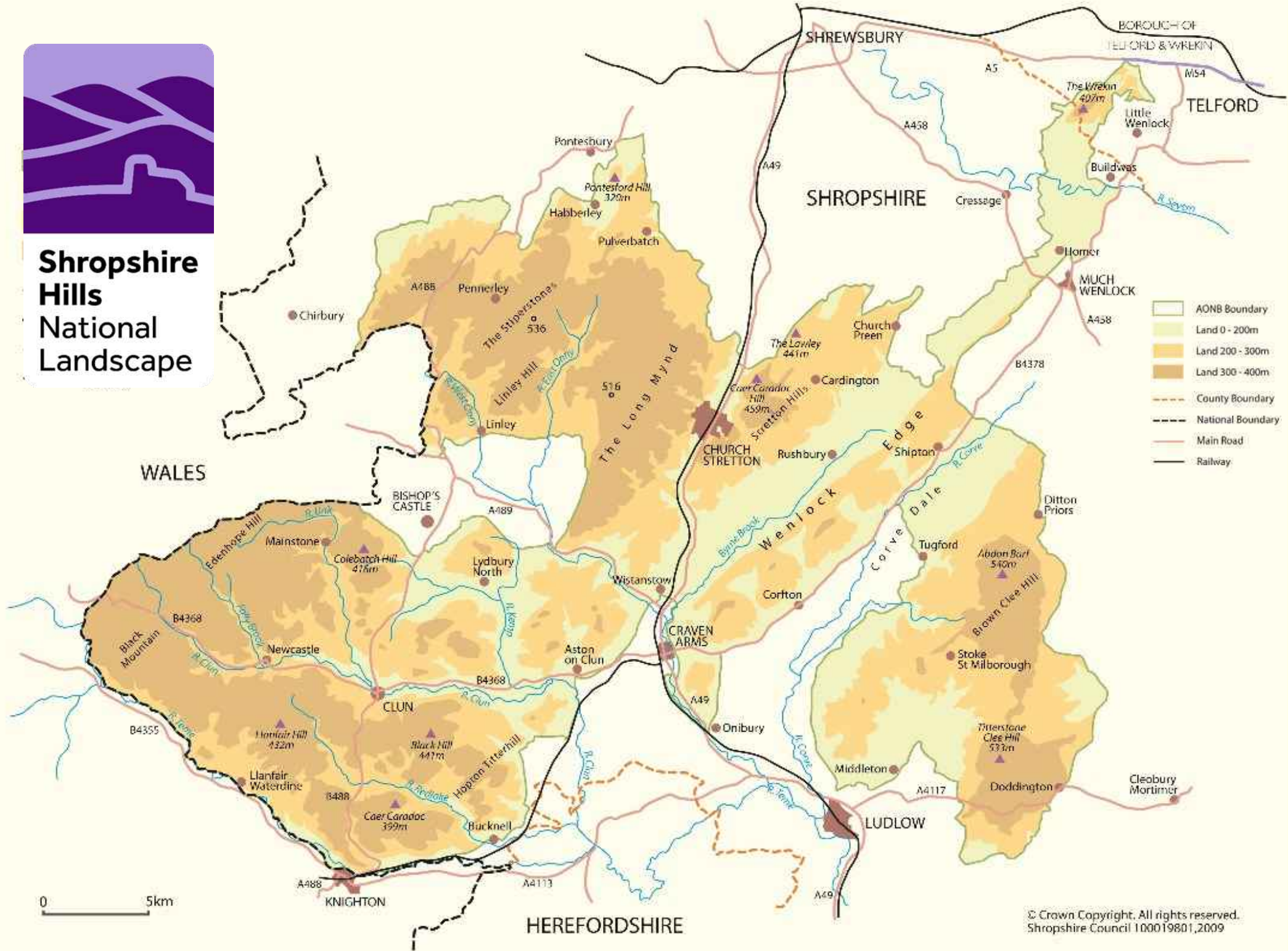
The area covered by the strategy is the Shropshire Hills National Landscape (designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The strategy includes aspects of collaborative working with the market towns of Ludlow, Bishop’s Castle, Clun, Cleobury Mortimer, Craven Arms and Much Wenlock lying just outside the designated area, but it doesn’t encompass all tourism activity relating to these towns. The Shropshire Hills has some recognition as an area but its strength lies in being part of Shropshire as a destination.



The Long Mynd & Stiperstones Shuttle in Church Stretton



# Shropshire Hills National Landscape



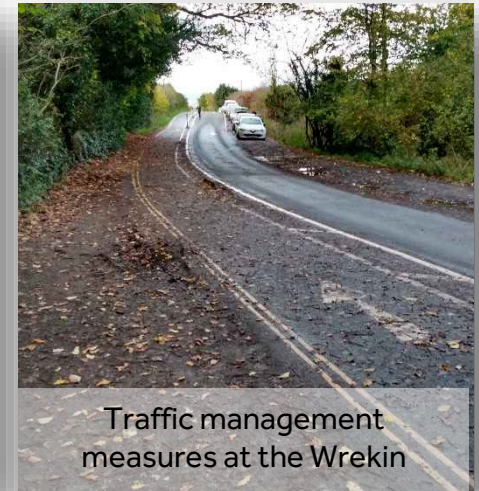
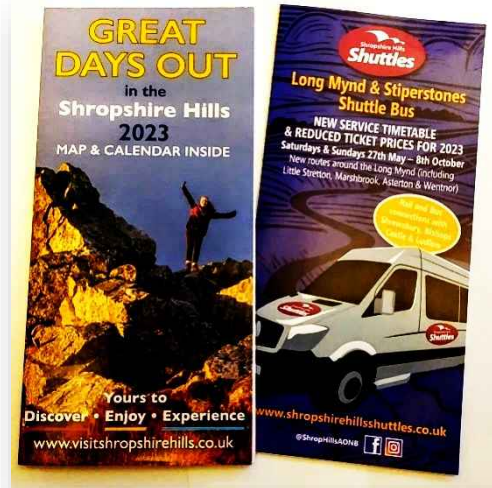
- AONB Boundary
- Land 0 - 200m
- Land 200 - 300m
- Land 300 - 400m
- County Boundary
- National Boundary
- Main Road
- Railway

0 5km

## Achievements during the last five years

Some of the highlights of collective partner working on sustainable tourism in the Shropshire Hills during the previous Strategy period have included:

- Covid recovery work including Shropshire Welcomes campaign, and collaboration between providers of countryside sites
- Fix the Fort project undertaking repairs to erosion on the Iron Age hillfort on Caer Caradoc
- Continuation of the Shropshire Hills Shuttles bus service
- Shropshire Hills Tourism Expo event held in multiple years
- Increased integration and representation of Shropshire Hills in the county level structures
- High profile for sustainability in the [Shropshire Destination Management Plan 2023-2025](#)
- Increased activity on climate change in local and national networks
- Visit Shropshire Hills rebranding and improved promotion and marketing including Great Days Out
- Telford & Wrekin Council implemented traffic management measures at the foot of the Wrekin
- National Landscapes rebranding November 2023
- Hay Meadow Festival held in 2020, 2021 and 2023
- Stepping Stones Farm Tourism study 2020
- Access for All capital works 2022-23 funded by Defra
- Diversity and inclusion study for the National Landscape



Traffic management measures at the Wrekin



Hay Meadow Festival July 2023

## Focus on: Fix the Fort, safeguarding archaeology

Caer Caradoc hillfort is one of the most iconic summits in the Shropshire Hills. Being situated close to Church Stretton, in the heart of the National Landscape, it is a very popular walking destination.

The popularity of the destination had contributed over many years to the erosion of the main ramparts and approaching footpaths. The damage had accelerated because of the increased visits during the Covid 19 Pandemic and busy period that followed this.

The stone footings of the earth embankments had become exposed in deep V-shaped notches. In other areas, paths had long erosion gullies, where exposed soil had been stripped away by heavy rain.

Using funding raised from visitors and local people, we installed a stepped and maintainable 'sacrificial stairway' at two locations. This was designed to improve accessibility whilst protecting the exposed archaeology. Further funding was awarded by HF Holidays and a Farming in Protected Landscapes grant.



Young Rangers and other local volunteers undertook archaeological surveys and some of the restoration work

## Natural and cultural resources of the area

With a variety of geology unequalled in any area of comparable size in Britain, the Shropshire Hills have a varied character. The rocky Stiperstones, the plateau and deep valleys of the Long Mynd, the craggy Stretton Hills and Wrekin, the quarried landscape of the Clee Hills, the wooded scarp of Wenlock Edge, and the rolling enclosed hills of the Clun Forest all have their own distinctive character.

The landscape is one of transition between the lowland plains of the English Midlands and the uplands of Wales, and this is reflected in both ecology and human activity. The patchwork of fields bounded by hedges results from generations of farming. Pasture grazed by livestock is the largest land use, along with arable cultivation on lower ground. The valuable habitats of heathland, grassland, ancient and semi-natural woodland and high-quality rivers and streams are linked to a long history of relatively sympathetic land management. The Shropshire Hills is very significant in the region for upland species such as merlin, snipe, whinchat, dipper, emperor moth, small pearl-bordered fritillary and grayling butterflies, and holds some nationally threatened species such as curlew and wood white butterfly.

Many ancient features survive in a landscape which has seen less change than many parts of the country. Defences such as Offa's Dyke, Iron Age hillforts such as at Caer Caradoc and Bury Ditches and medieval castles and fortified houses such as Clun and Stokesay, tell of centuries of turbulent history along the Welsh borderlands. Panoramic views extend from, across and into the Shropshire Hills, with wide open spaces and intimate corners. Off the beaten track and remote in the context of this part of England, the Shropshire Hills are a relative haven of tranquillity.

For more on special qualities of the Shropshire Hills see <https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/a-special-place/special-qualities>



Storm eroded path at Perkins Beach, October 2023

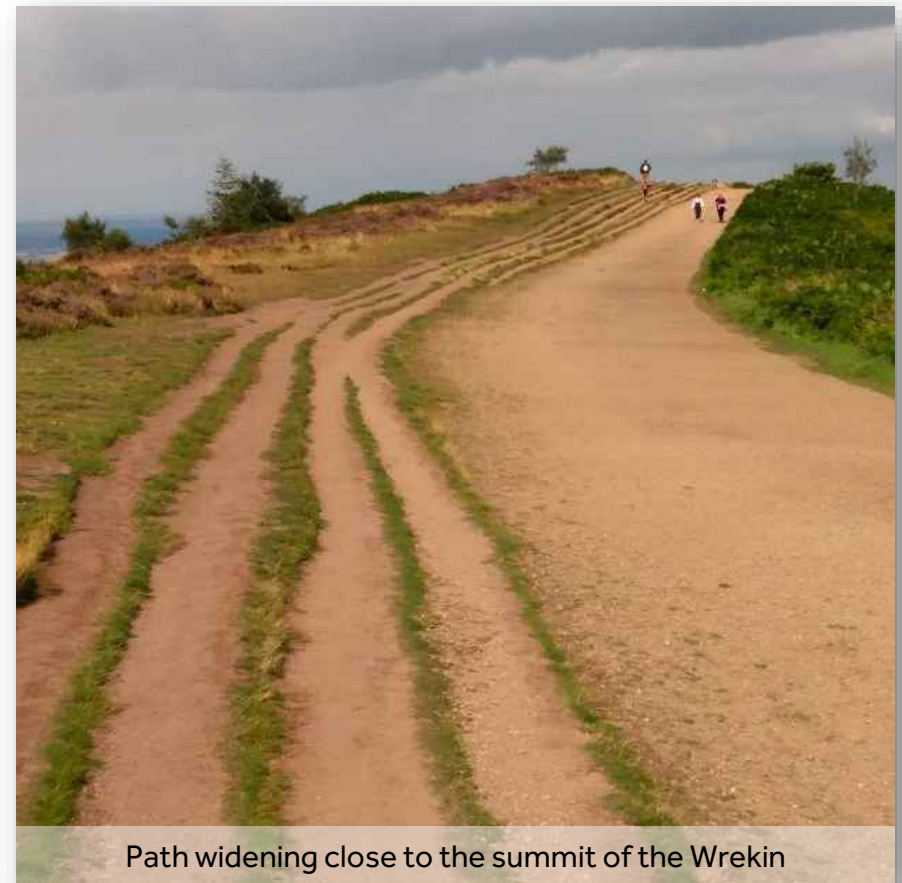
The Shropshire Hills have considerable cultural richness. Numerous historic buildings define our market towns and ancient monuments grace our landscape. These cultural features provide time-depth and character to our landscape and visitors' experience of it. Our events and festivals are inspired by and celebrate these riches. From walking to arts and 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 attractions allow visitors to explore the relics and stories of the past as well as stunning geological and natural collections.

The current review of the National Landscape Management Plan has identified climate change mitigation and adaptation, nature recovery and agricultural transition as the biggest issues facing the Shropshire Hills, and these all have relevance to tourism. The push to net zero will require different patterns of facilities and behaviour in tourism, while more extreme weather events are having an impact on infrastructure e.g. paths eroded by storms.

There is some built development which is insensitive to the National Landscape and which may affect the appeal of the area for tourism, but development pressures in a national context are relatively low. Current expanding activity on nature recovery and farming transition however has the potential to make the landscape more ecologically rich and attractive, which could have benefits to tourism.



Physical pressure from numbers of visitors can be seen at well-used sites such as at the Long Mynd, the Wrekin and some other hills. There will be some disturbance impacts to wildlife from people and dogs, though there is little data on this. There are localised adverse impacts from recreational off-road vehicle use. Negative impacts of tourism on natural and cultural resources are not as severe as in some more heavily visited places, but the resources available here to manage these problems are also quite limited.





## The local community and economy

The number of people living within the National Landscape is estimated at 18,367 (2021 census data). Although the National Landscape is 23% of the land area of Shropshire, it contains only around 6% of Shropshire's population. The area has a relatively high age profile, with higher than average proportion of people over 65. Tourism is understood to account directly for around 11% of jobs within the National Landscape.

A high dependency on low paid seasonal employment in agriculture and tourism leads to a relatively low wage economy. On previous statistics, the area has a lower than average income and higher than average numbers of people self-employed. There are also higher than average numbers of people in the area with no qualifications.

There are a significant number of microbusinesses, and a growing trend towards homeworking. Tourism has a long history in the area, albeit at modest levels. The Long Mynd Hotel dates from 1900 as a hydropathic hotel, and Cardingmill Valley and the Forest Glen at the Wrekin were popular day visit locations from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The local food culture has a strong foundation in the area but has suffered somewhat in recent years with the pressure on cost of living. Ludlow has an excellent reputation for food culture at a variety of levels, and there was previously some good work on supporting Farmers Markets and local producers in the Shropshire Hills. The Shropshire Good Food Partnership is revitalising local food activity.

A good number of farms in the area have diversified into tourism, though there has been a shift from the traditional B&B towards self-catering accommodation units. Not many farm-based tourism enterprises make a strong connection between their visitor offer and their farming or their management of land to benefit wildlife.



Church Stretton is the largest settlement within the National Landscape and its location in the heart of the hills makes it a good centre for tourism



Shropshire Real Food & Farming Conference 2023

## Economic Impact - the latest evidence, STEAM 2023

The Visitor Economy Impact study for Shropshire<sup>1</sup> published in December 2023 is the first rigorous survey of its kind for many years<sup>2</sup>. The study compares the 2022 post-pandemic season to the pre-pandemic 2019 season. The steady rise in tourism figures seen in 2019 has been damped by the pandemic. In absence of bespoke data for the Shropshire Hills, the county trends are felt to be relevant to the Shropshire Hills. Shropshire Council's analysis survey has drawn the following points:

- Tourism was worth **£767.23 million** to the Shropshire economy in 2022. **This represents an increase of 8.9% compared with 2019.** However, taking inflation into account, the sector has contracted slightly (down by 3% in real terms).
- 29.5% of direct expenditure is spent on food and drink, 24.6% on shopping, 17.2% on accommodation, 15.2% on transport and 13.5% on recreation. Spend in all categories has risen since 2019, but only at current prices – **when inflation is considered, the only sector to have seen increased spend has been accommodation** (due to an uplift in those staying in non-serviced accommodation).
- **More than half of economic impact is attributable to staying visitors** (51.1% or £391.9 million) although people staying overnight account for just 14% of overall visitor numbers.
- The number of visitors has reduced by almost a tenth (9.6%) since 2019 to 10.04 million. This equates with approximately 1 million fewer visitors (11.1 million visitors in 2019).
- While day visitors continue to account for the lion's share of visitors in volume terms, the volume of staying visitors increased by 3.5% and their contribution to economic impact rising by 19.7% (+6.7% when taking inflation into account).
- The number of day visitors was 11.4% lower in 2022 than in 2019 and the economic value associated with this sector fell by 0.6% (down 11.4% when factoring in inflation).
- **The fastest rising tourism sector has been non-serviced – rising by 28.1% in value terms to take the sector economic impact to £197.19 million** (just over half of the staying visitor market by value). 345,300 people used non-serviced accommodation in 2022 (37,600 more than in 2019). Almost three-quarters of all bed spaces in Shropshire (74%) are in non-serviced accommodation.
- The number of serviced bed spaces stood at 5,727 in 2022. **The 2022 occupancy rate for serviced accommodation was 49%.**
- **The 10.04 million visitors to Shropshire in 2022 spent 13.08 days in the county.** Just over a third of these days (4.45 million) were attributable to staying visitors, with each staying an average of 3.16 nights. This represents a slight increase from 3.07 nights in 2019. Length of stay for those in non-serviced accommodation is significantly longer than stays in serviced accommodation at 6.5 nights.
- Tourism supports a total of 8,474 full-time equivalent jobs. This represents a slight reduction of 4.2% since 2019 (a loss of 372 jobs). 6,751 of these jobs are directly employed within the tourism sector. **For every four jobs supported directly by the tourism industry, an extra job is created indirectly.**

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<sup>1</sup> STEAM Tourism Economic Impact Assessment - Global Tourism Solutions Ltd on behalf of Visit Shropshire 2023

<sup>2</sup> The study covers the Shropshire Council area only, so excludes Telford & Wrekin Council, who will be publishing their own study imminently.

These figures show that the events of the last four years have had a significant impact on visitor patterns, and that inflation due to other factors has adversely affected the value of the visitor economy.

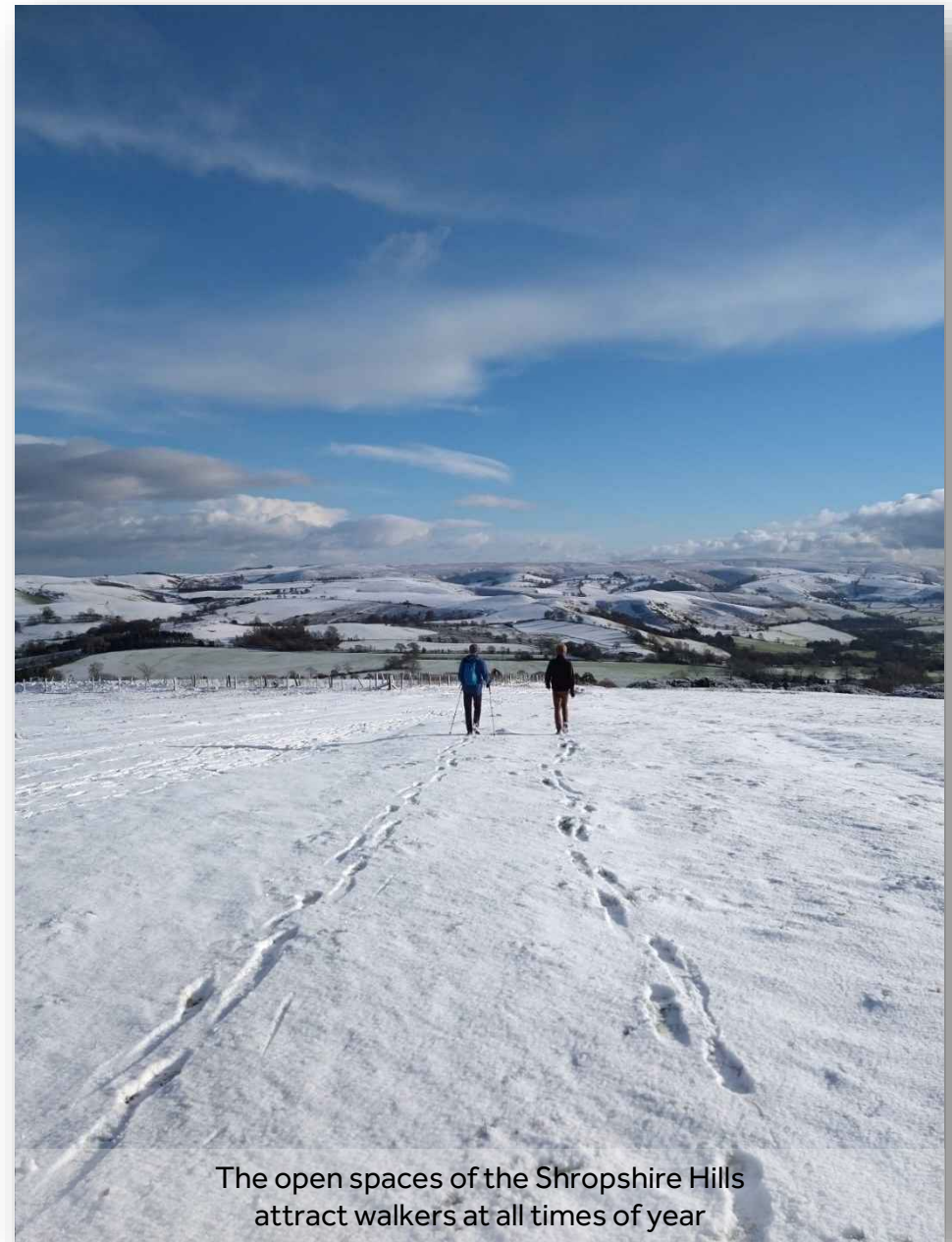
However, they also show evidence of an increase in the number of staying visitors, which is a positive trend for sustainable tourism. It is likely that this is due to reaching new domestic tourism markets more than a shift of behaviour of day visitors opting to stay.

### **The importance of tourism to the Shropshire Hills economy**

The Shropshire Hills are seen as one of the four main attractors for Shropshire. In most cases tourism is one of the main economic drivers for the economies of the smaller towns, providing jobs and supporting services.

The table on the following page is drawn from 2021 statistics. It shows the importance of tourism in the market towns that neighbour the National Landscape. These towns provide many of the services that visitors need to explore our landscape, as well as supporting the overall visitor experience and sense of place. Most of the towns are within an hour's walk of the National Landscape with Church Stretton and Clun lying within the boundary. The only exception is Shrewsbury which is well connected to the heart of the hills at Church Stretton by road and public transport (20 minutes by car or train). Consequently, Church Stretton's prominence in these figures reflects the economic value it derives from its location. The [Shropshire Way](#) long distance path connects all these towns as part of its 200 mile journey.

Clun is not a market town, having never been granted a medieval charter, but now has a Town Council. It was recorded as having a population of 680 in the 2011 Census making it the smallest town in the county. Rich in history and close to Offa's Dyke Path National Trail, tourism is a vital part of the town's economy.



The open spaces of the Shropshire Hills attract walkers at all times of year

Table 1. The importance of tourism to the economies of our Market Towns<sup>3</sup>

Market Towns	Town population	Number of jobs available generally	Tourism jobs	% of workforce working in tourism (excluding retail)	% work force working in Accommodation & Food	% workforce in Arts, Leisure etc	% of workforce in retail (all retail)	Towns where retail significant part of visitor offer
<b>Bishop's Castle</b>	1,600	falling	100	18.2	77	23	12.9	*
<b>Church Stretton</b>	4,100	stable	400	29.7	62.5	37.5	14.1	*
<b>Craven Arms</b>	3,000	rising	200	14.2	61	39	3.9	
<b>Ludlow</b>	11,000	rising	900	16.6	59	41	15.6	*
<b>Much Wenlock</b>	3,400	rising	200	20.3	50	50	10.6	*
<b>Shrewsbury</b>	76,600	rising	5,600	13.7	67	33	11.6	*
	99,700	na	7,400	18.78	62.75	37.25	na	



<sup>3</sup> Shropshire Council

## Focus on: National Trust Carding Mill Valley, Church Stretton

Carding Mill Valley is arguably the most visited attraction in the Shropshire Hills. It is the main car park and access point for one of the National Trust's most popular sites. Unlike other National Trust properties, there is no estate house or famous building; the focus is the landscape of the Long Mynd. Carding Mill Valley is a scenic gateway to the wider area of the Mynd.

### Visitor experience

The Valley is very popular with families, especially with young children. The facilities are good, and include opportunities for playing safely in the shallow, fast flowing waters of Ash Brook. The valley has a restored Victorian Pavilion tearoom with toilets and an ice-cream kiosk. Light Spout Hollow waterfall and the small reservoir nearby are also a reasonable easy walk or scramble from the car park. The metalled road running along the valley floor adds to the accessibility of the offer.

For many visitors this is the starting point for long and shorter walks on the Long Mynd and the Stretton Hills across the valley. It is also the starting point for the Long Mynd and Stiperstones Shuttle Bus. Many of the visitors to the valley visit regularly, and a large proportion have visited at least once in the past.

### A popular place

Since the pandemic the National Trust have created a pay barrier at the entrance to the valley, significantly increasing their income for parking. The ticket kiosk is staffed from 9am until after 5pm throughout the year, only closing earlier in the quieter winter months. .

<sup>4</sup> NT Annual Report 2019/20

### Car Parking

Carding Mill Valley is a short walk from Church Stretton town centre, and so reasonably well connected via public transport throughout the week.

Over 90% of visitors arrive by car, although it is regularly frequented by coach parties, reflecting its historic past. Since the pandemic there has been a noticeable increase in visitors of Black and Asian ethnicity, especially larger groups of British Asian families at weekends and often later in the day.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 YTD
<i>Number of vehicles</i>	<b>59,694</b>	<b>66,811</b>	<b>53,955</b>
<i>NT Members</i>	<b>26,434</b>	<b>37,111</b>	<b>30,200</b>
<i>Non-Members</i>	<b>33,284</b>	<b>29,700</b>	<b>23,755</b>
<i>Estimated number of visitors</i>	<b>149,235</b>	<b>167,027</b>	<b>134,887</b>
<i>Estimated number of additional visitors to Long Mynd</i>	<b>100,000</b>	<b>120,000</b>	<b>100,000</b>

At c250,000 visitors per year, Carding Mill Valley and the Long Mynd is in the top 20 most popular of all the National Trust's properties. This is roughly comparable to St Michael's Mount in Cornwall. The Trust's third most popular property is Attingham Park on the northern edge of the Shropshire Hills near Much Wenlock which boasts 650k visitors per year<sup>4</sup>.

Visits to the valley are hugely affected by the weather. The warm winter of 2019 created a considerable spike in numbers early in the year. Bright winter days can be busier than stormy days in summer.

Background: View from the Long Mynd, above Carding Mill Valley.

## Strengths and weaknesses of tourism and recreation infrastructure and services

The Shropshire Hills is a rural tourism destination which is becoming better known, but is not among the best known of such places nationally. This is a large part of its charm and appeal, but it does mean that investment in tourism is quite low. Tourism structures are less well developed than some areas, as the industry here has a smaller critical mass. This does however mean that a sustainable tourism approach is more prominent. There is high support from the community and businesses for a form of tourism that doesn't harm the special qualities of the National Landscape.

The train line running north-south through the National Landscape is a really valuable asset. This corridor also has good buses, though elsewhere in the area public transport is fairly limited. The area has a very good network of public footpaths and bridleways, and many quiet lanes which are good for cycling. Away from main recreation sites, car parking is quite limited, some popular hills being accessed mostly from very limited capacity laybys and roadside parking.

Aside from Cardingmill Valley, the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre and the Bog Centre there are few countryside sites with facilities. Those using other recreation sites will often rely on the facilities (such as refreshments and toilets) in towns and villages. This helps the local economy but does tend to increase car dependency.

The organisations managing publicly accessible countryside sites are quite disparate in the area and are not that strongly networked with each other. Levels of investment in recreation infrastructure are quite low, with limited new or upgraded facilities and some organisations are facing challenges on revenue budgets for ongoing maintenance.



New all ability path at the Bog Centre



EV charging points are becoming more common, as here in Church Stretton

# SWOT Analysis

## Strengths

- High visual appeal and quality of the landscape
- Complementary offers of nature and cultural heritage
- Proximity to urban centres of population
- Good rail connectivity to Birmingham, Manchester, and South Wales
- Off the beaten track, undiscovered but rewarding visitor experience.
- Visit Shropshire (DMP) growing in influence, expertise, and confidence.
- A network of local food and drink producers interested in working and supplying locally.
- Strong county brands built around food and festivals, national recognition

## Opportunities

- A49 rail and bus connections better promoted.
- Improving digital connectivity
- Greater recognition for the landscape as a driver for the visitor economy
- National recognition and coordination through National Landscape rebranding
- Coordination through the Destination Management Plan and LVEP
- Food and drink – working with Good Food Partnership
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Cross border and inter county collaboration.
- Airbnb agents & owners working collaboratively

## Weaknesses

- Poor transport connectivity within the county, rural lack transport services to connect isolated communities.
- Lack of services in key areas needed to drive sustainable dispersal strategies.
- Historic under-investment in tourism management from public sector.
- Key management organisations not taking active interest in collaboration over tourism.
- Engagement from small business sector declining.
- Airbnb and other brands not working at a local level

## Threats

- Climate change affecting landscape character and farming practice.
- Climate change exacerbating erosion and damage to paths.
- Climate change 'spoiling' the visitor season, changing use patterns.
- Loss of wildlife eroding nature offer.
- Reduced resources to manage rights of way network.
- Some local resistance to signposting visitors to less visited places.

## Existing visitor patterns and needs

The Shropshire Hills is a rural tourism destination within England which is not among the highest tier of recognition and popularity. Over 80% of visits are day visits, with significant centres of population within an hour or so of journey time. Within the Midlands area of England, the Shropshire Hills has an unusually high quality of landscape and interesting terrain, so unsurprisingly the landscape, peace and tranquillity, wildlife and heritage are all significant attractors for visitors. Key demographic groups among the visitor profile are older couples and families. Walking is the most popular activity, with the area offering high quality and varied walks of all lengths, but without the seriousness or dramatic setting of a mountain area.

We have not been able to undertake a full visitor survey in the last five-year period, but we have data from:

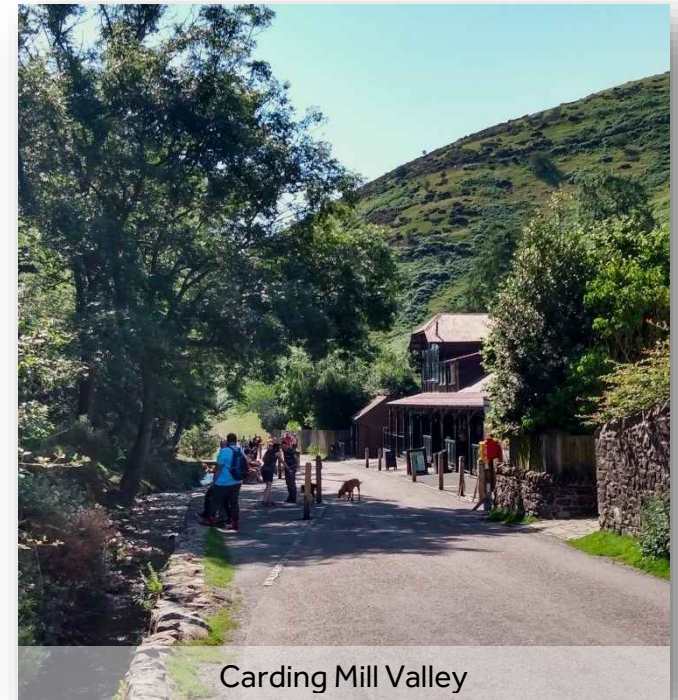
- Visit Shropshire STEAM report (discussed above).
- A visitor survey we conducted in Carding Mill Valley and Church Stretton in August 2020
- Church Stretton visitor and business survey 2023
- Breakdown of accommodation providers from Visit Shropshire and Visit Shropshire Hills membership.
- Shropshire Council Outdoor Partnerships user survey
- A 2019 study and report we conducted on Farm tourism for the Stepping Stones project.

Like many countryside areas, the Shropshire Hills experienced unprecedented peaks in visitor numbers as Covid lockdowns were eased, especially in the spring and early summer of 2020. We undertook a visitor survey at Carding Mill Valley (our main 'honeypot'

area) and in Church Stretton in the summer of 2020 to understand better the patterns of visitor use. We prepared for a similar peak in the spring of 2021, but this did not materialise. Visitor numbers and patterns have largely returned to pre-Covid levels, subject to other more gradual changes and longer-term influences.

A change observable in the last five years has been the rise in small self-catering units – pods, shepherds huts, cabins etc, as observed in other parts of the UK. Some of these are on farms as diversification activities while others are on other kinds of property, in some cases giving incomers to the area a business to run. This type of accommodation development has not posed problems in relation to planning and the National Landscape and in many ways supports a sustainable tourism approach.

Challenge events can attract large numbers of people and concentrate impacts. Most of these are well organised and seek advice and permissions where needed. A small levy or donation from events to support conservation activity should be encouraged.



Carding Mill Valley



### Church Stretton Visitor Surveys 2020-2023

In the summer of 2023, volunteers from Church Stretton Town Council conducted a face-to-face visitor survey in the town and in Carding Mill Valley. Although using a different form, many of the questions replicated a similar survey conducted by the National Landscape team in 2020. The 2020 survey was conducted following the easing of Covid lockdown restrictions allowing people to visit the countryside.

The headlines for the Church Stretton Town Council were as follows:  
Sample size: 220 overall, 76 in Carding Mill Valley, 144 in town.

Couples were the largest group overall, families dominated the Carding Mill Valley surveys. Most visitors were from the West Midlands area, had arrived by car, and were on a day trip (61%). 30% answered 'Yes' when asked if they'd consider travelling to the town/valley by public transport. Self-catering was the most recorded accommodation category (36%) followed by camping (26%). Over 50% of visitors had visited before. The most popular activity was walking, especially in Carding Mill Valley. The results closely resemble the 2020 survey which showed a higher figure for self-catering accommodation but yielded similar results otherwise. The 2020 survey showed a marginally higher record of people from Black, Asian or other ethnic community groupings (13% in 2020, 10% in 2023).

The National Trust conducted its own national survey of its outdoor sites in autumn 2022 and Easter 2023. 203 surveys were conducted in Carding Mill Valley.

The results were broadly similar to the local surveys, with one exception. Both periods surveyed showed fewer family groups, with instead a dominance of senior and over 65-year-old couples.



## Potential future visitor markets

Developing tourism in the Shropshire Hills in a sustainable way offers opportunities for the area to tap into markets which are expanding. Increased environmental awareness, the costs and security of travelling abroad, along with post-Brexit bureaucracy are all encouraging some people to holiday in the UK. Areas such as National Landscapes will be in demand as people seek local, authentic experiences.

There are small but promising increases in leisure visits by train. The area has greater potential for cycling touring and both road and off-road cycling. The Shropshire Way is a valuable resource with potential to attract more people for multi-day walking holidays using local accommodation. A number of establishments offer creative breaks based on art or writing.

Shropshire's Destination Management Plan aims to change the balance of day and staying visitors from 90:10 to 80:20. It also plans to develop new visitor segments. Further investment is required in increasing number and capacity of accommodation businesses. A lack of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in rural locations could affect the attractiveness of rural areas to environmentally conscious car owners and this also requires further investment.

Lower cost accommodation and hospitality options are important to enable tourism to be socially inclusive. There are a reasonable number of campsites in the area, some are run through clubs rather than being open to the public. A flexible overnight offer for campervans would help tap into this market (and probably reduce problems associated with fly parking).



The area has more potential for cycle tourism



Increasing participation in all parts of society offers benefits for people and for tourism (*Steppers UK visit to Shropshire Hills*)

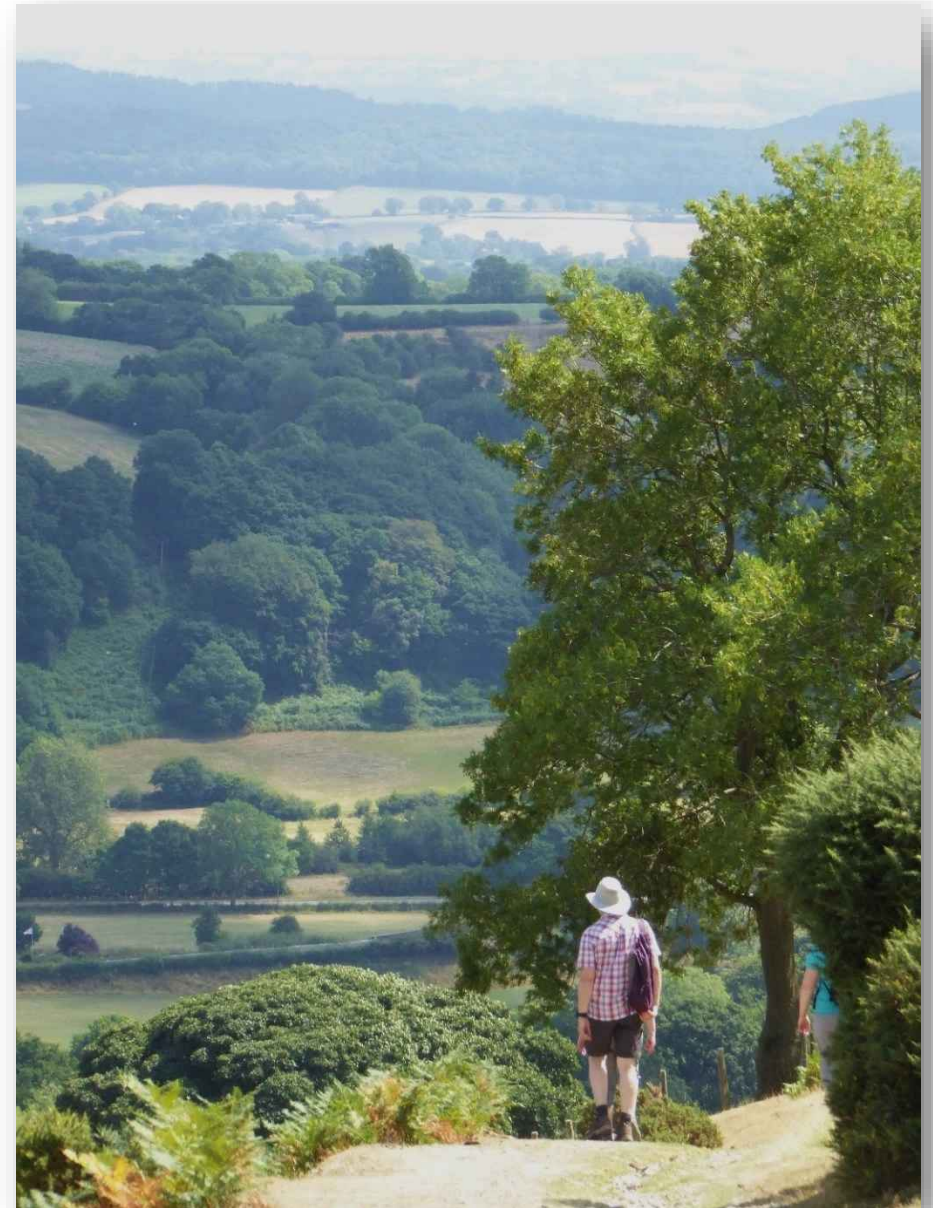
## Vision and Strategic Themes

**VISION:** The Shropshire Hills is a nationally recognised destination for sustainable tourism, valued for its outstanding landscape, its visitor experiences providing enjoyment, health and wellbeing for all, and its positive contribution to livelihoods and communities in Shropshire.

### Strategic themes

The following themes have been drawn from consultation with our partners and stakeholders, and from higher level strategic priorities:

- i. Setting an ambitious sustainable vision for tourism and engaging people with this.
- ii. Improving provision of sustainable tourism services which draw on the area's special qualities.
- iii. Supporting and encouraging environmental practices and behaviours by businesses and visitors.
- iv. Managing the effects of localised visitor pressure, mitigating impacts, and sharing economic benefit by promoting visitor activity across the area.
- v. Co-ordinating and adding value to sustainable tourism delivery.



## Connections of this strategy's themes with those of the Shropshire Destination Plan

		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
	<p><b>Shropshire Hills Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2024-29</b></p> <p><b>Shropshire Destination Plan</b></p>	Setting an ambitious sustainable vision for tourism and engaging people with this	Improving provision of sustainable tourism services which draw on the area's special qualities.	Supporting and encouraging environmental practices and behaviours by businesses and visitors.	Managing the effects of localised visitor pressure, mitigating impacts, and sharing economic benefit by promoting visitor activity across the area.	Co-ordinating and adding value to sustainable tourism delivery.
<b>1</b>	Develop a strong evidence base to support future decision making			X	X	X
<b>2</b>	Improve digital infrastructure for tourism businesses					
<b>3</b>	Increase the appeal of the county for visiting families		X	X		X
<b>4</b>	Adjust the ratio between day and staying visitors from 90:10 to 80:20	X	X	X	X	X
<b>5</b>	Become an exemplar destination for sustainable tourism practice	X	X	X	X	
<b>6</b>	Adopt an attract and disperse approach to regional and national marketing.	X	X	X	X	X
<b>7</b>	Increase Shropshire's reputation for quality experiences by developing the product	X	X	X	X	X
<b>8</b>	Build a reputation for delivering high service standards and a warm visitor welcome by investing in people.		X			

## Actions

<b>Theme 1 Setting an ambitious sustainable vision for tourism and engaging people with this</b>				
Ref	Action	Lead organisation and partners	Timetable (Year 1 – 5)	Indicative cost (where appropriate)
1.1	Through wider activity linked to the National Landscape, seek to protect, and restore the Shropshire Hills landscape, preventing inappropriate development and supporting nature recovery and regenerative farming and land use.	SC, TWC, NLP, NLT, Land managers	1-5	-
1.2	Keep sustainable tourism prominent within the area’s tourism sector and foster a sense of shared environmental responsibility among both businesses and visitors.	SC, TWC, NLT, VS, VSH	1-5	-
1.3	Develop a visible way for businesses to adopt and promote sustainable tourism principles and be recognised for their actions.	NL, LVEP, VS, VSH,	1	-
1.4	Promote and improve existing channels for people to give back to the area, e.g., through membership organisations, through the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust’s Conservation Fund and potential other specific appeals.	NL, SHLT, ODA, NT, SWT	1-5	-
1.5	Maintain partnerships and networks for sustainable tourism – with tourism businesses, countryside site providers, delivery partners and communities.	NLT, VS, LVEP	1-5	-
1.6	Use events and networks to share sustainability ideas and practices.	NLT, VSH, VS, LVEP	1-5	-
1.7	Seek to engage new sectors e.g., creative enterprises, outdoor activity providers and challenge event organisers, in sustainable tourism principles and practices.	NLT	3-5	-

<b>Theme 2 Improving provision of sustainable tourism services which draw on the area's special qualities</b>				
Ref	Action	Lead organisation and partners	Timetable (Year 1 – 5)	Indicative cost (where appropriate)
2.1	Coordinate and maintain high-quality visitor information and promotion on different opportunities and how to enjoy the Shropshire Hills, including on-line, social media, print and interpretation.	VS, VSH, SC, NLT, Site providers	1-5	See action 4.1
2.2	Support partners to use the National Landscape rebranding messages to improve the welcome to visitors.	NLT, site providers	1	£1,000
2.3	Promote visitor information services and support visitor facing staff, businesses, and volunteers as ambassadors for the area.	SC, TWC	1-5	-
2.4	Produce or support the production of a Shropshire Hills map sheet and/or other orientation information for visitors.	NLT	1	£1,000
2.5	Promote the area as a destination for walking and cycling, highlighting supported/maintained routes, and seeking to influence the content of user-generated sites.	VS, VSH, SC, TWC, NLT, LVEP	1-5	-
2.6	Prioritise and seek a new generation of investment in infrastructure for active travel and recreational walking and cycling (including both strategic capital improvements and ongoing maintenance).	SC, TWC, LVEP, NLT	1-2	-
2.7	Support development of the local food sector and the shift to regenerative farming producing low carbon, wildlife and soil-friendly, low waste, local foods. Work with producers, supply chains, retailers, and hospitality businesses.	SGFP, GCL, LTL	1-5	-
2.8	Foster a local food culture, promoting local food and drink to visitors and through suppliers, retailers, and hospitality businesses.	VS, VSH, SGFP, GCL, LTL, NLP	1-5	-
2.9	Be a more inclusive and welcoming destination, reaching new audiences, and improving provision for those with special needs and under-served groups.	Site providers	1-5	-
2.10	Develop work of new Shropshire Hills National Landscape Engagement Ranger post, working with partners.	NLT, Site providers	1	£27k/year
2.11	Support and promote opportunities for more niche but low impact activities e.g. horse riding, adventure sports.	VS, VSH, site providers	1-5	-

<b>Theme 3 Supporting environmental practices and behaviours by businesses and visitors</b>				
Ref	Action	Lead organisation and partners	Timetable (Year 1 – 5)	Indicative cost (where appropriate)
3.1	Set a high aspiration on net zero compatible travel behaviour – including transport habits and choices to reduce travel and lower car use, and through use of public transport and active means of travel.	VS, VSH, NLT	1-5	-
3.2	Champion visits to and within the area by public transport, where possible highlighting specific services that facilitate and support this e.g. by providing discount to those arriving not by car.	VS, VSH, SC, TWC. NLT	1-5	-
3.3	Support and promote specific itineraries and products based on visiting and exploring on foot and by bike.	VSH, NLT	3-5	?
3.4	Continue to manage and provide the Long Mynd and Stiperstones Shuttle Bus.	NLT, NT, CSTC	1-5	c£16k/year
3.5	Use the qualities of the area and its culture to associate the Shropshire Hills as somewhere to have a sustainable holiday/visit e.g. a change of pace, physically active, healthy, and low car miles with a locally distinctive, authentic experience.	VS, VSH, NLT, site providers	1-5	-
3.6	Support people to gain inspiration and experiences from visits to the Shropshire Hills to encourage them to become more sustainable and develop pro-environmental behaviours more generally.	Site providers, NLT	1-5	-
3.7	Improve opportunities for people to develop their emotional connection to nature through nature-focussed activities and experiences.	Site providers, NE, SWT	1-5	-
3.8	Increase promotion of dark skies as a powerful nature experience and as a motivator for improved sustainability on lighting.	NLT, NT, SC, TWC	1-5	-
3.9	Promote greener tourism business practices, including a pathway to net zero on energy use and products, and benefits to nature and the water environment.	Tourism organisations SC, TWC, NLT	1-5	-
3.10	Help tourism businesses to access good sustainability advice and to promote their good practices and gain recognition for these.	SC, TWC, NLT, VS	1-5	-

**Theme 4 Managing the effects of localised visitor pressure, mitigating impacts, and sharing economic benefit by promoting visitor activity across the area**

Ref	Action	Lead organisation and partners	Timetable (Year 1 – 5)	Indicative cost (where appropriate)
4.1	Maintain web and print media designed to help visitors navigate, find, and be inspired by our iconic landscape in ways that safeguard its future. Annually produce a visitor map to help people explore the area.	VS, VSH, SC, TWC, NLT, NT	1-5	£10-20k/year?
4.2	Support countryside site providers to manage pressurised sites through on the ground repairs, information and changing patterns of use and behaviour.	Site providers, NLT	1-5	-
4.3	Seek to spread visits across the area reducing pressure on honeypot sites at key times of the year through promotion of a wide variety of visitor locations. Provide or promote visitor information on a range of places - how to get to them, parking opportunities, what to expect, their qualities, facilities, and accessibility.	Site providers, VS, VSH, NLT	1-5	-
4.5	Work with partners to coordinate and promote environmentally positive visitor activities and messages about environmental care through printed media, media campaigns, websites, and social media.	VS, VSH, NLT	1-5	-
4.6	Support and promote year-round activities and events led by community and partner organisations, and attractions that celebrate the landscape, heritage, and culture of the area.	VS, VSH, NLT	1-5	£3-5k/year?
4.7	Actively promote visitor experiences that take place at off-peak times and during less busy periods.	VSH, VSH, site providers	1-5	-



<b>Theme 5 Co-ordinating and adding value to sustainable tourism delivery</b>				
Ref	Action	Lead organisation and partners	Timetable (Year 1 – 5)	Indicative cost (where appropriate)
5.1	Work in partnership at a strategic level, as a Destination Organisation, contributing to the work of the Local Visitor Economy Partnership.	VS, SC, TWC, NLT	1-5	-
5.2	Support the delivery of the Shropshire Destination Management Plan.	VS, SC, TWC, NLT, tourism associations	1-5	-
5.3	Co-ordinate tourism activity between Shropshire and Telford.	SC, TWC	1-5	-
5.4	Work at a community level to provide advice, support and guidance to groups, organisations and businesses.	NLT	1-5	-
5.5	Integrate promotion and marketing of the area with county level activity - the Shropshire Hills being a key part of Shropshire's visitor offer, and its representatives integrated with county tourism structures.	VS, VSH, NLT	1-5	-
5.6	Boost capacity for action by connecting sustainable tourism work to wider initiatives e.g. the National Landscape Partnership and Management Plan, work of health & wellbeing and diversity & inclusion, plus partner activity on nature recovery, climate change work, farming transition, etc.	NLP, NLT, SC, TWC, site providers	1-5	-
5.7	Establish a programme to monitor some key tourism metrics on which data are available and which are relevant to the strategy's objectives.	NLT, SC, TWC	1	-
5.8	Make use of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism by learning from other areas, sharing what we do well, and being a visible sustainable tourism champion.	NLT	1-5	-

## Organisation Abbreviations

DLP Destination Ludlow Partnership  
GCL Grow Cook Learn (Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre)  
LVEP Local Visitor Economic Partnership  
LTL Local to Ludlow  
NLP Shropshire Hills National Landscape Partnership  
NLT Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team  
ODA Offa's Dyke Association  
SC Shropshire Council  
SGFP Shropshire Good Food Partnership  
SHLT Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust  
SWT Shropshire Wildlife Trust  
TWC Telford & Wrekin Council  
VS Visit Shropshire  
VSH Visit Shropshire Hills



Volunteers play an important part in maintaining the rights of way network and open spaces



The river and historic bridge are a focal point at the centre of Clun. Our towns provide facilities and a complementary offer to the countryside.



The Shropshire Hills provide interesting and scenic walking without the seriousness of a mountain area

## Delivery

This Strategy is more an influencing document than a direct delivery plan written by an organisation or consortium with full control over all aspects. The actions set out here include some things which partner organisations are already doing as part of their normal business, and others which the Strategy encourages partners to adopt. The Strategy is a stage within that ongoing dialogue of partnership working, and its success will depend on the will of all partners. There is general support for the principles, but the challenges of achieving true sustainability in tourism are large.

Key delivery partners include:

- the organisations responsible for tourism marketing (principally Visit Shropshire and Visit Shropshire Hills). The integration of sustainable messaging within mainstream promotion is vital.
- Organisations providing and managing countryside sites (especially National Trust along with Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission and Shropshire Council).

The National Landscape team have neither of these roles but does undertake some promotion aimed at visitors. The team will use this presence and voice to further sustainability among businesses and visitors. The team will also facilitate partnership working with key delivery partners. The good alignment of this Strategy with the Shropshire Destination Management Plan will help to support delivery.



The Shropshire Way has its most iconic sections within the Shropshire Hills National Landscape

## Monitoring

We will report annually to the National Landscape Partnership on progress with implementation of the Strategy's actions. To monitor (and therefore further) the sustainability of tourism in the area generally, we need a framework looking at various dimensions of sustainability. For this we need to look beyond standard economic data such as volume and revenue. Holistic sustainable approaches such as Doughnut Economics set out the need to move beyond the paradigm of economic growth whether or not this benefits people, to

an economy which benefits people whether or not it grows. Rather than focusing just on what data is available, we plan to focus on what matters and then see what we, in partnership, can discern or discover about these factors. The factors set out below can help to indicate sustainability in tourism in the Shropshire Hills, though not all of these will be easy to measure. Our opinion on current status of each of these is shown (red = poor, to green = good), along with the current trend as we understand it.

Sustainability measure/indicator	UN Sustainable Development Goals	Are we where we need to be?	Perceived Trend	Sources of information	Notes
Carbon emissions from travel to and within the area	13		→	Gov emissions data	Few flying overseas visitors. Not much improvement?
Carbon emissions from tourism businesses e.g. energy use, footprint of food, drink and products	7,13		↙ (improvement)	Gov emissions data	Gradual improvements in energy use, as seen widely in the UK but behind target levels.
Negative environmental impacts from tourism e.g. path erosion, wildlife disturbance, loss of tranquillity, harm to water environment	6,14,15		→	Observation, partner feedback	Localised issues are mostly contained by management. Gradual continued increase in visitor pressure.
Financial support for conservation and nature recovery through tourism and visitors	8		↗ (improvement)	Conservation Fund, membership of voluntary bodies	Slight increase but from a low base, lots of potential to increase.
Proportion of sustainable and local food and drink used by visitors	12		→	Observation, partner activity	Fairly static, due in part to cost of living pressures.
Degree of social inclusion of tourism and among visitors	5,10		↗ (improvement)	Observation	High diversity at peak sites, but lots more progress to make.
Social benefits, and avoidance of harm, to local communities from tourism	1,2,8,11		→	Observation	Little harm to communities and many benefits.
Improved health, wellbeing, learning and connectedness to nature among visitors	3,4		↗ (improvement)	Visitor feedback including from social media	Visitors report these benefits but need to spread wider.
Degree to which visitors show or develop pro-environmental behaviours	12		↗ (improvement)	Observation and partner feedback	A proportion of visitors do, but potential to spread this wider.
Adaptation to climate change (e.g. repairs plus improvements to infrastructure)	9		↗ (improvement)	Partner activity	Needs more pro-active investment.
Inclusive governance and partnership	16,17		→	Partner activity	Structures are developing.



## Process of producing the Strategy

The Strategy has been developed by the Shropshire Hills National Landscape team through a series of partner meetings during 2023.

On 20<sup>th</sup> July a workshop at the Shropshire Hills National Landscape Partnership focused on what has changed in tourism over the last five years, and what needs to be done differently looking to the future. Two workshops were then held specifically with tourism stakeholders:

On 26<sup>th</sup> July 14 people attended and considered the changes and suggestions identified by the National Landscape Partnership, and what tourism stakeholders wanted to achieve in the next five years.

On 14<sup>th</sup> September most of the same group attended a workshop focused on identifying and prioritising actions.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> November the Shropshire Hills National Landscape Partnership meeting included a consultation on the draft Strategy's vision, themes and actions. Feedback from this meeting and that gained from other stakeholders through direct conversations and email has fed into this final plan.

The Strategy will now be disseminated and involvement fostered through ongoing discussions with partners in the delivery phase.



Tourism Strategy stakeholder workshop at Church Stretton



# **Shropshire Hills National Landscape**

## **Shropshire Hills National Landscape team**

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The Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team is hosted by Shropshire Council, and funded in addition by Defra, Telford and Wrekin Council and project funders.

Height above sea level: 1772 feet | 540 metres  
The highest point in Shropshire