



Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 2022-23 Annual Review



About the Shropshire Hills AONB

The Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers almost a quarter of Shropshire. The Long Mynd, the Wrekin, Stiperstones, Clee Hills and others are treasured by residents and visitors alike.

Special places give us a sense of belonging. An outstanding landscape is good for our wellbeing and quality of life, provides a sense of identity, and attracts business investment. The landscape underpins the economy - food production needs soils and water, while our hills and woods help to manage flood risk.

The Shropshire Hills AONB needs careful looking after by both land managers and those who use and enjoy it, paying particular attention to the qualities that make it special. This means sharing ideas and knowledge, and working together.

The AONB designation recognises this landscape as nationally important, but the vast majority of it is privately owned and managed. There are legal duties on local authorities and a Management Plan sets out policies and actions under three priorities:

- Land management supporting landscape and natural beauty
- Planning for a sustainable economy and communities
- People enjoying and caring about the landscape.

Working in partnership

A broad Partnership supports this work and makes sure that local people and organisations are involved and have a sense of ownership. The Partnership encourages collaboration and mutual understanding among different interest groups.

In 2022-23, a small team of 10 staff supported the work of the Partnership, by taking action and delivering projects directly, and through influencing, advising, supporting and facilitating.

Alongside the Partnership and staff team is a charity, the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust, which raises and distributes money in support of conserving and enhancing this special landscape.

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View looking west from Stapeley Common, by Renee Wallace

Farming in Protected Landscapes

There was an increased uptake of grants in Year 2 (2022-23), with 42 applications made. In total, 51 projects were in delivery in 2022-23 as nine were multi-year projects which had started in Year 1.

Projects ranged from ancient woodland coppice restoration at a challenging site near The Wrekin, to a controlled biological composting project at Linley Estate, and new animal housing with access for those with special educational needs and disabilities at Lower Bush Care Farm.

We have supported projects to better look after a section of Offa's Dyke, to restore a badly eroded footpath on Caer Caradoc hillfort and provide interpretation, and to support the Clee View Farmers Group to carry out Carbon Accounting across 31 holdings in the Shropshire Hills. All the projects supported to date can be viewed [here](#).

In January 2023 Defra increased the standard payment rates for Countryside Stewardship which meant 12 existing applicants were able to reapply using the enhanced rates. This led to grant funds being fully allocated for Year 2 and Year 3, so the programme was temporarily closed to new applications. It reopened in May 2023, following Defra's extension of the programme to March 2025.

Over 1,500 trees planted in the Shropshire Hills

Overall spend on projects in 2022-23 was £644,832, with another £90,000 spent on supporting programme delivery.

60 hectares of habitat conserved or enhanced for biodiversity

2022-23, 51 projects delivered:

Nature

- 1,914 metres of hedgerows planted
- 5,478 metres of hedgerows restored
- 1,533 trees planted
- 23 hectares of positive management on SSSIs
- 60 hectares of habitat improvement for biodiversity, including managing scrub
- 10.2 hectares of new habitat created
- 8,732 metres of existing habitat connections improved for biodiversity
- 2,344 metres of new habitat connections created for biodiversity
- 4,355 metres of river protected/enhanced
- 9 projects to improve quality of watercourses
- 7 projects reduced dependence on bought-in fertilisers, through improved targeting of manure applications, and growing crops to assist fertility building



People & Place

- 1,200 metres of new footpaths created
- 3,500 metres of existing footpaths improved
- 4 projects making landscape areas more inclusive for visitors
- 109 volunteers engaged with programme
- 3 historic features conserved and enhanced
- 23 projects have increased resilience of nature friendly sustainable farm businesses

Climate

- 9 hectares of existing woodland managed
- 5 projects to improve understanding of carbon storage, carbon emissions and climate change impacts
- 529 hectares of land being managed with regenerative farming techniques
- 7 projects to improve the soil quality
- 13 projects helping to reduce flood risk



Ancient woodland restoration project

Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) covers almost 5% of the Shropshire Hills. Around two thirds of these woods have had non-native trees planted on them, usually conifers. These sites are known as Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

In September 2022, in partnership with the Woodland Trust, we secured funding from Forestry Commission's Woods into Management Forestry Innovation Fund to support a new Woodland Officer post until March 2025 to work with landowners to restore ancient woodland back to wildlife-rich woodland habitats.

In autumn/winter 2022, woodland condition assessments were undertaken by consultants, and following discussions with landowners, 8 sites were put forward for restoration.

Dougald Purce joined the Team in March 2023 to work with woodland owners to enhance management / restoration, complete woodland assessments and recommend where management can be altered or introduced to improve condition. Dougald also works with project partners to secure grant funding to deliver woodland management and restoration.

A project steering group was established in autumn 2022, with the six members of the group representing key stakeholders in ancient woodland restoration in the Shropshire Hills.

Peatlands and catchment headwaters in the upper Clun catchment

The AONB has approximately 3,700 hectares of shallow peat and soils with peaty pockets. These areas are associated with the uplands and are generally managed for agriculture or forestry, but the state of the peatlands is unknown.

Natural England classifies much of our peatland as being in the highest category of greenhouse gas emitters, particularly the peatland in the Clun catchment uplands.

In partnership with Shropshire Wildlife Trust, we made an application to the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme to engage wetland specialists to assess areas in the upper Clun Catchment and recommend measures to help restore headwater functions and reduce carbon emissions to air and water.

The project was awarded £63,087 in December 2022 and a hydrology consultant was appointed to carry out detailed ecological/ hydrological surveys on the following sites, totalling 449 hectares:

- 3 Shropshire Wildlife Trust nature reserves (Rhos Fiddle, Masons Bank and Lower Short Ditch Turbary)
- 6 areas of land in private ownership, adjoining and neighbouring the nature reserves

Surveying began in spring 2023. The findings will help inform future land management schemes and emerging carbon trading and offsetting schemes.

Sphagnum moss is a keystone species of peatland



Peatland presentations were made by team members to:

Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group's AGM (30 people) on peatlands in the upper Clun catchment.

University Centre Shrewsbury Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology (40 people) on the use of mapping and spatial data on peatlands in the upper Clun and across the Shropshire Hills.

Our Upland Commons

A £3 million, three year National Lottery Heritage Fund project helping to secure the future of upland commons on Dartmoor, in the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and the Shropshire Hills. It is led by the Foundation for Common Land with support from the National Trust and involves 25 partners.

Project activity in the Shropshire Hills is focussed on three commons: Longmynd, Stiperstones and Clee Liberty.

In 2022-23 project activity included:

Providing a water bowser to the commoners of Stiperstones. The recent dry summers are threatening traditional livestock grazing as water is not available from natural springs and streams.

Two multi-day historic environment events centred around common land enabled more than 75 local people to sharpen their archaeological excavation skills as well as broadening their understanding of these places. Volunteers excavated footings of a dwelling and buildings at Pole Cottage (an enclosure on top of the Long Mynd) as well as spoil heaps of bell pit mining activity and a boundary bank at Clee Burf on Clee Liberty.



Surveys of wheatear, whinchat and other upland birds as well as various butterflies and moths continued across the commons.

Self-guided walks developed for Stapeley and around Clee Liberty.

Supporting commoners on Clee Liberty start to draft a habitat management plan which included fact-finding field visits to other commons.

84 primary school children from Lawley and Farlow took part in the John Muir Award, visiting commons and a commoners' farm.

Commons Stories captured the thoughts and stories of commoners in the Shropshire Hills, view [here](#).



Stepping Stones

This is a partnership project led by National Trust to work with landowners and their local communities to create a healthy natural environment around the Long Mynd and Stiperstones. We continue to coordinate activities for the Upper Onny Farmers Group (UOFG), whose membership has risen from 9 to 20 farmers.

With funding from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, several **farm demonstrations were held** (hay meadow creation, woodland and wood pasture management, wetland and river channel restoration) to help farmers understand better how they can implement the recommendations in their Whole Farm Plans.

Five farmers had the historic environment included into their existing Whole Farm Plans, and five new Whole Farm Plans were developed under the Defra Test and Trial for Environmental Land Management schemes.

In October 2022, using a grant from Farming in Protected Landscapes members of the group **visited Cumbrian farmers James Rebanks and James Robinson to see the changes they have made on their farms to provide public goods and benefit their farm businesses.** This proved to be an inspirational trip, which resulted in:

- **7 farmers making successful applications to FiPL** for a variety of environmental improvement works, such as hedge restoration, orchard creation, fencing riparian and wetland habitats and planting hedges.
- **A member of the Farmers Group now sits on the Nature Friendly Farming Network**, representing the West Midlands.

We organised farm visits in the Shropshire Hills for students at Harper Adams University as part of their assignment on Environmental Land Management schemes.



Climate Change

We continued our work on climate change on a number of fronts:

The Partnership developed a **Climate Change Action Plan** with actions on Nature-based solutions, Agriculture, Sustainable tourism and transport, Renewable energy, Building design and planning, and Engagement, communication and collaboration. The Partnership's own carbon footprint was estimated to have reduced by around 60% since 2007. We looked at the Doughnut Economics model which seeks to reframe economic objectives to meeting people's needs fairly within the planetary boundaries that protect Earth's life-supporting systems.

We were part of the National **Association Climate Change collaboration group** which developed a Statement of Commitment for AONB Chairs. Alex Carson-Taylor our Chair signed this at our Partnership meeting in July. We led the Nature-Based Solutions topic group and had input to the AONB Climate Change Toolkit and Framework which were launched on the National Landscapes platform. We helped to lead a workshop at the AONB Conference on engaging people with climate change.

We were on the steering group for the **carbon audit of land and habitats of all English AONBs by Cranfield University**. From this we learned more about the value of soil as a carbon store and which land types are most effective for this. A webinar was held on this work in June, and Phil gave presentations on this to Shropshire Climate Partnership Land & Biodiversity Group and to the Marches Nature Partnership.



“Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated for the precious landscapes they enfold. As such they must make an important contribution to face climate change and its consequences. AONB teams and partnerships must now more than ever confirm their leading role and ambition in addressing this challenge.”
From the Chairs Statement of Commitment

Sustainable Tourism

We have contributed at county level to the Shropshire Destination Management Plan and discussions on a potential new or restructured Destination Management organisation. We also supported work to evaluate the impact of the Shropshire Welcomes marketing campaign and contributed to destination branding work being led by Shropshire Council. We agreed a proposal with the EUROPARC Federation regarding our reapplication for the Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas and will pursue this in 2023-24.



Planning casework

We made objection responses on a proposed mobile phone mast above Coates near the edge of the Long Mynd, and in relation to siting of a temporary agricultural workers dwelling near Wheathill.

Inspiring the next generation

Young Rangers

This is a three year partnership project working with South Shropshire Youth Forum, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project engages 12 - 16 year olds, providing opportunities for personal development through conservation, outdoor learning, and adventure in the Shropshire Hills.

In 2022-23, 58 weekend or school-holiday activities were delivered in the Clun, Bishop's Castle, Pontesbury area, involving over 100 young people. Typically, outdoor sessions involve around 10 -12 young people. Highlights included monitoring Pied Flycatchers in SSSI woodland in late spring 2022, green woodworking sessions at Poles Coppice and a hedge laying project at Acton Scott in winter 2022.

Participants are given a voice in the design and delivery of activities to ensure they are achievable, meaningful, and fun. It is also important that the volunteering aspect (1,400 young ranger hours in 2022-23) is balanced with a variety of outdoor learning activities offering challenge, recognition and reward.

9 young people joined a 2-day summer residential which brought together different Young Ranger groups at an outdoor education centre in mid-Wales.

7 AQA Unit Award Scheme sessions were delivered including green woodworking, woodland management and tree planting. 53 certificates were awarded to 37 young people.

Exploring the mines at Llanymynech in Wales, one of several adrenaline-fuelled activities during the two-day summer residential.



In addition, 4 AQA sessions were delivered to Year 7-9 statemed pupils and/or those with special educational needs and disabilities at Bishop's Castle Community College with 55 certificates awarded to 29 pupils.



"It felt like I was really making a difference and helping to restore something. I'm proud that it might be there for another few hundred years. I also enjoyed being outdoors. That was a good day!"

"I liked that it pushed us out of our comfort zones but was still achievable."



Buchcraft at Walcot Wood near Bury Ditches.



Completion of a new wheelchair boardwalk by the ponds at Poles Coppice, Pontesbury.



200 primary school children engaged in outdoor activity sessions

Green Leaders The second strand to our National Lottery Heritage Fund project offers young people aged 17-25 a leadership skills programme, including environmental action and campaigning, and links to the AONB Partnership. This element has proved harder to deliver.

In 2022-23, 12 young people participated in around 10 workshop events and activities exploring topics including the climate and ecological crisis and its meaning and impact on younger people's lives.

Access for All

In August 2022, Defra awarded funding to help make protected landscapes more accessible to people of all ages and abilities and from all backgrounds. The Shropshire Hills was awarded £128,607 over two years (2022-23 and 2024-25) for capital spend only. Capital spend is a one-off itemised cost where funding is provided to purchase or invest in a physical item or asset, in this case to improve accessibility for all.

With £58,773 to spend by March 2023, we worked with partners to deliver the following access improvements:

- Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, £19,616 for a new accessible Dragonfly pontoon/viewing platform in the Onny Meadows.
- National Trust Carding Mill Valley, £15,861 for a new waymarked all ability footpath from the top car park and seating, and improvements to the Portway all ability route on the Long Mynd.
- Bog Visitor Centre, £9,995 for a new all ability path, seating, interpretation and display equipment.
- AONB Partnership, £7,219 to research and provide recommendations on the access needs of under-served groups within the Shropshire Hills, and to reprint two popular walk leaflets and make improvements to access information of our website.

£52,691 of the £58,773 allocation was spent. There is no funding available in 2023/24, but £69,833 allocated in Year 3, 2024-25.



We continue to support local tourism groups and businesses to ensure our Sustainable Tourism Strategy underpins visitor activity in the Shropshire Hills:

Visit Shropshire Hills

Visit Shropshire

Ludlow Destination Partnership

Much Wenlock tourism representatives

Bishop's Castle & Clun Tourism Group

Shuttle Buses 2022

Despite the very hot season, we carried over 2,300 passengers on the Shuttle Bus in 2022. We ran a two bus service on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays between June and September, including the Queen's Jubilee. The service was operated by Caradoc Coaches, who also trialled a Bus Online Data (BODS) ticketing system, which is meant to be able to track the bus during its journey. We also trialled contactless card payments for our ticketing. Unfortunately, the costs and technical challenges these two systems presented have made them too costly to continue for the 2023 service.

Ticket income remained similar to 2021 but the increased costs resulted in the service requiring a greater subsidy than is affordable longer term.

We would like to thank Shropshire Council, Church Stretton Town Council, and the National Trust for maintaining their contributions to running costs of the service. We would also like to thank those passengers who kindly donated money to the Shuttles through our Shuttle Supporters Scheme.

Promotions

The AONB website has been regularly updated and improved and we make regular posts on Facebook and Instagram. We have closed our Twitter account.

Press releases, articles and newsletters - The quarterly AONB E-newsletter was sent out to over 3,000 people on our Gov Delivery mailing list and news items on our website ([read news articles](#)) about the Shropshire Hills AONB. We have provided articles into the monthly Shropshire Council Culture, Leisure & Tourism newsletter.



The Shropshire Hills AONB Trust

Registered Charity 1168432

The Trust continues to support local people to take action to care for the countryside around them. In 2022-23 £15,000 was distributed to 8 projects through the Conservation Fund (listed opposite). The Fund is supported by Friends of the Shropshire Hills, the Millichope Foundation and other kind donations including from Moonshine and Fuggles of Ironbridge.

In September 2022, the Trust launched the **Shropshire Hills Supporters**, an easy way for businesses and organisations to contribute to local conservation activities. The scheme is complementary to Friends of the Shropshire Hills, and all donations go into the Conservation Fund. More about the Supporters Scheme [here](#).



Fix the Fort

The Trust's public appeal to raise money to fix Caer Caradoc's worn-down ramparts generated £4,000. This was boosted in autumn 2022 with additional funding from HF Holidays (£10,000) and Farming in Protected Landscapes (£13,000), enabling the Fix the Fort project to start.

Preparatory archaeological and ground work was undertaken in November and 50 bags of stone and soil were airlifted onto the hillside by helicopter. Repairs to the ramparts were made over the winter with support from some Young Rangers and volunteers. The work has created steps at key points where the footpath crosses the earthworks, and repaired other erosion scars.



People Enjoying and Caring About the Landscape



2022-23 Conservation Fund projects:

Shropshire Ornithological Society - grant £2,000

A joint project with Upper Clun and Clee Hill Community Wildlife Groups to improve breeding success of curlew by fencing nests and monitoring chicks.

Llanfair Waterdine Community Trust – grant £1,000

A community project to look after a popular site on Llanfair Hill next to the Offa's Dyke National Trail footpath. Activities include ecological survey, practical habitat management and installing a locally made bench.

Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project – grant £730

Enabling volunteers to create a wildflower meadow and new hedgerow at a children's playground in All Stretton, helping local and visiting families to get closer to nature.

Restoring Shropshire's Verges Project – grant £2,000

A collaboration between three existing nature conservation projects in the Shropshire Hills (verges, hedgerows and burial grounds) to achieve a bigger impact by linking habitats and enhancing wildlife corridors/networks.

Clunbury Parish Council – grant £2,000

A community project to restore open heathland on the Black Hill in the Parish of Clunbury. The grant supported the felling of Sitka Spruce, bracken control, an information board and community engagement.

S Cooke & Partners – grant £1,940

Supporting urgently needed tree surgery on five black poplars at Crowsnest Dingle which need a 20-30% crown reduction to ensure they remain in our landscape for years to come.

Bushmoor Verges Group – grant £1,285

Helping volunteers to manage the roadside verge leading into their village to encourage a diversity of flowering plants.

Clee St Margaret Village Hall – grant £1,100

Funding for two hedge-laying courses to give local people the skills to manage hedgerows both on their own land and in the local community.

Partnerships and wider networks

AONB Partnership

The Partnership held three meetings - on 12th July themed to climate change, on 8th November covering Our Upland Commons and Stepping Stones, and on 23rd March covering Access for All and starting the Management Plan review. On 26th July the summer AONB Forum was held at Craven Arms Community Centre followed by four field visits, and this was attended by about 50 people.

National Association for AONBs

We took part in the annual conference in September and the Chairs Conference in November themed to Green Finance.

Partnership working activities included:

Hosting a visit from Shropshire Council Chief Executive Andy Begley

Hosting a visit from the Defra FiPL team

Work with the Forestry Commission to plan a workshop on Landscape & Woodland Design, held on 27th November at Pollardine Farm.

Site visits with Telford & Wrekin Council ecologists

Site visits with John Muir Trust area manager

Input to early process for Shropshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Meeting with Shropshire Wildlife Trust managers

South Shropshire Climate Action Group

Shropshire Climate Action Partnership Land & Biodiversity group

Shropshire Council Climate Officer group

Shropshire group on Carbon accounting in land

Teme Catchment Partnership

Rea Brook Working Group



Field visit at the Forum event



Site visit by Andy Begley

Support has been provided for initiatives led by others, including:

- Llanfair Waterdine parish land management plan
- Middle Marches Community Land Trust Conference on hedges, verges and ditches
- CPRE Hedgerows project
- Crowsnest Dingle black poplars project
- Clun Forest Facilitation Group visit with Upper Onny Farmers Group
- Interpretation for Farming in Protected Landscapes projects at Morrell's Wood and the Onny Trail
- Shropshire Hills Great Days Out leaflet for 2023
- Conservation Fund project applicants
- Our Upland Commons promotion and events

A selection of Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Key Performance Indicator returns for 2022-23:

- 59 hectares of habitat conserved or enhanced for biodiversity
- 141 volunteers engaged
- £6,142 worth of volunteer time generated
- 5,567 people engaged through events or publications
- 432 young people engaged in activities
- 319 farmers and land managers engaged
- 24 partnerships where the AONB Team is part of the project/ team/ steering group lead
- 31 partnerships as a supporting partner
- 4 development schemes appraised
- 31 land management schemes appraised



Site visit with Defra FiPL team

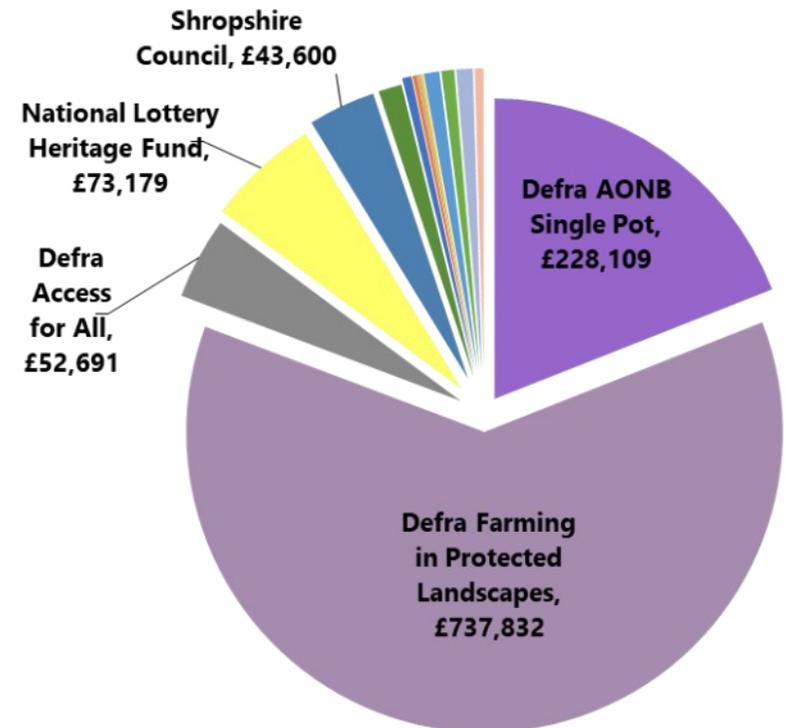
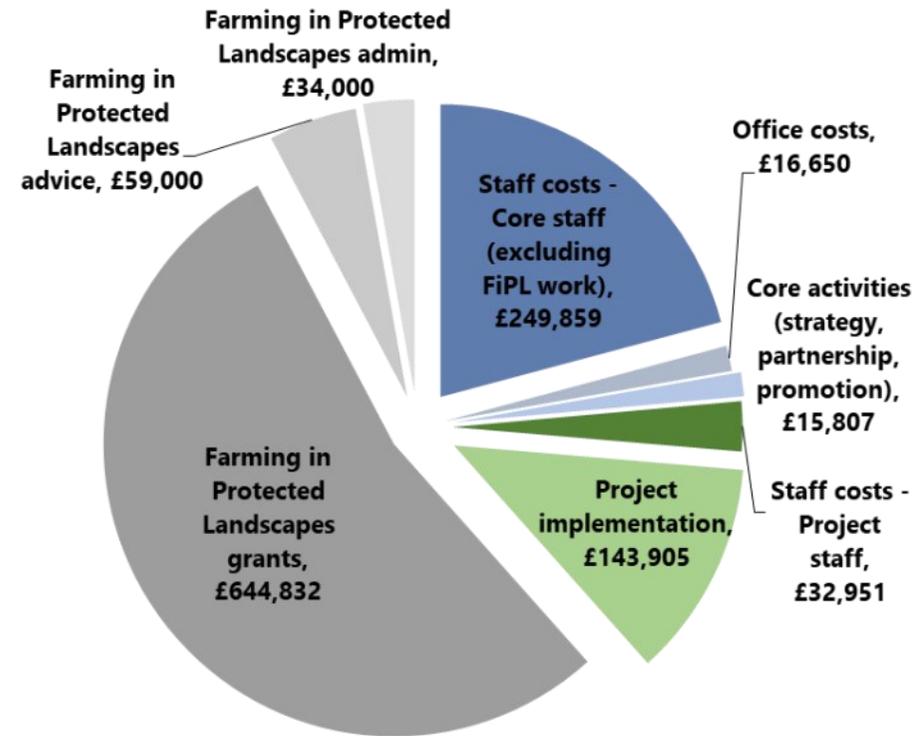
Financial Summary 2022-23

Expenditure

Staff costs - Core staff (excluding FiPL work)	£249,859
Office costs	£16,650
Core activities (strategy, partnership, promotion)	£15,807
Staff costs - Project staff	£32,951
Project implementation	£143,905
Farming in Protected Landscapes grants	£644,832
Farming in Protected Landscapes advice	£59,000
Farming in Protected Landscapes admin	£34,000
Total	£1,197,005

Income

Defra AONB Single Pot	£228,109
Defra Farming in Protected Landscapes	£737,832
Defra Access for All	£52,691
National Lottery Heritage Fund	£73,179
Shropshire Council	£43,600
Earned income	£15,108
Shuttles ticket and concessions income	£5,942
Telford & Wrekin Council	£3,000
Church Stretton Town Council	£1,500
National Trust	£1,500
HF Holidays	£10,000
Forestry Commission	£8,217
Brought forward	£10,577
Other donations	£5,750
Total	£1,197,005



**Shropshire Hills AONB
Partnership staff team at
April 2023**

Rachel Glover
Natural Environment Officer

Stephanie Hayes
Promotions Officer

Phil Holden
AONB Partnership Manager

Joy Howells
Funding & Programmes
Officer

Alison Jones
Farming in Protected
Landscapes Adviser

Alison Kay
Administrator

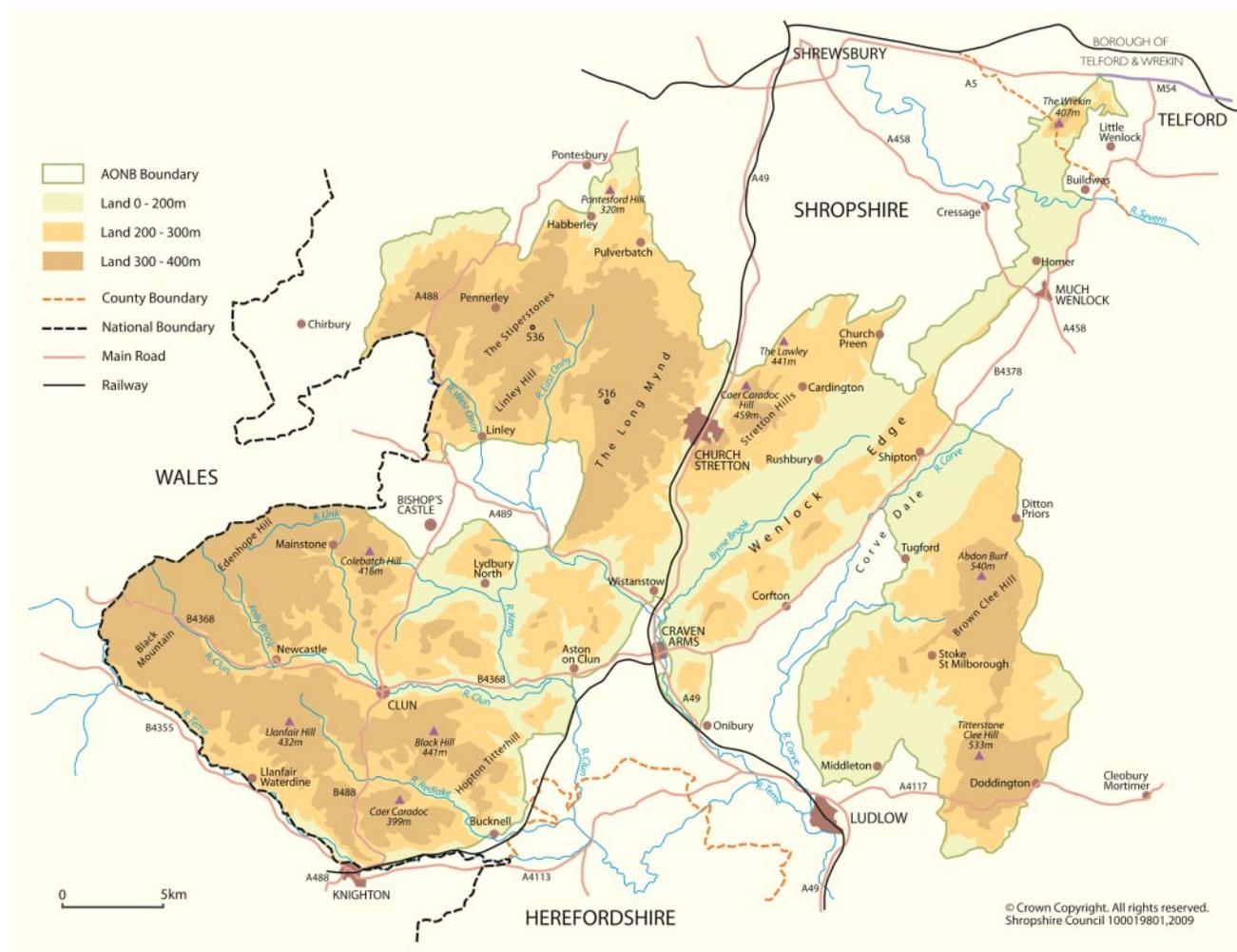
Mike Kelly
Natural Environment Officer

Cath Landles
Community & Landscapes
Officer

Nigel McDonald
Sustainable Tourism Officer

Joe Penfold
Young Rangers Officer

Dougald Purce
Woodland Project Officer



The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership is hosted by Shropshire Council, and funded in addition by Defra, Telford & Wrekin Council and project funders

We work to help conserve and enhance the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
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