



Executive Summary

A Development Plan for Walking,
Cycling and Outdoor Activities in Shropshire

July 2025

Prepared for:

Shropshire Council, Culture, Leisure & Tourism

Introduction

This Development Plan was commissioned by Shropshire Council, funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. through the Great Outdoors initiative, to show how walking, cycling and other outdoor activities can strengthen the visitor economy. It draws on national tourism trends, local stakeholder insights and targeted visitor research to evaluate current provision and highlight priority areas for development. The Plan supports local aims to foster healthier lifestyles, widen access to nature and grow Shropshire's visitor economy through low impact, experience rich offers.

Overview of Shropshire's current outdoor activity offer

In 2024 Shropshire received 10.2 million visits, of these 86% were day trippers. However, the 14 % who stayed overnight accounted for half of all visitors spend and they stayed on average 3.2 nights each. Most spending was on food and drink, with shopping next. Increasingly people want to take nature trips that help protect the environment.

Walking is Shropshire's main outdoor activity, with several long-distance trails including the Shropshire Way, Offa's Dyke Path and the Severn Way. Clearer signage, easier access, better public transport and short themed walks would make the network stronger.

Cycling is increasing on the Shropshire Cycle Way, market town loops and mountain-bike tracks in the Shropshire Hills. Horse riders use long bridleways such as the Jack Mytton Way and the Humphrey Kynaston route.

Rivers, canals and meres provide locations for canoeing, kayaking and wild swimming. There is a clear opportunity for the River Severn to become a leading water trail.

Walking festivals and trail runs are common, but there are few cycling or water events. Linking hotels and other places to stay with activity hubs and themed routes could attract visitors to stay longer and help local businesses.

Full details of Shropshire's outdoor activity offer and market opportunity are available in *Annex 1: Situational Analysis*.

Current visitor market

Most visitors to Shropshire are older adults with good incomes who travel from the West Midlands. They come mainly to walk and to enjoy fresh air, quiet countryside and scenic views. Many stay only for the day; those who stay two or three nights often book Airbnb or mid-range hotels. They focus on cafés, pubs and restaurants when planning their trip, yet awareness of the Shropshire Great Outdoors website is low. Their main concerns are for clearer signage, better kept paths and improved parking.

An online panel survey of visitors and non-visitors interested in outdoor activities gathered insights into demographics, behaviour, motivations and trip preferences. The findings are presented in *Annex 2: Visitor and Non-Visitor Survey*.

Current Position

Strengths

**Natural Assets and biodiversity**

Natural Assets and biodiversity . Peat Bogs, River Valleys, Woodlands, Heathlands

**Trail and Route Infrastructure**

Shropshire Way, Offa's Dyke Path, Severn Way

**Conservation and Nature Recovery**

Stepping Stones, Marches Mosses Initiative

**Cultural and Heritage Assets**

Ludlow Castle, Ironbridge, Shropshire museum

**Community Involvement**

Local walking, cycling and conservation groups

Challenges

**Trail routes and Infrastructure Gaps**

Infrastructure inconsistencies

**Fragmented Visitor Information**

No single digital platform that consolidates all touristic information

**Water Activity Constraints**

Lack of designated launch points, quipment hire and signage

**Inconsistent Food and Beverage Offer**

Limited availability of cafes, pubs, and food outlets along trails

**Lack of Accessible Green Space**

Limited number of well-maintained and well-promoted sites

**Limited Information Social Prescribing**

Few mapped and maintained trails for individuals with mobility challenges


**Over Reliance on Volunteer Maintenance**


Lack of funding for the maintenance of trails and public rights of way.


**Lack of Co-ordinated Funding**


Funding streams are limited and fragmented.

Opportunities

**Strengthen Shropshire's outdoor activity offer**

**Put restoration and sustainability at the centre of every new project**

**Conservation and Nature Recovery**

**Protect carbon stores and biodiversity and prepare the landscape for climate change**

- Repair worn paths
- Re-wett peatlands
- Improve river quality
- Stabilise eroded heritage sites

The Way Forward

To achieve this aspiration and align with Shropshire's wider strategic goals, four strategic initiatives are recommended.

These initiatives will be underpinned by sustainable and nature restoration principles and supported by 8 new Development Opportunities and 7 ongoing Partner Projects that are detailed in *Annex 3*. The Development Opportunities are listed in the graphic below.

