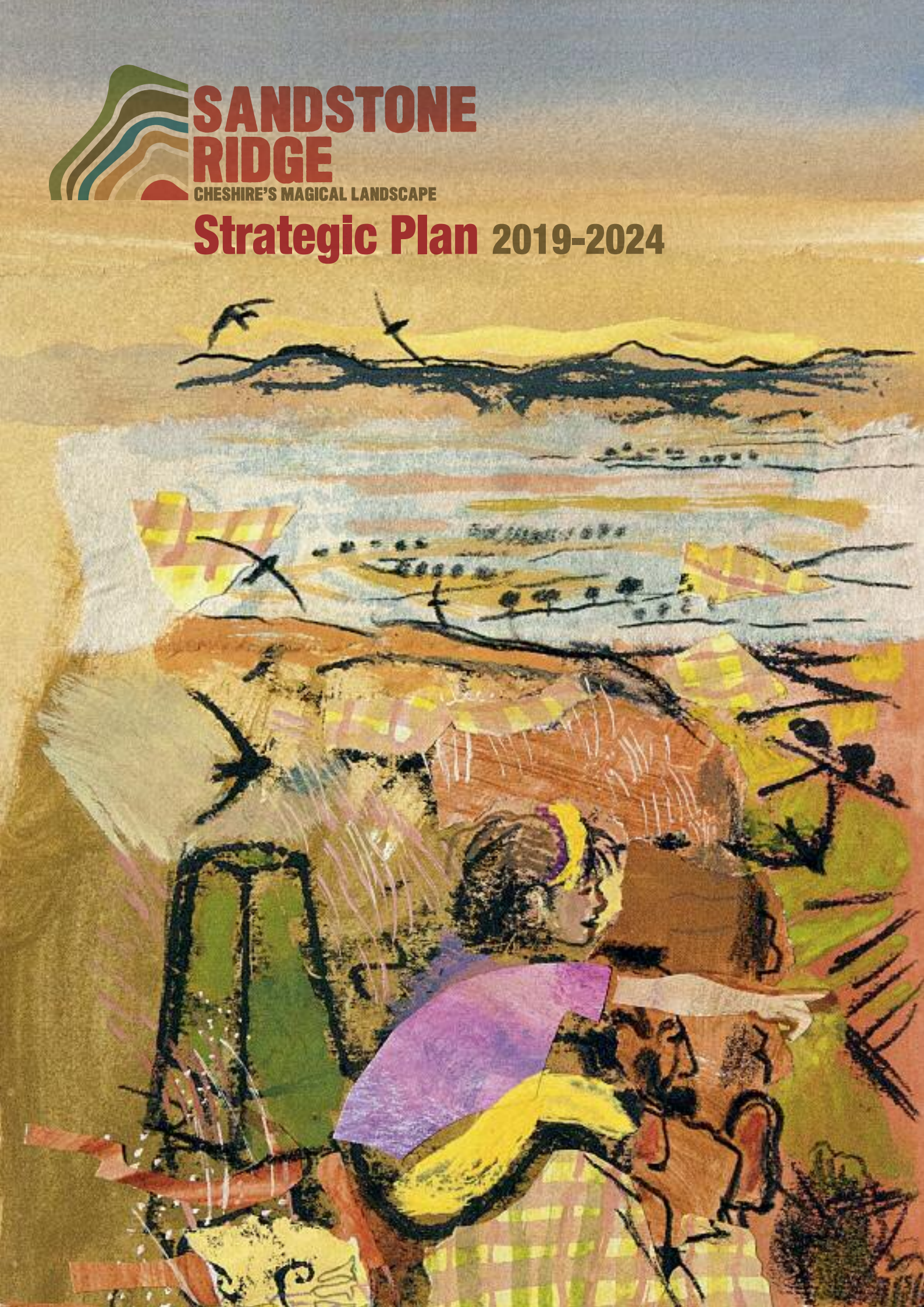




**SANDSTONE
RIDGE**

CHESHIRE'S MAGICAL LANDSCAPE

Strategic Plan 2019-2024



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Foreword

Our five year Strategic Plan sets out both our vision and our objectives for the future of the Sandstone Ridge Trust. This is a watershed moment for the Charity as it embarks on a new direction of travel, following the successful conclusion of our Heritage Lottery funded Transition Project. Over the last two years we have discovered just how passionate people are about the Sandstone Ridge and how deeply they care about its future. This magical place is one of Cheshire's most distinctive and most cherished landscapes. As a result of the Transition Project, we better understand the values, priorities, issues and opportunities facing the Sandstone Ridge and its immediate area. Most importantly we have identified a way forward that can address future challenges in order to **'secure the long-term future of Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations'**.

The Sandstone Ridge Trust is one of many organisations that have an interest in the natural beauty, landscape and cultural heritage of the Sandstone Ridge and the needs of the people that visit, live or work on it. The future of this distinctive landscape can only be secured through collaborative working, and I have been hugely encouraged by the willingness of stakeholders to come together, with others, as part of the wider Sandstone Ridge 'family'. All have been keen to deliver a shared mission to **CONSERVE** the natural beauty, special qualities and natural resources of the Sandstone Ridge; to **CONNECT** people with nature, heritage and the rural way of life, and to **INSPIRE** current and future generations to better understand and look after this unique area.

The preparation of this five year Strategic Plan is timely. It coincides with a period of unprecedented change and opportunities for rural England as we leave the European Union and implement the commitments emerging from the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, as well as the publication of new Agriculture and Environment Bills and industrial strategies, such as that relating to the Northern Powerhouse. The Trust is well positioned to lead the response to these exciting challenges, and to secure a long-term future for the Sandstone Ridge that will seek to benefit all.

Andrew Hull

Chair, The Sandstone Ridge Trust
February 2019.



Purpose and Ambition

This five year Strategic Plan sets out how the Sandstone Ridge Trust will work towards achieving its vision, mission and objectives. It has been prepared in the context of:

1. The progress made during our last Business Plan 2016-19.
2. A major investigation into the future direction of travel for the Sandstone Ridge Trust, carried out as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund Transition Project: Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge Towards a Sustainable Future (Dec 2016 – Dec 2018).
3. A period of unprecedented change in Government policy in a range of areas including farming, the environment, protected landscapes, health and wellbeing and industry.

In delivering this Strategic Plan over the next five years we will:

- Consolidate the Sandstone Ridge Trust as the leading voice for the area.
- Transform people's awareness and understanding of the Sandstone Ridge by creating a strong sense of identity and place that is deeply felt by residents, businesses and visitors.
- Clearly communicate our work and the value and benefits of the Sandstone Ridge.
- Sustain the natural beauty and special qualities of the Sandstone Ridge, and enrich people's lives and experiences through an ambitious programme of projects and activities.
- Co-ordinate the added value to the outcomes of individual organisations by leading and facilitating the Sandstone Ridge Partnership.
- Reinforce our links with the wider Sandstone Ridge 'family' through collaborative projects and greater opportunities for volunteering.
- Increase opportunities for external funding and investment.
- Continue to evolve as an organisation fit for the future, with a clear understanding of our users' needs, a sound governance structure, and secure financial base.
- Raise awareness nationally of the distinctive qualities of the area.





Vision, Mission and Objectives

Our Vision

To secure the long-term future of Cheshire's Sandstone Ridge for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations.

Our Mission

1. **CONSERVE** the natural beauty, special qualities and natural resources of the Sandstone Ridge.
2. **CONNECT** people with nature, heritage and the rural way of life.
3. **INSPIRE** current and future generations to better understand and look after this unique area.

Our Objectives

1. Enhancing the Sandstone Ridge landscape through habitat conservation and restoration.
2. Improving understanding of the archaeological, historical and cultural heritage of the landscape.
3. Raising awareness of the area's natural beauty and special qualities.
4. Educating all users in the protection, conservation, and improvement of the physical and natural environment.
5. Working with others to ensure the continuation of the public benefits the Sandstone Ridge provides for our environment, our health and wellbeing, and our rural economy.

Our Culture and Values

The Sandstone Ridge Trust is passionate about the Sandstone Ridge and is dedicated to securing its long-term future. We will seek to champion the natural beauty and special qualities that make the Sandstone Ridge a distinctive landscape, and:

- Provide strong, clear and inspiring leadership.
- Encourage teamwork and collaborative and supportive working practices.
- Help our communities flourish.
- Promote opportunities for inclusivity and engagement.
- Treat everyone with openness, integrity, respect and equality.
- Be open and honest in our communications, freely sharing our knowledge and information.
- Use our resources efficiently and effectively.
- Actively support individual and collective learning and development opportunities.
- Adopt an outward looking and enterprising approach in everything that we do.



About Us

The Sandstone Ridge Trust is a company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 17 June 2011 (Company number 7673603), and which was granted charitable status on 28 October 2011 (Charity number 1144470).

The Sandstone Ridge Trust is run by a Board (of up to ten Trustees) that is responsible for the overall management of the Trust, its strategic direction and finances. The Trustees are passionate about the future of the area, and offer a diverse set of skills in areas such as governance, community development, communication, marketing, fund-raising, project and business management, ecology, landscape, archaeology, education, rural issues, and the performing arts.

The work of the Board of Trustees is supported by an unlimited membership of the Trust which includes those who are actively involved in the Trust's work, as well as those who voluntarily support the aims and objectives of the Trust in a generic sense.

Between 2018 and 2020 the Trustees are being supported by a part-time Communications Officer for the Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network, funded through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund.

In addition, Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC) provides support for the Trust through a Service Level Agreement covering the period 1 January 2012 – 31 December 2022.

Our Beneficiaries

Our principal beneficiaries are the individuals, landowners, and communities who live and work on the Sandstone Ridge and those who visit it from Cheshire, the wider sub-region and beyond. They all benefit from enhanced and more accessible heritage and environmental resources, improved health and wellbeing, and a more sustainable rural economy.





Operating Context

State of the Sandstone Ridge

In May 2018, and as part of the Heritage Lottery funded Transition Project, the Sandstone Ridge Trust published an insights paper entitled 'Cheshire Sandstone Ridge: Towards a Sustainable Future (2016-18)'¹. This extensive evidence base provided a thorough understanding of the state of the Sandstone Ridge landscape, the issues facing it, and people's views and priorities. The evidence demonstrates that:

- The Sandstone Ridge is highly cherished by locals and visitors alike, and that there is overwhelming agreement of its importance as an area of natural beauty, landscape, heritage and wildlife.** The panoramic and long-distance views that can be gained from its summits are particularly valued, along with its peace and quiet, walking opportunities and accessibility.
- The status of the area is not well understood, and few are aware of its proposed designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) some 70 years ago, or of its current recognition as a distinctive landscape by Natural England (National Character Area No. 62 Cheshire Sandstone Ridge).** Some communities on the geographic fringes of the area do not associate themselves with the 'Sandstone Ridge'. Although a number of individual attractions on the Ridge are popular with visitors, many are drawn from a small catchment. The Sandstone Ridge as a 'place' is not a visitor destination. This, and other evidence, points to the area lacking an overall identity.
- Residents, visitors and those who work on the Sandstone Ridge draw multiple benefits from its rich and varied natural resources, yet the full value of its assets to society is poorly understood and/or often overlooked.** The area provides a living for over 400 farmers and landowners, and is the chosen location of at least 1,000 businesses. More than 36,000 people live in the area, whilst in excess of one million individuals are attracted to visitor destinations on the Sandstone Ridge annually. These destinations include, for example, Delamere Forest, events held at the estates of both Bolesworth and Cholmondeley as well as popular attractions such as the Cheshire Ice Cream Farm near Tattenhall. Visitors are drawn principally from within Cheshire and from the surrounding conurbations of Greater Manchester, Merseyside and the Potteries. The Sandstone Ridge also provides the essentials for life, such as clean air and water, food, timber and raw materials, helps regulate our climate, stores flood waters, filters pollution, and provides opportunities for us to improve our health and wellbeing.
- Historically, the Sandstone Ridge landscape has always been subject to change from countless and continuous influences and pressures.** Exactly how, where and why it has changed is difficult to determine due to an absence of empirical data. The state of the environmental health of the Ridge is also hard to assess owing to the ad hoc nature of the evidence.



¹ The Insights Paper is available to read and download from the publications section on www.sandstoneridge.org.uk

- **People's perceptions of landscape change are mixed,** with many of the same changes being identified as both for the better as well as for the worse. Conservation management (including tree removal in favour of open habitats), accessibility, the provision and quality of the access infrastructure (footpaths, bridleways, cycle routes, waymarking, information, refreshments and car parking), and anti-social behaviour (littering and dog fouling) are at the forefront of people's perceptions.
- **A broad range of pressures for potential landscape change exists,** including inappropriate development (particularly for housing), mineral extraction, water abstraction, farming and forestry practices, visitor pressures, people's values, behaviour and lifestyles, economic and market trends, declining public purse, climate change, and a changing policy landscape. To be better placed to manage these changes requires social, economic and environmental agendas to be brought together to develop a single voice and vision for the Sandstone Ridge, strongly supported by a commitment to safeguarding the increased protection that would be offered by a landscape designation.
- **A number of emerging future priorities for the Sandstone Ridge have been identified** including increased stakeholder engagement, access and infrastructure improvements, wider conservation of natural and cultural heritage sites, wholesale branding and marketing of the Ridge, better scrutiny of development management, greater investment, and leadership and co-ordination. Some 70 new community-led project opportunities have already been identified and the number is increasing.

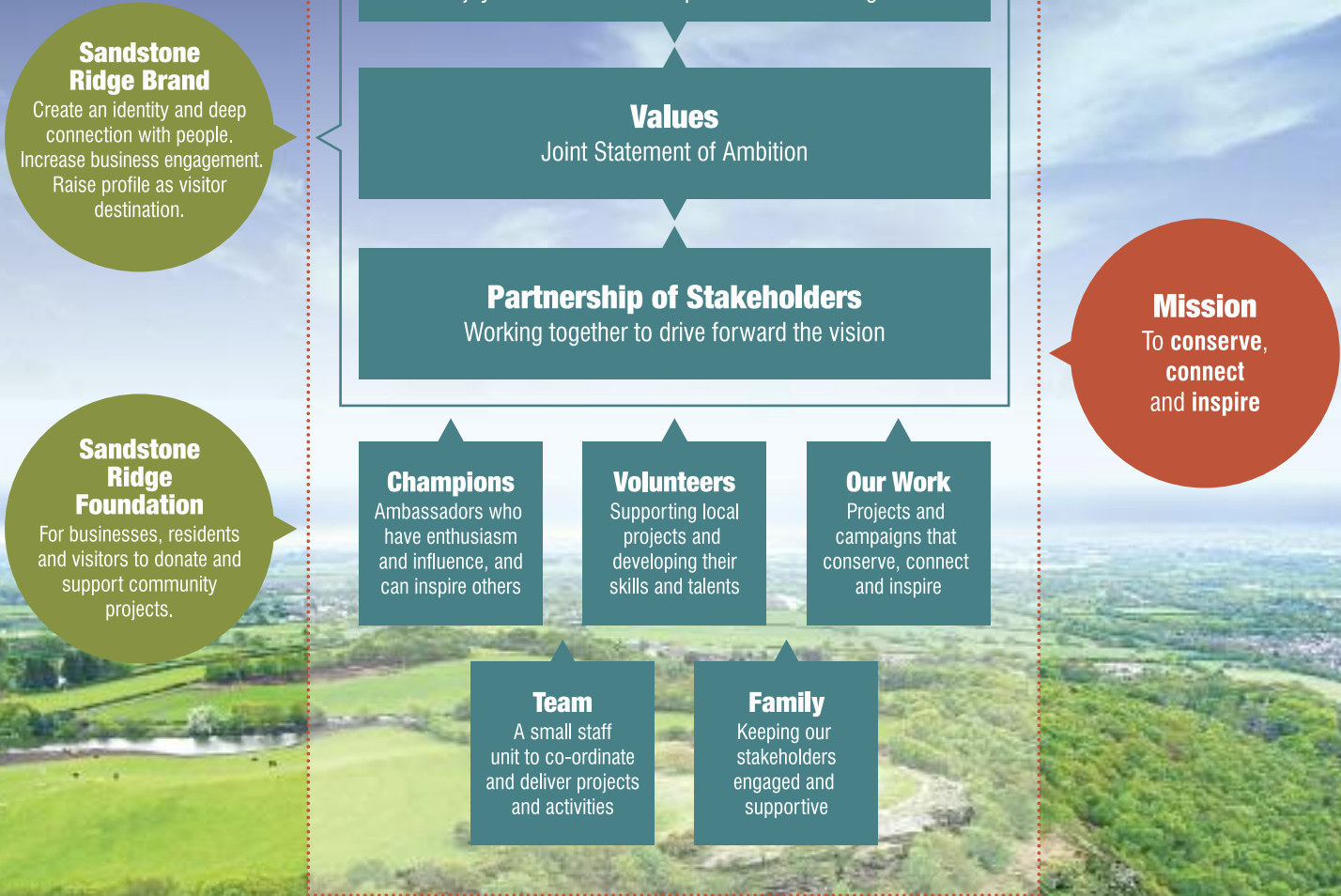
Future Direction

The evidence has been critical to informing and shaping a long-term Delivery Model suitable to meet the requirements of the Sandstone Ridge. This has enabled a review of landscape-scale delivery models operating in the UK. Our conclusion is that the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) option is a best fit to meet the needs of the Sandstone Ridge, and the only option which offers a route to delivering a statutory landscape designation for the area. Given the lengthy timeframe (5-10 years), and with no guarantee of success at the end of the process, a bespoke public-private-community initiative (the 'Delivery Model') is recommended to run in parallel, whilst the long-term ambition of AONB status is being pursued.

The Delivery Model (see diagram right) presents the Sandstone Ridge Trust with a new strategic direction and long-term governance arrangement for delivering its mission.



A Delivery Model for the Sandstone Ridge



Delivery Model

The Delivery Model comprises the following key elements:

Sandstone Ridge Partnership

At its core is a new Sandstone Ridge Partnership which brings together relevant stakeholders within the area that can contribute to the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of this distinctive landscape from across the environmental, social, cultural and economic sectors. The shared mission of the Partnership will be to:

1. **CONSERVE** the natural beauty, special qualities and natural resources of the Sandstone Ridge.
2. **CONNECT** people with nature, heritage and the rural way of life.
3. **INSPIRE** current and future generations to better understand and look after the area.

Sandstone Ridge Foundation

A Sandstone Ridge Foundation will be established, allowing businesses, residents and visitors to donate to, and support, community projects that contribute to the mission.

Sandstone Ridge Brand

The Sandstone Ridge brand will be used and promoted by the Partnership, to create and sustain an inclusive brand identity with users; increase business connectivity and engagement, and raise the profile of the area as a visitor destination.

Delivery structure

The long-term work of the Sandstone Ridge Partnership will be enhanced and supported by:

- Champions who have enthusiasm and influence, and can inspire others.
- A small team to co-ordinate and deliver projects and activities.

- Volunteers, who will use and continue to develop their skills and talents in supporting local projects.
- The enthusiasm and energies of the wider Sandstone Ridge family of residents, businesses and community groups.
- A co-ordinated work programme of projects and campaigns that will **CONSERVE**, **CONNECT** and **INSPIRE**.

Legacy Projects

Under the terms of the Sandstone Ridge Trust's establishment and Service Level Agreement with Cheshire West and Cheshire Council, it is responsible (until 2022) for monitoring and maintaining 29 separate capital projects established during the Habitats and Hillforts Landscape Partnership Scheme (2008-12) comprising:

- 22 projects under Programme 1 Habitats.
- 4 projects under Programme 2 Hillforts.
- 3 projects under Programme 3 Access and Interpretation.

To cover these costs, £38,250 of former Habitats & Hillforts (HLF) funds was transferred to the Sandstone Ridge Trust, and is ring-fenced for this purpose.

In 2018 the Trust began three new projects with the support of volunteers and local communities:

- Beneath the Ridge (improving understanding about caves, rock shelters and mines beneath the Ridge).
- A Pictorial History of the Sandstone Ridge (illustrating landscape change through old photographs).
- Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network (Countryside Stewardship facilitation funding bringing together over 40 farmers in the south of the area to work collectively on a range of local priorities - led by Reaseheath College with the support of the Sandstone Ridge Trust).





Our Strategic Priorities

The Sandstone Ridge Trust has identified nine Strategic Priorities and an ambitious programme of 40 projects and activities to deliver its mission over the next five years. The exact detail and the specific nature of the activities will be firmed up as we progress through the Strategic Plan. Successful delivery will depend on working closely with our partners and communities and by securing new resources from a range of providers.

Governance and Resources

Desired Outcome

An excellent organisation that is fit for the future; valued, recognised and authoritative about the Sandstone Ridge.

Commitments

We will:

- Introduce the new Delivery Model for the Sandstone Ridge to support our work.
- Work with our partners for the benefit of the Sandstone Ridge and its communities.
- Invest in our Trustees, members, volunteers and the wider Sandstone Ridge family to further develop as an ambitious, innovative, high achieving and inclusive organisation.
- Investigate opportunities for generating revenue to support our work.
- Seek to attract investment to the area that supports our vision.
- Monitor changes and trends in the condition of the special qualities of the Sandstone Ridge and develop a performance management framework to demonstrate the impact of our work.

Measures of Success

- Number of Trustees, members and volunteers.
- Attendance and participation in meetings of the Sandstone Ridge Partnership.
- Levels of income generation for core funding.
- Levels of income secured for the Sandstone Ridge Foundation and transferred to projects.
- Publication of quinquennial State of the Sandstone Ridge Report.

Projects and Activities

1. Establish and embed robust governance structures and processes within the Trust.
2. Lead and co-ordinate a Sandstone Ridge Partnership.
3. Identify ambassadors to promote the Sandstone Ridge.
4. Recruit a Sandstone Ridge team to coordinate and deliver projects and activities.
5. Establish and promote the Sandstone Ridge Foundation.
6. Prepare and implement a funding strategy.
7. Produce a State of the Sandstone Ridge Report.

Communication

Desired Outcome

A widespread understanding and recognition of the special qualities of the Sandstone Ridge and the benefits the area provides.

Commitments

We will:

- Develop a greater understanding of what makes the Sandstone Ridge special.
- Inspire people to enjoy the Sandstone Ridge, get involved, and learn about its diverse and special qualities.
- Improve our visibility, enabling better two-way communication with communities, parishes, landowners, businesses and visitors, and develop greater capacity for projects - many working with partners - that make a difference 'on the ground'.
- Work with local educational providers to promote and deliver a framework for inclusive learning and practical engagement that celebrates what makes the Sandstone Ridge unique and special.

Measures of Success

- Number of contacts with our audiences.
- Total number of participants at the Walk and Ride Festival.
- Total number of volunteer days delivered by the Trust.
- Number of educational providers who sign up to the framework.

Projects and Activities

1. Develop a public relations and communications campaign.
2. Establish an annual Walk and Ride Festival (foot, hoof and wheel).
3. Set up a Sandstone Ridge Friends Group.
4. Work with partners to develop coordinated volunteering programmes that share opportunities for training and learning.
5. Share our expertise, knowledge and learning materials with educational providers in the area.

Access and Access Infrastructure

Desired Outcome

The creation of an inclusive, accessible and welcoming landscape.

Commitments

- We will:
- Work with our partners to enhance visitor and resident experiences through a high quality and connected access network.
 - Work with Public Rights of Way Teams, landowners, land managers, and access groups to ensure that footpaths and other rights of way are accessible, easy to use and maintained in very good condition.
 - Work with health providers, communities and businesses to enable people to benefit from improved mental and physical health by creating new, enhanced and accessible routes and other recreational facilities.

Measures of Success

- Increased car parking provision.
- Establishment of Sandstone Trail cycle and horse-riding route.
- Lengths of new circular walks and disability access created.
- Creation of new recreational routes.

Projects and Activities

1. Improve car parking provision in areas that are deficient.
2. Establish a Sandstone Trail cycle and horse riding route as a companion to the Sandstone Trail footpath.
3. Create circular fun/health walks in and around key and local service centres, especially for those who are less mobile or less confident visiting the countryside.
4. Create a new recreational route, for example, on the former Helsby-Mouldsworth railway line.

Arts

Desired Outcome

The enrichment of people's lives through artistic and cultural experiences inspired by the Sandstone Ridge.

Commitments

- We will:
- Work with artists, sculptors, festival groups and providers to develop arts and cultural projects which focus on the special qualities and benefits of the Sandstone Ridge and promote social inclusion.
 - Tell the stories of the landscape, natural and cultural heritage of the Sandstone Ridge and how it has evolved and changed over time.
 - Engage with outdoor learning centres based on the Sandstone Ridge.

Measures of Success

- Attendance figures at Arts Festivals.
- Number of art installations.
- Participation numbers at community art events.

Projects and Activities

1. Celebrate the Sandstone Ridge in music, art and literature through the annual Sandstone Ridge Arts Festival.
2. Provide focal points –'Framing the View' art installations - that allow walkers to pause and experience the landscape in new ways.
3. Introduce an artistic development and inclusive community programme.



Cultural Heritage

Desired Outcome

The diversity and richness of the cultural heritage assets are better understood, cared for and protected.

Commitments

We will:

- Improve and share awareness and understanding of the archaeological, historical and cultural inheritance of the area.
- Work with our partners, community groups, and the custodians of heritage assets, to ensure that our historic environment is well-managed and better protected.
- Encourage more people to get involved in learning about and conserving the area's historic environment and cultural heritage.
- Support initiatives that promote the skills, knowledge and traditions that have shaped the Sandstone Ridge landscape.

Measures of Success

- Total number of community groups and parishes engaged.
- Numbers of participating volunteers.
- Number of heritage assets protected and restored.

Projects and Activities

1. Involve and engage local communities and parishes in celebrating and looking after historic milestones and mileposts.
2. Celebrate and promote the area's heritage of caves and mines – 'Beneath the Ridge'.
3. Publish a Pictorial History of the Sandstone Ridge.

Nature and Landscape

Desired Outcome

More, bigger, better and joined-up places for wildlife, and increased opportunities for species.

Commitments

We will:

- Work with our partners, landowners and managers to develop landscape-scale projects which manage, restore, expand and connect priority habitats and key landscape features.
- Encourage land management practices which support a greater abundance of species.
- Encourage more people to discover the magic of the area's dark night skies, and work with policy makers to protect the area from light pollution.
- Promote the simple, quiet enjoyment of the natural beauty and tranquil nature of the area.
- Maintain our legacy investment of habitat creation projects.

Measures of Success

- Kilometres of boundary features protected and restored.
- Total number of enhanced viewpoints.
- Publication of geodiversity audit.
- Hectares of restored wetlands.
- Population increase of key species.

Projects and Activities

1. Celebrate and restore traditional hedgerows and drystone sandstone wall boundary features.
2. Maintain key viewpoints.
3. Tell the story of the area's rich geodiversity.
4. Support the creation of a resilient network of wetlands in the meres and mosses of Delamere Forest.
5. Support the recovery and reintroduction of key species.
6. Promote technical events with the Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network and share best practice.



Rural Economy and Tourism

Desired Outcome

A strong, diverse and resilient rural economy where farming, forestry, land management and rural tourism enterprises play a leading role in conserving and enhancing the area's special qualities.

Commitments

- We will:
- As an active partner in the Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network, support farmers to deliver landscape, biodiversity, historic environment, resource protection, education and access improvements.
 - Work with economic partners to help businesses get the most out of the area's local distinctiveness, and encourage the utilisation of the natural resources of the Sandstone Ridge in a sustainable way.
 - Encourage investment in the rural economy by supporting markets for local produce, sustainable rural tourism, and new approaches to rural development and environmental management.

Measures of Success

- Increased membership of the Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network.
- Publication of Local Distinctiveness Handbook.
- Creation of a Sandstone Ridge Business Alliance, together with a number of events.

Projects and Activities

1. Support the Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network.
2. Publish a Local Distinctiveness Handbook for stakeholders and visitors.
3. Explore the demand for a Sandstone Ridge Business Alliance and host business networking events.

Sense of Place

Desired Outcome

The Sandstone Ridge is recognised and celebrated for the value it brings to the area and wider sub-region.

Commitments

- We will:
- Develop a distinctive Sandstone Ridge brand and identity that is immediately recognisable and instils the loyalty of residents, businesses and visitors.
 - Place the Sandstone Ridge brand at the core of our future plans for the area – using it to inspire local communities, to support rural regeneration, to protect and enhance natural and cultural heritage, and to encourage social and capital investment.
 - Encourage our partners, businesses, community groups and town and parish councils to adopt and use the brand.

Measures of Success

- Sales of Visitor Guides.
- Installation of signage.
- Total number of businesses supporting the Sandstone Ridge brand.

Projects and Activities

1. Produce and distribute Visitor Guides.
2. Install gateway signs at key towns and villages.
3. Establish a touring exhibition/café mobile van.
4. Produce and distribute brand and interpretation products, and the branding toolkit.

AONB Designation

Desired Outcome

The long-term protection and management of the natural beauty, cultural and natural heritage of the Sandstone Ridge landscape.

Commitments

- We will:
- Pursue AONB designation for the Sandstone Ridge insofar as this is a best fit model to meet the needs of the area and its communities.

Measures of Success

- Submission of case for AONB designation to Natural England.
- Total number of letters of support for AONB designation.

Projects and Activities

1. Present a case to Natural England to designate the Sandstone Ridge as an AONB.
2. Seek a local consensus of opinion that the area meets the statutory criteria for designation.
3. Feed our views into the Government's review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and whether areas should be given new designations.
4. Undertake further investigation into the costs and benefits of AONB designation.
5. Maintain links with, and Associate Membership of, the National Association for AONBs.





The Sandstone Ridge Trust

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