

# Briefing Paper: Adoption of Cluster Model for Outdoor Spaces Partnership in Shropshire

## Introduction: About the Outdoor Spaces Group

The Outdoor Spaces Group is an informal, cross-sector partnership formed to champion and coordinate community-led action on nature recovery and green space enhancement across Shropshire. Emerging organically from a collaborative funding bid, the group brings together representatives from local councils, environmental organisations, landscape specialists, and community trusts.

Our shared purpose is to help communities reconnect with their environment, improve biodiversity, and build local resilience to climate and ecological challenges. We aim to identify gaps in existing provision, align efforts with strategic policies such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), and develop practical tools, like workbooks and project templates, to support local delivery.

While not formally constituted, the group operates with a spirit of cooperation and inclusion, acting as a catalyst for new ideas, stronger partnerships, and place-based action. We believe that by working together at a local level, we can create a greener, healthier, and more connected Shropshire for all.

## Overview

Shropshire is home to 184 town and parish councils, each playing a vital role in shaping and stewarding local outdoor spaces. To support stronger collaboration, strategic alignment, and more effective delivery of nature-based initiatives, we have developed a five-cluster model designed to bring councils together based on shared geography and scale. This model is non-political, practical, and grounded in a shared commitment to improving our outdoor environment for people and wildlife.

## Purpose of the Cluster Model

The cluster approach was developed through the Outdoor Spaces Partnership – an informal network of organisations working collaboratively on nature recovery, access, and community engagement. The aim is to:

- Encourage more coordinated local action on improving and managing green and blue infrastructure
- Support co-operation, shared learning and resource pooling between councils
- Improve access to funding by enabling joint bids that reflect landscape-scale priorities
- Strengthen community involvement, capacity building and environmental stewardship
- Align local efforts with the county-wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

## How Clusters Were Designed

- Five clusters have been created, each balancing population size and geographic proximity
- Clusters have been based on local connections and practical groupings, not on political boundaries

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- To achieve this balance, Shifnal has been aligned with Telford & Wrekin for cluster coordination purposes only. This has no political implications and is solely to ensure the manageability and consistency of group size and activity

### Why Adoption is Important

We invite town and parish councils across Shropshire to formally adopt the cluster model for the following reasons:

#### 1. Greater Impact Through Collaboration and co-operation

Working collectively within clusters enables parishes to deliver projects at scale, coordinate better use of shared resources, and respond more effectively to environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss, implementation of nature recovery initiatives, flooding, and climate resilience.

#### 2. Unlocking Funding Opportunities

Many external funders now favour or require collaborative bids. Clusters strengthen our ability to apply for funding (e.g. UKSPF, LNRS-linked funds, Natural England schemes), by demonstrating cohesive delivery models and joint planning.

#### 3. Simplified Communication and Support

Coordinated clusters allow for more efficient communication with Shropshire Council, infrastructure teams, and external partners. It also makes it easier to provide technical support, workshops, or access to funding advice.

#### 4. Evidence-Based Planning and Action

The cluster model will help towns and parishes align local priorities with county-wide mapping and policy tools, including LNRS spatial data and the forthcoming workbook of best practices.

#### 5. Strengthening Community Identity and Ownership

By working together across natural landscapes, councils can foster a shared sense of place and encourage active citizenship—delivering benefits for health, wellbeing, and civic pride.

### Next Steps

- View the attached cluster map to identify which group your parish falls into
- Discuss within your council how you can collaborate with your cluster peers
- Nominate a cluster coordinator or point of contact (if desired), or engage via upcoming events
- Attend the October 3rd Conference in Ellesmere, where we will present the cluster approach alongside new tools, funding updates, and training resources  
<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/nature-recovery-conference-3-10-25/>

### Conclusion

This is an invitation to work better, together. The cluster model is a flexible and strategic framework that respects local autonomy while providing a foundation for meaningful cooperation. By adopting your cluster, your council will be part of a wider, supportive network working toward a healthier, greener, and more connected Shropshire.

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### Proposed Clusters

<b>South Shropshire – population 76,723</b>	<b>Shrewsbury – population 76,599</b>	<b>Telford – population 73,808</b>	<b>Wrekin – Population 78,942</b>	<b>North Shropshire – Population 77,573</b>
Bishops Castle (existing lottery bid live)	Shrewsbury	Telford	Newport	Ellesmere
Bridgnorth		Dawley	Oakengates	Market Drayton
Broseley		Madeley	Shifnal	Oswestry
Church Stretton			Wellington	Wem
Cleobury Mortimer				Whitchurch
Clun				
Craven Arms				
Ludlow				
Much Wenlock				