

**SHROPSHIRE HILLS DISCOVERY CENTRE,
APRIL 2009 TO OCTOBER 2009****Responsible Officer** Zoe Griffin

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1. Round up of our services at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre**1.1 Craven Arms Library**

The use of the library is continuing to increase. Loans of all types are up again versus last year, varying from +8% for adult fiction to +35% for junior non-fiction. Overall total loans are up 19%. (Performance indicators will be tabled at the meeting.)

The library supports four local Reading Groups, including the Craven Arms group who meet once a month at the Centre.

Our two Thursday Rhyme time sessions for under fives and their carers remain well received and well attended.

We now have two classes from Stokesay School coming for weekly Rhyme Time / library visits – the nursery and the reception class.

The children's service librarian came and did some significant stock work in the autumn.

We have also recently taken part in the national public library adult user survey. This happens every three years, so these results will be the first since the relocation of the library to the Centre and give the service a national benchmark of satisfaction. Results are expected in the New Year.

1.2 Secret Hills exhibition, Café and Retail

Of over 124,000 Centre users to the end of October, over 13,700 came to visit the Secret Hills exhibition or to do one of our various led activities. This is almost identical to the previous year. Receipts also remain at a very similar level to last year.

We have reviewed the price structure for school visits and catering this autumn. We will be analysing the feedback cards this winter.

The retail consultants are continuing to introduce / expand Shropshire related products. Some examples include:

- Chokolit - various chocolate bars made in Bridgnorth
- Trivets and cast iron nut crackers - Supplied by Telford based International Cookware

- Heather's Harvest - various preserves / chutneys made in Shrewsbury
- Purescents range - soaps and creams hand made in Shropshire
- A range of designer maker scarves, brooches and other jewellery from Shropshire makers

1.3 Onny Meadows and Outdoors

Forest school

The monthly Dads' and Kids' Forest School continues as normal. Attendance at the Meadow Fun sessions remains disappointing. Following a review this are being rescheduled and rebranded as Toddle Time which will start in January. We have applied to the LJC for some funding to deliver Forest school sessions to the primary schools within the LJC.

Wednesday Work parties

Volunteer sessions continue. They have been enhanced by joint working with the Shropshire Outdoors project, which may be able to fund the purchase of some additional benches for the meadows.

1.4 Other services

Shropshire Council Customer Service Point (SCSP)

This continues to operate five days a week.

Registrar

There is an appointment only session run on Mondays by the Shropshire Registration Service.

Craven Arms Homework Club

We are continuing to work with the Homework Club, in particular planning joint events – in the summer we ran a special session of one of our holiday activities and during half term they had a session helping them with their gardening skills.

Learning, Employment and Training Services advice sessions

These continue to happen frequently.

2. Marketing, Promotion and Events

2.1 Marketing & Promotion

This year's advertising plan saw a shift in focus – we have spent less on advertising to the coach group market and more money on family specific publications such as The Primary Times and This is Kids Stuff.

The result of this seems to have been no change in coach group visits but a significant increase in uptake of our family activities over the summer. As such a similar advertising strategy will be implemented next year.

We have received a small grant from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund. This is being used to increase awareness about activities we undertake. We are developing a sustainability trail round the Centre and Meadows; promoting the buy local, be sustainable credentials of the café; and have bought a grill to use at Farmers' Markets to sell local sausage and bacon sandwiches.

Mick Elliot, the Director of Culture at the DCMS, visited the Centre as part of a tour of Shropshire Council premises in October. Feedback from his visit was very positive.

We are currently completing the marketing plan for 2010 / 11, which includes the following changes / enhancements:

- We will have a full page feature in the Shropshire Hills Events brochure.
- We will continue to develop our presence on Facebook. We will also consider running a trial on Twitter.
- The onsite and offsite leaflets will be combined into one larger leaflet, and we will have a larger print run to reflect this change.
- Free listing on key websites for events will be more fully exploited.
- We are investigating ways to capitalise on the success of Acton Scott, this will likely be in the form of a special offer for those who visit the farm.
- We will push to collect more email addresses from customers to improve our mailing list and allow us to keep them updated in a cheaper and greener way than traditional mail shots.

We have also updated the illustrated site map, using it to replace the internal orientation panel in the foyer, and will be installing a lectern, to replace the one that was damaged in the meadows, with the updated illustration. This will also be used in the new leaflet.

2.2 Events and Activities 2009

This year we have seen the highest attendances ever for our events and activities program. We have expanded our program but attendance numbers have also increased. The ArtWalk was very successful in September, planning has begun for next year's event. This will again be led by Craven Arts Community Interest Company. We got good coverage in October for our world record attempt to create a pop up book. We will be binding this in the winter and will then send our evidence to Guinness.

2.3 Events and Activities 2010

All major aspects of the 2010 program have now been decided.

The regular sessions will continue – Reading Group, Rhyme Time, Toddle Time, Forest School, Local History talks and drop in sessions, RSPB talks program, Farmers Markets.

Family activities:

- February half term – Digging for Dinosaurs
- Mid March – National Science week workshop
- Easter – Scrambled Eggs
- May half term – Pond Dipping
- Summer – Orienteering Antic, Three Little Pigs, Minibeast Safari
- September – Heritage Open Days and ArtWalk
- October half term – Paper Making

We will be jointly offering, with the AONB, a series of Days Out in the Shropshire Hills / Guided walks with seasonal themes throughout the year.

The Local History Group is also going to run some Who Do You Think You Are? workshops in the autumn.

3. Community Projects and activities

3.1 Craven Arms Local History Group

Every Friday morning the volunteers are available to help people with enquiries and continue their work cataloguing documents relating to the local area. The talk / workshop program on the first Wednesday evening of the month continues.

3.2 Craven Arms Volunteers for the Environment (CAVE)

CAVE continues to be an invaluable help to the Centre keeping a programme of management activities going in the Meadows.

3.3 Craven Arms Community Food

The Farmers' markets continue to be well attended and have a core group of stallholders who come every month.

A partnership project between Ludlow 21, Community Food – Church Stretton and Craven Arms, Craven Arms Community Centre, Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, the Rocksprings Community Centre and the primary schools in Ludlow and Craven Arms has recently won funding in excess of £250,000 for a four year project to role out and develop the Community Garden concept. This will include the appointment of a full time project co-ordinator and a full time gardener to work across the sites involved.

3.4 Play

Working with the Community Centre and various other parties in town we are happy to have had an agreement in principle for up to £50,000 of funding to improve play opportunities for 8 – 13 year olds in Craven Arms. The project is still in the planning stages but is likely to include a BMX track and some natural play structures. The project will be completed in the next financial year.

3.5 Other partnership and community events and activities

The Centre continues to be used by the Brownies and Guides. The RSPB local group's winter talks program has started again. Ludlow College continue to run a Literacy Course – they are really pleased to have the People's Net computers available for their learners to use.

4. Conclusion

We have had a busy and successful season. Growth in use of the library continues. We are happy to have maintained visitor numbers and spend at levels similar to last year despite the continuing economic downturn. Events and activities have been well attended.

Work with the local community has seen funding secured which should deliver benefits to the Centre and the community in 2010 and beyond.

We are now focusing on applying the lessons we have learnt this year to further enhance and improve our service next year.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Human Rights Act Appraisal

No issues

Environmental Appraisal

Future work will encompass the principles of sustainable development particularly with respect to building and exhibition material and the running of the Centre and Onny Meadows.

Risk Management Appraisal

The management of the Discovery Centre is informed by a business plan and marketing plan.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

User and off site surveys are ongoing. Any new proposals will be informed by further consultation.

Cabinet Member

Cllr Steve Charmley

Local Member

Cllr David Evans

Appendices

Decision(s)