



Shropshire Hills Discovery
Centre Advisory Board

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Item / Paper

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Public

SHROPSHIRE HILLS DISCOVERY CENTRE, JANUARY 2010 TO OCTOBER 2010

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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 has levelled off during the last few months. The library now supports seven, up from 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. In September Stokesay School reduced the weekly Rhyme Time / library visits to the nursery class only. The reception class had a new teacher; we are trying to connect with her to find a way to bring the reception class back to the Library.

The results of the national public library adult user survey have been received by local authorities. This information, as relating to the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre will be presented at the meeting. In summary 87% rated the Library as a very good / good place to visit. 60% rated the selection of books available in the Library as very good / good. 91% rated the standard of books available in the Library as very good / good. 83% rated the computer facilities available at the Library as very good / good. 85% rated the information provision at the Library as very good / good. 87% rated the Library provision as very good / good.

1.2 Secret Hills exhibition, Café and Retail

The Centre had over 158000 Centre users between January and October, this is a 10% increase on April to December last year. Of these visitors over 16,000 came to visit the Secret Hills exhibition or to do one of our various led activities this remains on a par with last April to December. Receipts also remain at a similar level to last year.

The onsite feedback cards given to everyone visiting the Secret Hills exhibition have been analysed in house. Satisfaction with the Centre remains high and show little change from the previous year, (a chart will be tabled).

The review and implementation of revised catering prices happened smoothly. A second round of price reviews is currently in progress and will be implemented before the VAT increase in January 2011. We will also be looking at market positioning and any added value offers that would be appropriate.

The small grant from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund has now been spent. This has contributed to the purchase of a free standing grill which we are using at a stall at the Farmers' Markets to retail hot sandwiches made solely with produce you can buy at the market, and continues to go from strength to strength. The three panels which promote the Buy Local ethos of the café are currently being installed in the café and seem to be working well. The A board to promote the café immediately outside the building is in place. This maybe moved to the rear of the building to help promotion of the café to Onny Meadows users. This will only be done if plans to improve on site marketing at the front of the building come to fruition. The new quiz trail for visitors to do around the building and the meadows on the theme of sustainability has been developed and is building slowly.

1.3 Education

Extended Schools

Learning Communicator, Stephanie Bellows, has developed a successful programme of activities which she delivers to primary school children at their own schools after school hours. The sessions, which use activities developed for our holiday family audience and some new activities focusing on sustainability issues, are run over a half term of 5 or 6 weeks and have been very well received by schools. In the Spring Term 2010 Stephanie piloted the sessions at two schools and is now fully booked for this Autumn and Spring 2011 visiting 6 schools in total over this period.

New Foundation Stage Activities

Developed for 2010 to address the specific needs of children aged 5 and under by Education and Learning Officer, Laura Harvey, these new activities have yet to be fully embraced by pre-schools. An activity that always proves popular is 'Three Little Pigs' which invites children to construct a house of sticks and toast marshmallows on a campfire.

Schools Visits

2010 saw a busy summer season which saw many return visits from schools who have had enjoyable experiences with us in past years as well as some new schools, some of which had enjoyed presentations made by the Education Team during staff or subject co-ordinator meetings earlier in the year. We also experienced an unprecedented extension of the autumn season visits continuing well into November.

1.4 Onny Meadows and Outdoors

Forest school

The monthly Dads' and Kids' Forest School continues as normal. Toddle Time started on 4th January. Attendance is growing slowly, but weekly themes and use of digital media to highlight the activity seem to be helping with this.

Wednesday Work parties

Wednesday volunteer sessions continue with great success and have helped to maintain the meadows over the year. They have also been instrumental in the many of the enhancements detailed below.

Enhancements to the Meadows

Two new benches have been installed along the all weather path. The first is at the end of the right hand side of the path so visitors can look across to Norton Camp. The second is in the big meadow offering a wonderful view of the centre.

The story telling ring has been renewed using logs from trees recently felled on the meadows. The tree felling has also allowed us to building a large natural play structure where the stone maze used to be. This offer a great natural climbing and exploration areas of children of all ages.

The 'Onny Meadow Mile' was created this year as part of the Walking for Life programme.

Sculpture Trail

Building on the success of the Craven Arts ArtWalk we are currently working with the same people to develop a Sculpture Trail within the Onny Meadows. The emphasis will be on natural sculpture that will enhance and help inform visitors to the Onny Meadows. This is being developed with funding secured by the Craven Arts ArtWalk Team.

1.5 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

The Homework Club continues to operate three days a week. The joint events planned for 2010, 'Cocktails & Quizzes' and the Animation Workshop were well attended. Joint activities for 2010 / 11 are currently being planned.

Learning, Employment and Training Services advice sessions

These continue to happen frequently.

2. Marketing, Promotion and Events

2.1 Marketing & Promotion

The marketing plan for the remainder of the 2010/11 year, and for the 2011/12 year has been put together. There are significant challenges to be faced due to savings that need to be made; therefore, we are exploring more inventive ways of promoting the centre and its activities. We are also looking at approaching our press advertising as one complete marketing campaign. This should allow us to be more targeted, cost effective and innovative. We will be approaching the council's preferred design companies with a brief in the coming weeks and look forward to seeing what solutions they present.

2.2 Events and Activities 2011

The 2010 programme of events and activities is nearly complete and has been very successful.

All major aspects of the 2011 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 – Dragon Detectives
- Mid March – Gruffalo Games and as part of National Science Week – Can you keep a secret.
- Easter – Happy Birthday to Us
- May half term – Back Yard Survival
- Summer – Orienteering Meet Moley & Wiggly Woo, Teddy Bears Picnic and From Tree Hugging to Leaf Hammering
- September – Heritage Open Days and ArtWalk
- October half term – Time Traveller Crafts

The offer of two sessions per day over May half term and the summer holidays of 2010 had mixed success, but we feel that is worth pursuing for another year.

The Local History Group Who Do You Think You Are? Workshops in the autumn were very well received. The possibility of running further workshops next year is still an option.

Learning Opportunities for Adults

This was launched with a 'Summer of Art' joint venture with Ludlow Museum Resource Centre, where free funded sessions in portrait photography, land art and watercolours were offered during Adult Learners' Week. Two of these sessions were fully booked and all extremely well received. This was followed in the summer with a series of workshops organised by the Arts Cafe and culminated in ArtWalk.

In April we worked with the Shropshire Education Business Partnership and Gatekeeper Educational Ltd to provide a science training day for 20 primary teachers which was heavily over subscribed.

Expanding upon the themes of art and environment celebrated within the centre and adjoining Onny Meadows, Laura Harvey developed a programme of opportunities for adults offered the latter half of 2010. Under the umbrella of 'Why Don't You..?', three twilight sessions were provided investigating insects, pond creatures and butterflies with funding from the Field Studies Council and a series of four sessions entitled 'Crafty Cards' covered different card making techniques led by local card makers who had exhibited in February's 'House of Cards' exhibition.

2011 will see a comprehensive and wide ranging programme of art and environment themed courses being offered at the centre, offering local people the opportunity to extend their life skills or take part in recreational activities at very competitive prices.

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 & Grow, Cook, Share

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

The Co-ordinator and the Gardener for the Grow, Cook, Share project started in early January. They have been instrumental in the progress that the Community Garden has made over the year. We will be continuing to work them as part of the steering group in the coming year.

3.4 Play

Unfortunately due to Government spending cuts the funding for this project was withdrawn. Other funding streams are currently being explored but as yet no further funding has been secured.

"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. We hope that we may be able to use this money to lever some additional funding to pay for further improvements to the Meadows, including seating immediately outside the café."

3.5 Other partnership and community events and activities

The Centre continues to be used by the Guides and the Rangers. The Brownies has become so popular that we no longer had a big enough space for their pack meetings. So they have moved to the Community Centre where they have room to grow. The RSPB local group's talks program continues, as does the local history groups. Ludlow College have moved their Literacy Course to the Community Centre. Unfortunately, they needed to move the course to a Wednesday evening which we were unable to accommodate.

4. Conclusion

The main season between April and October saw us remaining on a par with last year. The coming year will be very challenging. However, we feel that we are well placed to meet these challenges and continue to grow. It is our 10th Birthday in 2011 and we will be planning a number of events and activities to celebrate this, including a gallery exhibition where we will be ask previous exhibitors and other artists to submit work reflecting the Discovery Centre over the last 10 years. We will curate this exhibition ourselves. Despite the challenges ahead, we should look to 2011 as an opportunity to celebrate and promote all that the Discovery Centre has achieved in the last 10 years and look forward to what we hope to achieve in the coming 10.

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 Members

Cllr David Evans & Cllr James Gibson

Appendices

Decision(s)