



Shropshire Hills Discovery  
Centre Advisory Board

8 March 2011

10.00am

Item / Paper

**3**

Public

## **SHROPSHIRE HILLS DISCOVERY CENTRE, OCTOBER 2010 TO FEBRUARY 2011**

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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 remained consistent during the period. 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.

#### **1.2 Secret Hills exhibition, Café and Retail**

The Centre saw a 4% increase in general visitor numbers over the same period last financial year. The exhibition saw a 20% increase for the period. School visits went up by 60% and those taking part in an activity increased by 19%. Receipts also remain at a similar level to last year.

The second round of review and implementation of revised catering prices happened smoothly. We are still looking at appropriate market positioning and any added value offers for the café.

#### **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. Stephanie has been fully booked for this Autumn and Spring 2011, visiting 6 schools in total over this period.

##### **Schools Visits**

The autumn season visits continued well into November and contributed to school visits increasing by 22% for the year. Much effort has gone into developing contacts with schools and joint marketing efforts with our counterpart in museums.

## **1.4 Onny Meadows and Outdoors**

### **Forest school**

The monthly Dads' and Kids' Forest School continues as normal. Toddle Time started on 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **Enhancements to the Meadows**

A plum orchard has been planted in the meadows. The trees were paid for through a donation from a local resident. Specimens of 13 different varieties of British Plum have been planted so far. Further planting will be done next winter.

Through our Adult Learning courses we have run two very successful courses in the meadows. Hedge laying and 'Grow Your Own Fuel' Coppicing courses. Both were very successful and offered incredible value for money to the participants and allowed much work to be completed in the meadows at no additional cost to ourselves.

### **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. Joint activities for 2011 / 12 are currently being planned. However, their sessions will be reducing from three to two per week, in line with the savings that need to be made.

### **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 2011/12 year has been put together, but is being reviewed. 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 still intending to approach our press advertising as one complete marketing campaign. This should allow us to be more targeted, cost effective and innovative. We have now approached the council's preferred design companies with a brief, their quotations have been received and are currently being assessed.

### **2.2 Events and Activities 2011**

The 2011 program has been published in the Shropshire Hills event guide from the Shropshire Hills AONB.

The highlighted family activities are:

- 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

Dragon Detectives in February Half Term, was very successful. Two sessions were run each day, both being fully booked.

### **Learning Opportunities for Adults**

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 have returned to the centre. The RSPB local group's talks program continues, as does the local history groups.

## **4. Conclusion**

The winter season between October and February saw us increase our visitor numbers when compared to 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.

**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)**