

Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of
South Shropshire Walking Forum
Windsor Conference Room at the Ludlow Food Centre
14 August 2012

Present: Ian Pearmain (IP), Walking Co-ordinator, Shropshire Council
Jim Stabler (JS), Access Development Officer, Shropshire Council
David Hardwick, Countryside Recreation Officer, Shropshire Council
Merle Lippitt, WfH Apedale Amblers
Una Widdett, WfH Cleobury Mortimer
Sue Jones, Shropshire Area Ramblers
Peter Jones, P3 Clun & RA Footpath Secretary
Susan Sharp, P3 Cleobury Mortimer
Steven Levers, Clun Walking Group
Christina Anderson, Clun Peramblers & Clun walks book
Jodie Griffith, Shropshire Hills AONB
Clare Fildes, Shropshire Hills AONB
Julia Walling, Woods for Wellbeing
Don Hale, Long Mynd Walking
Jackie Smith, WfH Church Stretton
Dick Ward, P3 Church Stretton
Jane Carroll, P3 Bishops Castle
Keith Pybus, Shropshire Way Association
Miranda Ashwell, Shropshire PCT

Apologies: Trish Howard, WfH Church Stretton
Mike & Pam Beazley, WfH Ludlow
Alan Garner, Secret Hills Walking
Michael Holland, P3 Ludlow

IP explained that he was happy to act as interim Chairman or to continue in that role should no other suitable candidates offer themselves. Please let IP know if you would like this role or would like to propose someone else.

Likewise, someone to volunteer as a regular minute taker would be greatly appreciated.

The meetings would be quarterly, timed to feed into the Local Access Forum (LAF).

JS said the South Shropshire Walking Forum had been established to represent all forms of walking for everybody. It would provide feedback to the Local Access Forum (LAF) whose role is to advise the Council and others on access matters. Until two years ago there had been a county-wide forum with rather narrow representation and too wide a geographic remit. It was intended that the three area Walking Forums would be pro-active rather than reactive and achieve a broader representation.

Vision and Aims of the Walking Forum

The overall goal: *How can we improve walking in this area?*

IP outlined the shared vision for walking in the Shropshire Countryside and the proposed aims of the Walking Forum.

A lively discussion followed on the past history and current status of a 'well-maintained network.' Experience had shown that some obstructions were never tackled. The local authority had seemed reluctant to take enforcement action against even serial offenders. It was feared the situation will be even worse in future, due to budget restrictions.

Although it would be a case of making the best of what resources are available, there were also fresh opportunities. The recognition of the contribution walking can make to public health might offer new funding. Inputs from this forum would carry more weight if a particular investment can be shown to be what local people wanted.

Important to hear from parishes which routes are priorities for them. Many popular paths are not covered by the 'Promoted routes' designation. If these paths are blocked by fallen trees outside help is needed.

Funding for the Chairman's job came from the Shropshire Sustainable Transport project. The Shropshire Hills AONB would like to see reduced car-use, the promotion of the Shuttles as part of the aims. Rail Ramblers had been running now for 20 to 25 years.

In addition to a 'well-maintained network' there needed to be a list of safe parking spots. They were listed on the Ramblers website but needed to be generally promoted. OS would not contemplate their inclusion.

Walking tourism brings in many £ millions to the Shropshire economy. Volunteers are crucial to a 'well-maintained network' and its promotion. Recognition of their contribution scarcely seems to match this important role and we need to improve this, whether on-going tasks like strimming or specific new developments. There are tasks which volunteers cannot tackle – fallen trees and encroachment by crops. It was agreed the Council needs to contact landowners in good time for the walking season about keeping the rights-of-way clear of crops. The backing of the Council was needed when dealing with organisations like Network Rail. At local level it would be very useful to have ready access to a list of landowners. There is a regular need for fresh walks leaders who can be taught the necessary skills.

There was general consensus with the sentiments of the vision and aims, which have been included here with some small changes and additions. These are not set in stone and can be confirmed as the *Terms of Reference* for the group at the next meeting.

Vision: The South Shropshire Walking Forum recognises:

- That a well-maintained, legally-protected access network significantly benefits the County's health and economy.
- That working in partnership with Shropshire's communities (including local residents, landowners and businesses) is the best way to maximise these benefits.
- That there should be more opportunities for everyone to enjoy the countryside and to be more physically active.

The **Aim** of the Forum is to represent all forms of walking for everybody through:

- development and promotion of walking;
- support and encouragement of walking to promote health and wellbeing within the County;
- partnership working to make the best use of resources and joint working;
- identification of projects and funding;
- reduction in car use.

Development and promotion of walking

How do we help people find information? How do we improve that information? What sort of training should be offered?

Historically, promotion had not featured on the local authority's list of priorities. Marketing had not enjoyed equal prominence with the physical network. Outdoor Recreation had been formed by amalgamating Countryside Access with parks and countryside sites. This might prove a new opportunity.

Information is highly fragmented – a more *joined-up approach* would embrace our shop windows like the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms and even the Leisure Centres. Members of staff responding to questions from the public have only limited personal experience of the walking provision.

The walking website was criticised for its inflexibility. There was general agreement that the provision of information in all forms from print to online needed to be reviewed.

Most rights-of-way are 'anonymous.' However, there are exceptions, where a series of paths are bundled together and given a personality; the Simon Evans Way, the Jack Mytton Way, Ippikin's Way, Wild Edric's Way, Brookes [William Penny] Walk. Should this be looked at on a less *ad hoc* basis?

JS is reviewing progress against the **Actions** as we approach the 5 year point of the Countryside Access Strategy.

Up-dates

Walking for Health – the Ramblers have taken over as the host organisation, funding from Macmillan. Day-to-day running remains the responsibility of local volunteers and organisations with support from IP.

Shuttles – new service to start from Ludlow in Spring 2013, Much Wenlock began this year – ongoing priority for the AONB.

www.travelshropshire.co.uk

Travel Shropshire is a new umbrella website for all travel and transport information covering main headings of cycle, walk, bus, train, drive and visit. For example, 'Bus' then reveals Routes and times, Fares and passes, Park and ride, ShropshireLink, Shuttle buses , each with a *click on* to further information.

Shropshire Way now complete except for the North-east of the county and bits around Shrewsbury. Landscape Partnership Schemes £1.5m enhancement for the Meres & Mosses, a nationally important landscape. Stiperstones & Corndon. Community participation is the key.

Walking with Offa – 6 LEADER action groups along the border – economic benefit adding value to other projects.

Grow With Wyre - a model for others to think about - a launch 15th & 16th September of walks from Cleobury Mortimer Golf Course.

Wenlock Walks – five short circular walks none more than 5km. The walks are the result of three years hard work by the Wenlock Footpaths Group volunteers.

Membership of the Forum

IP wondered whether we should invite a representative from Powys or Herefordshire – other possibilities might be from Offa's Dyke or Mortimer Country. JS felt it might be a good idea for the Shropshire representation to settle down first.

Other parties with whom it might be valuable to have contact included youth / schools representatives such as Scouts, Guides or Duke of Edinburgh groups, more P3, Diddlebury footpath group, Landowners / NFU, and Ludlow 21.

Next meeting

Next meeting will be mid November. Craven Arms is the preferred location. Ludlow or Church Stretton also acceptable.