



Shropshire Hills Discovery
Centre Advisory Board

4 February 2010

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Item / Paper

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Public

SHROPSHIRE HILLS DISCOVERY CENTRE, APRIL 2009 TO DECEMBER 2009

Responsible Officer Zoe Griffin

e-mail: zoe.griffin@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01588 676060 Fax 01588 676030

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 +10% for adult fiction to +24% for junior non-fiction. Overall total book loans are up 12%. (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 results of the national public library adult user survey have not yet been processed and returned to local authorities. This information will be shared with the Advisory board when it is received.

We were Mystery Shopped in October as part of the library service's benchmarking scheme and received positive feedback, (further details will be tabled at the meeting).

1.2 Secret Hills exhibition, Café and Retail

Of over 142,000 Centre users to the end of October, over 14,000 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 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.

We won a small grant from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund in the autumn. 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. This has been well received. This funding will also be used to:

- Create three panels which promote the Buy Local ethos of the café
- Purchase an A board to promote the café immediately outside the building
- Develop and print a new quiz trail for visitors to do around the building and the meadows on the theme of sustainability

We have been developing a new program of Educational activities specially tailored for Foundation Stage. This will be launched after half term.

1.3 Onny Meadows and Outdoors

Forest school

The monthly Dads' and Kids' Forest School continues as normal.

The rescheduled and rebranded Toddle Time started on 4th January. They have been better attended than Meadow Fun, although numbers have not been significant. However, we are encouraged, especially given the weather in January, and hope that the popularity will grow.

The LJC approved our application for £660 to cover the transport costs for Wistanstow and Onibury primary schools to attend weekly Forest school sessions for half a term. These will begin in late February.

Wednesday Work parties

Christmas, the extreme cold spell and snow have meant several Wednesday volunteer sessions were cancelled. However, the schedule is now back to normal.

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

The Homework Club continues to operate three days a week. We have a number of joint events planned for 2010.

Learning, Employment and Training Services advice sessions

These continue to happen frequently.

2. Marketing, Promotion and Events

2.1 Marketing & Promotion

The marketing plan is being implemented as described in my previous report. Including 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.
- 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 will offer visitors to Acton Scott a discount to visit the Secret Hills exhibition.
- 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.

2.2 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

Given the very good attendance at our family activities in the peak season during 2009, which saw many sessions fully booked, we have decided to offer two sessions per day over May half term and the summer holidays of 2010.

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.

We are working on a series of events which will be collectively promoted as the Summer of Art and include activities in Adult Learners week, the Art Café Summer Festival workshops and the CravenArts ArtWalk and workshops.

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. The Local History Centre volunteers had an open weekend in January. In the three day period, their conservative estimate was over 120 people visited.

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 will be launching the project locally on 18th February with a morning of meet and greet and family activities to be held at the Discovery Centre. It is hoped that the community will be a key driver of project activity, so event and training planning is yet to be confirmed, but the Steering Group expect that we should see a significant program implemented starting in the spring.

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. 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 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

December and January are always quiet months at the Centre. The snow and cold weather exacerbated this early in 2010. However, planning and development for the new season continues. We have also used this time to deliver staff training, including Welcome Host training for all frontline staff and First Aid training for four of the team. Hopefully the preparation will stand us in good stead for the coming season.

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, Cllr Cecilia Motley

Appendices

Decision(s)