

Shropshire Hills Forum

Notes from 12th Meeting

Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms

10 am – 12.00 noon Friday 5th February 2016

Attendees: Sue Jones (Ramblers), Helen d’Albert (Shropshire Council), Clare Fildes (Shropshire Council), Keith Pybus (Shropshire Way Assoc. & Chair of Shropshire Hills Forum), Chris Chillingworth (Ludlow / Wheathill P3), Val Simpson (Cleobury Mortimer WAW and CCL tourism), Nigel McDonald (Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership), Michael Holland (Ludlow P3), Marion Law (Ramblers area secretary/ Rail Rambles), , Helen Beresford (Shropshire Council), Charles Edwards (P3, Vice Chair G.C.L.), Gill Steed (Ramblers), Rick Summers (Ludlow P3 / Whitcliffe Common), Steve Levers (WaW / Walking Festival B.Castle), Paul Butter (Maintenance team S.C.), Patrick Edwards (N.T. Ranger Long Mynd), Gill Mortimer (Ramblers and Ludlow WfH), Glyn Roberts (Bishops Castle Walking festival)

Apologies: Dick Bailey (WAW Much Wenlock), Ted Laidlar, Peter James (Clun P3), Catherine Collier (Promotions and Marketing manager GCL), Merinda Essex, Mike Starr, Meryl Lippit.

Notes of Meeting	Action
<p>Welcome and Introductions: See list of attendees. Helen thanked everyone for coming and once again commented how wonderful it was to have such a large turnout for the meeting.</p> <p>Feedback focused on the 3 priorities identified by members: Promoted routes: (Clare Fildes). No feedback received further to last meeting’s request for all to look at interactive map to check promoted routes in their area. Shropshire Way (SW) – CF reported discussions underway with Ramblers – aiming to make SW long distance (LD) route more identifiable. Route agreed at Ramblers meetings. Two main problems identified: 1.) removing old and confusing SW way marking, & 2.) How to identify the L.D. route on the ground, without losing the definition of the circular routes. Idea proposed is to advertise these as 3 distinct levels of walk a.) Long Distance route, b.) Discovery routes & c.) Explorer routes. The shorter routes being the circular and market town explorer routes. Concern over similarity of current way markers and thus confusion. Main difficulties are at route junctions. Please send details to CF of key areas where signage is causing confusion.</p> <p>Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre (SHDC) as a Walking Hub (Charles Edwards): Things remain much as they were as at the last meeting. A small interest group was formed immediately after the last forum meeting – (N.McD, AC, CE) looking at current walks in the area. Recceing existing and new walks has commenced and will continue over the Spring. PB and team working on existing stiles on ROW from the centre. KP recommended improvements on interpretation to increase interest in walks. CE explained aiming to make link with food (given the ethos of Grow,</p>	<p>ALL</p>

Cook, Learn) e.g. drovers routes, foraging foods etc. KP leading seasonal series of walks with food theme. SJ commended the route up to Flounders folly. ML wished to pass on her compliments to the kitchen staff at the Discovery Centre for the excellent Christmas meal there with the Ramblers. CE reported an increase of 25% in January takings year on year. Huge hill to climb regarding income generation, but situation improving. CE confirmed that further to Janet Radford leaving, Catherine Collier is going to take over the management of the Centre.

Volunteering Updates:

P3: (Helen Beresford)

Volunteering Hours

Volunteering hours (County total) – 6,755 hrs representing £61,412
450 Individual Improvements

Volunteering hours for Southern area 2,712 hrs (North -1951 hrs, Central - 2092 hrs)

Grants

All grant requests have come in and are being processed. Just under £5,500 which is £600 under last year's requests, even though more groups applying for grants.

New Groups

Farlow recently signed P3 agreement. Group all in full- time work difficult to get out in the week, so HB arranging training day on Saturday 27th Feb. Thanks to CMFA for their offer of support.

Shrewsbury Ramblers Article

Great article in in the Shropshire Star about Shrewsbury Ramblers P3 – has resulted in enquiries from the probation service, RAF Shawbury and Sundorne School.

Cleobury Mortimer Silver Jubilee

HB congratulated the CMFA on their 25th Anniversary, and extended a huge 'Thank you' for all the hard work and dedication over the years. The Rights of Way in and around Cleobury are testament themselves to what the group has achieved. Here's to the next 25 years!

Walking for Health: (Helen d'Albert) The 14 walks are going well.

10 booked on Volunteer walk leader training on 27th January - 2 unable to attend but keen to rebook on future course, 8 new walk leaders were trained : Church Stretton (4), Rushbury (1), Bishop's Castle (1), Clun (2).

Church Stretton will benefit from help with back-marking, and enable them to set up a grade 2 (45-60 min walk), in next few months - providing the missing link in range of graded walks.

Bishop's Castle will greatly benefit from a further walk leader, (especially as 2 leaders have reduced availability) This will bring the number of regular walk leaders to 4. Volunteers helping out across groups in Clun and Bishop's Castle.

Clun's volunteers will double in number. One of the new leaders is having a baby in the summer. She is keen to bring the baby to the walks- which we

hope will encourage other mothers to join in.

Craven Arms - group still heavily reliant on input from Walking Coordinator. A volunteer walk leader from Clun continues to assist. 2 local volunteers are likely to help as back-markers, but no volunteers have come forward to assist leading the walks. **Hd'A asked Forum to help spread the word about volunteering opportunities.**

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Wild Teams: ([Helen Beresford](#) for [Simon Brown](#))

The Wild Team Craven Arms group are now running autonomously- Testimony to the time and effort Simon Brown has put in and to the individuals involved. HB asked Forum members to contact either her or Simon if they have **any ideas for projects in the area which the group might help with.**

'Thank you' extended to PE and the National Trust by CF for their support of the Wild Teams. The aim is to increase partnership with organisations such as the National Trust, Corndon Landscape Partnership etc. to support the long term sustainability of the groups. CF- productive meetings have taken place with CASCA and the Ludlow Foyer to assist the Wild Teams.

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Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre: CE- centre has several volunteers with various focuses, but none specifically focused on walking.

National Trust: ([Patrick Edwards- Ranger at Long Mynd](#))

Lots of volunteering opportunities. Wild Team volunteers to be signed up as N.T. volunteers to promote long term sustainability of the group and enable them to claim travel expenses.

Hosting a 'Baby and Toddler' walk as part of Church Stretton's Walking Festival in Summer.

'Public Rights of Way- A guide for landowners and farmers' :

ROW team has produced a ROW guide for landowners and farmers. 7,500 copies to be printed. **If anyone would like a hard copy or PDF copy emailed to them – contact HB.**

Volunteers to be provided with some copies to hand to farmers and landowners as needed.

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Volunteer supplement:

Request made for **good news stories and feedback from volunteers for articles in next Volunteer Supplement-** please send to HB.

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Council update ([Clare Fildes](#)) :

The Financial Strategy for 2016/17 and 2017/18 ratified by Cabinet.

Council prioritising essential services which will be ring fenced - including Adult Social Care and Children's Services; other services come under the mandatory bracket - these include ROW (funding for which will continue but at a reduced level). Other discretionary services will be cut unless the settlement from Central Government improves.

Council tax to increase - with all councils working towards no central government funding by 2020. Council to derive own funding from Council Tax and business rates.

All swimming pools, Council leisure centres, parks and open spaces to close by March 2018. The Council will not provide these services after that date. This is a 'worst case scenario', and a strong adverse reaction is expected from the public. It is hoped this, together with lobbying, will generate a more positive outcome.

Parks and sites are under threat. The reality is they cannot just be fenced off and closed. This is not practically workable. For the moment there are no other implications for staff in this next financial year, but after that it is unknown.

Working on solutions to address Parks and Sites situation – Applying for HLF funding to backfill management time to enable exploration into a range of options to ensure these services as still provided.

Looking to local Parish Councils and Town Councils to take on urban greenspace and play areas, but the Countryside Heritage Sites require special management and are of benefit to a much wider area.

Question raised-'How much recognition is there of the Council's statutory ROW responsibilities?' CF positive that Deb Hughes (Outdoor Partnership Service Manager) has clearly outlined this to Council members. They are therefore very aware of their statutory duties.

Mapping and Enforcement ROW team are to continue, point noted that their staffing has reduced significantly over the years from 11 to 4 (2 of which work part time). They are very stretched.

Question asked by Forum:' what impact will these cuts and the funding focus have on promoted routes such as the Shropshire Way?' – CF advised that the Shropshire Way continues to enjoy a high priority.

If anyone has any comments that they would like to raise with the council about the budget cuts and changes to services then the advice given is to contact the Outdoor Partnership Services Portfolio holder – Cllr Stuart West and send a copy to George Chandler (Director) - **Hd'A to send details out** with these meeting notes.

KP highlighted need for Forum members to send **case studies** in to CF to show the **economic and health benefits of walking**.

Public Health have assured funding of £200,000 for the next financial year for the Outdoor Partnerships Service. This is to support active volunteering development work, Walking for Health, Wild Teams and some goes into the general Outdoor Partnership Service's work. At the end of the 2016-17 financial year Public Health funding will no longer be ring fenced so it is

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uncertain how this will affect future funding.

N.McD pointed out that Visit England /Visit Britain has merged and if government cuts tourism this is likely to result in a lot of disgruntled visitors to the area, as there is a mismatch between local and government tourism focus. The split between rural and urban economies and the implications of this, also raised by Forum.

Shropshire's Great Outdoors website:

VS stated how useful she has found the interactive map on the website.

Work and future plans of the ROW maintenance team (Paul Butter):

PB outlined the effects of the latest cuts. The maintenance team will actively develop their contracting activity. Any income generated to be ploughed back into the department. This has only just been signed off. Work yet to be done on how best to promote contracting.

They are reorganising staff, and looking at staff skill set. Reassurance given that county is very proud of its P3 volunteers and that support for P3 groups and materials will continue.

PB highlighted that Shropshire is bucking the trend of counties with their ROW team; partly due to the excellent work of the P3 volunteers.

Forum would like a **list of skills that the new Countryside Maintenance Team** will offer so that they can help promote the contracting plans to their local contacts.

CF and PB explained they will provide this for Hd'A to circulate in due course, however further work is needed to clarify specialisms and create new marketing. Unlikely to be available in time for the meeting notes to be circulated. It will be sent out separately to the Forum members.

Walkers are Welcome (Val Simpson):

The number of WaW groups in Shropshire has increased from 4 - 10, with 6 in the south of the county.

The Joint Group formed from several groups was meeting 4 times a year. This has now ceased, given the wide geographical spread for meetings and the groups went down to 3. However a lot of good work has been achieved. Whitchurch hosted the national WaW AGM at short notice.

Yorkshire looking to join 3 of their WaW towns with a walking route, but when Shropshire considered this, they realised the Shropshire Way already links all 3 towns, so no new route is needed. Instead plan to further promote the existing SW route.

Yorkshire has walking festivals that follow on across the local WaW towns so forming a continuous walking festival over a longer period and they co-promote this.

Ironically given the Shropshire joint WaW towns meetings now no longer to continue, the idea of local joint groups was being promoted by the National WaW.

Simon Evan's Way (Val Simpson):

Creating a PDF of the route: about a third of the way through. Plan to

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complete by summer, in time for the Simon Evans walk on August 7th.

WaW Leaflets:

A small stock of the WaW leaflets printed last year, were held back for distribution this year- further to the meeting **Hd'A to discuss with VS how best to distribute and where.**

AONB – update – (Nigel McDonald)

After review of figures and usage, have made the difficult decision to cut the Castle Connect shuttle bus. The Long Mynd and Stiperstones bus to continue in conjunction with the National Trust for the next 2 years. AONB are investigating new funding opportunities. Not easy as is not a new service (running for over 15 years) so does not meet the remit of many funding pots.

Great Days Leaflet – initially called the Discovery Map, is going to print this week, it is entirely funded by advertisers and 25,000 are being printed.

Caravan and Camping Club have produced an article with the help of the AONB with factual information and photographs, which is due to be printed in their Spring magazine. 300,000 copies are printed and distributed nationally.

Coordinating a bid with lots of partners for European funding- applied for marketing and support for VIC's, website development, etc.

Shropshire Hills Tourism is now entirely separate from Shropshire Tourism.

Date for your diary: * **17th March, Leaflet swop event** at the Discovery Centre Craven Arms- drop in event, so you can have a table or stand, or just pop along and take leaflets to put on the table, or leave with N McD to put out for you.

AONB are not organising guided walks this year.

War walks on the Home Front: (Keith Pybus)

KP "Finnish seamen in British Woods" 100 Finnish Seamen, stranded by the First World War, worked on the Burwarton estate at the time of the timber shortages. They built their own sauna. One of the seaman remained in the area, married a widow and is buried here. This will be the main theme of the walk planned with Ditton Priors History Group and Brown Clee Walkers. There was also a local conscientious objector camp

Walks have enjoyed enthusiastic support from various groups. For more information on the Burwarton story, go to

<http://www.shropshireremembers.org.uk/from-the-baltic-to-burwarton/>

Bid to HLF for funding for 2017-2019 stage of the county's WW1 Commemoration Project was unfortunately unsuccessful. Suggestion made by CF that more success may be achieved if look at smaller funding bids, if

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it is still required?

CF enquired when the Abbey Foregate Interpretation board is to be unveiled, as it is ready and in storage. KP reported the German Embassy had volunteered the presence of a military attaché in uniform and the regional consul: reply from the Lord Lieutenant awaited.

Mayflower Voyage 400 year anniversary 2020 : (Keith Pybus)

DB has booked walk for Wenlock Walking Weekend. Shipton Hall will cater and provide a house tour. Plan is also to create a circular walk. Next stage is to recce mapped route on the ground [KP/CC]. Way Marking to be considered.

Funding issue raised- will need a partner to act as the accountable body in order to apply for **small grant to aid the project**. CF/ HB/ KP to consider this.

AOB:

MH – P3 Ludlow have reviewed and updated the Ludlow Country Walks series of leaflets and the series of 9 leaflets have just gone to print. Plan to do a further 3 to add to the series, but no set timescale for these are reliant on technical help of MH son to produce these and he has limited time due to work family commitments.

Hd'A raised idea of an outdoor meeting for June's Forum (as this was proposed by members at a meeting earlier in the year), but consensus of those present was that the current meeting format was the most productive and useful for information exchange and use of time.

VS Country Walking magazine wrote an article about Simon Evans which was printed in the Dec. issue.

KP wrote a recent article for the Holiday Property Bond magazine about things to do in Shropshire January March. He had led a New Year's Day walk for the bond-holders. Upper Norton pleased with our support.

CF highlighted that these should be noted in the **Volunteer supplement**.

Bishops Castle 9 day Walking Festival: 7th-15th May. Glyn Roberts attended the Forum and handed out leaflets.

Hd'A asked members to send **details of any walks** that are going on in the county to Mick Dunn who will put up on the **Facebook page**- email mick.dunn@shropshire.gov.uk

Date for next meeting set as follows:

Friday 3rd June 2016 venue to be confirmed.

Please note all agreed action points are highlighted in bold print.

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