

Shropshire Hills Forum Meeting

The Greene Room, Wistanstow Village Hall 20.10.17

Attendees: Keith Pybus (Chair), Clare Fildes (SC), Helen Foxall (SC), Liz Carr (HF holidays), Dick Bailey (WFH/WAW M.Wenlock), Jill Stead (Shrop. Area Ramblers), Marian Law (Rail Rambles), Peter James (Clun P3), Charles Edwards (P3/SHDC), Grant Wilson (Grow Cook Learn, SHDC), Joe Penfold (LPS), Rick Summers (Ludlow P3), Patrick Edwards (NT), Abby Knight (NT), Gill Mortimer (S. Shrop. Ramblers), Val Simpson (Cleobury M. WAW), Graham Simpson (CMFA).

Apologies: Helen Beresford, Les Lumsdon, Michael Holland, Nigel McDonald, Mike Beazley, Glynn Roberts, Steve Levers, Susan Jones, Chris Chillingworth.

- **Introductions and new members welcomed to the group.**
- **Feedback focusing on the three priorities identified by members:**
- **Promoted Routes:**
 - **War walks** - Keith Pybus: the original aim was to organise and publish 20. At the end of the project they would be re-issued as a set. We are now on walk 14. The project had exceeded by far the launch plans put together by Jim Stabler and himself. The outstanding achievement was in the spin-offs. Rather than confined to the guided walks, the project had been able to provide the Shropshire Star, Shropshire Magazine and BBC Radio Shropshire with articles and original research. No other county appears to have had a similar idea Shropshire will be left with a unique legacy.
 - Talks had also been a fruitful source of dissemination.
 - Examples of stories which have been used to create these walks, included the Commanding Officer Tern Hill (nr Market Drayton) who did a loop-the-loop and fell out of his plane. A railway worker, who in Aug 1918 invaded Russia, and was sadly killed on Armistice Day.
 - KP commended all involved for their efforts in producing these historical and interesting walks.
 - **Shropshire Way** – Clare Fildes: explained the background to the SW project and formation of the Shropshire Way Association (SWA). Plan: to identify a simple long distance route, as part of the Shropshire Way network.

The southern section has been way marked and launched. A few improvements remain to be completed, but it is now passable. The northern route has been proposed. Surveying and way - marking is due to commence in 2018. The SWA has just launched a new website, www.shropshireway.org.uk. They plan to link businesses to the website.

CF thanked all involved for all their dedicated work, including the P3 groups, without whom it would not have been possible.

LC - raised concerns about some broken stiles in Clun area. LC to report these to the ROW team. PJ- the map for the route through Clun is not correct on the SWA website, CF: the SW Website is managed by the SWA and not the Council; Peter reports he has brought the incorrect information on the map to Audrey's (from the SWA) attention.

Shropshire Way leaflets (produced by SWA) distributed at the meeting.

GW– asked if other routes will now be defunct as SW? – No, CF explained network of SW is retained as the long distance distinct route with the others remaining as minor subsidiary routes. Once Northern route has been finalised, the plan will be to have this on the OS new maps in due course. The old routes, subsidiary routes to remain on the SGO website.

GM- done parts of new route, and reports how easy it was to follow.

- **Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country LPS projects update** – *Joe Penfold (JP)*: LPS- Heritage Lottery funded scheme, 2013 - March 2018. Mostly funded by HLF plus other partners. Takes in the Stiperstones ridge, Corndon and part of the Long Mynd: Borderland heritage. Four principal outcomes: training, restoration, heritage and engaging the community (access and learning). The project has delivered many access work improvements, new routes and self-guided walks. and Leaflets complement the heritage work. Lead mining and the borderlands form the two main areas. If you put 'Pulverbatch' in as a key word when search the downloadable leaflet for the walk in that area is available via SGO website, as the hard copies have already run out!
- Nigel McDonald thanked for his help with Interpretation at Cothercott, Tankerville and Snailbeach mine sites.

Another promoted route: from the Bog visitor centre with an all ability trail on the theme of lead and barites mining.

Access and interpretation of four Motte-and-Bailey castles and three hill forts have formed part of the project: including Pontesford Hillfort and Callow Hillfort. A creative arts project supported local schoolchildren to explore and learn about the Iron Age and these local hill forts. The children made many ceramic discs, used to help promote the route on way mark posts and within a palisade fence as an art installation.

Most children involved in the project had not been up to the hill and JP reported they are now they are taking parents up there to show them the way-marker posts they helped to create. A book featuring this walk is also in the pipeline.

The palisade fence at Poles Coppice is a timber sculpture, with inset ceramic tiles into it, which capture the essence of the Iron Age. CF: Poles Coppice picnic site is wheelchair-accessible if approached via Pontesbury Hill roadside, and has a wheelchair accessible picnic bench. The latest project is at Stapley Common, where there are problems with old panels, softwood frames, and outdated leaflets. Allison Caffyn and Les Lumsdon have provided consultation and Shropshire Council team are working together with LPS on this project.

They are looking at walks on Stapley Hill and a three hills walk from Churchstoke.

LPS has linked with BC Walking Festival to add various walks in to their walking programme. Leaflets of some routes were distributed.

Mary Napper book - part of the 'Down to Earth' project, a book on the theme of vanishing buildings, which looked at what heritage means to small communities.

KP commented, it is great how we are taking ancient assets and using them to theme walks.

For further information about the LPS: <http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/> or contact Joe Penfold on joe.penfold@shropshire.gov.uk

- **Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre update** – (Charles Edwards and Grant Wilson) GCS received some funding for walk leaflets. Funding used to update existing walk leaflets. Allison Caffyn was the lead.
- 'Wart Hill Wander' is now two walks for added accessibility. Onny Meadow walks added. For anyone purchasing the leaflets there is a discount at the café – leaflet pack for sale at £5. Navigation and stories within the leaflets improved and food related information included to connect food, agriculture and the landscape. with these.

Accessible path to the Kingfisher corner is now open and has a new picnic area, also a new play area and bridge, this was funded by 'Everybody Active Everyday'.

WFH continues to run from SHDC.

There are tentative plans to connect DC with Iron Age cookhouse to connect the site with surrounding heritage. A new panel showing all the new walks is now sited inside the centre – produced by Mike Ashton.

Charles introduced the new SHDC manager – Grant Wilson who has been in post for two weeks. Grant explained he aims to cement the role of the SHDC as a Walking Hub in the area, and announced today their plans to officially launch a mass participation walk of 50 miles which will take place on the 17th / 18th March 2018; 9am – 9 am with breakfast at the end. The walk will start at the SHDC and take in various Shropshire towns and villages including and Bishop's Castle and Clun and they are calling it the '**Shropshire Way 80 K**'. Each checkpoint will represent local food. CF asked if the centre has liaised with the ROW team to check if the route is passable, **GW** reports he has not done so yet, but plans to action this. There will be a specific website and a lot of marketing.

ML raised concerns that the 'Wart Hill Wander' although a lovely walk is not in good condition in some areas, particularly some stiles and the train crossing is closed. CE reported a diversion noted on the leaflet if crossing closed. ML asked for clarification regarding what responsibility SHDC have regarding the condition of the route, CE – no specific, but they do work with Merinda Essex P3 regarding path issues on their routes.

GW- advised their planned 'Shropshire Way 80k' crosses the A49 at zebra crossing

PJ- reported concerns that people are not using maps to map out own routes now with all the promoted walks and leaflets.

CF- Mapping and Enforcement team are in negotiation regarding paths and closure of train crossings – but it is a national issue with network rail.

KP asked what SHDC are doing to promote other walks. Charles explained they have restructured the reception team and appointed a new front of house, visitor- experience staff member. They are revising staff job descriptions and roles, putting an emphasis on the centre as a gateway to the area regarding walking, cycling, birdwatching etc. and the need to provide advice and ideas to visitors

GM – reported the Ramblers mentioned the possibility of running a map-reading event from the SHDC was proposed at a recent meeting.

Shropshire Ramblers have put together information about walking for display at the centre.

RS mentioned the Magna Longa 10 mile Ludlow walk, which has a similar basis of food as SHDC planned walk.

Mayflower 400th anniversary Sept 2020 – *Keith Pybus*: a group from Shipton had seized the initiative to mark the story of the four More children from Larden Hall in the Corvedale. KP, DB, HB, SHDC and Holiday Property Bond are represented on this project.

After the birth of the fourth child, their 'father' Samuel More, claimed they were not his. They were the product of his wife's adulterous union with Jacob Blakeway "a fellow of meane parentage and condicion (sic)." Samuel removed the children from Larden and placed them with his father's tenants near Linley. The reason Samuel proposed to send the children to the New World was in their interest. In "these partes" [Shropshire] "great blotts and blemishes may fall upon them" due to "the apparent likeness & resemblance ... to Jacob Blakeway" and "the common fame of the adulterous life of said Katherine More."

13 local authorities in UK have formed "the Mayflower compact." Shropshire, via Mary Mckenzie of Shropshire Archives, is endeavouring to join. KP explained the steering group are trying to raise monies. He wrote to the MP re funding mentioned in Hansard, but has never received a reply. In terms of attracting US visitors this is a unique opportunity – especially as in Acton Burnell we have ancestors of Robert E Lee.

CF advised the issue will be the funding to do any works / promotion as the Council does not have the money to fund this, so will need to look at alternative funders.

➤ **Volunteering feedback:**

Walking for Health: *Helen Foxall*: WFH groups are going well. There are 17 groups in South Shropshire. 77 volunteers contributed over 500 hours between April and September this year, enabling walkers to enjoy these short walks to help with social isolation, increase stamina, well-being and improve physical health.

Wild Team: on behalf of Simon Brown *Helen Foxall* provided an overview of the team's progress. The Wild Team has four regular and one new member in the Craven Arms / Ludlow group and have the capacity to take more. Hannah Langford Rhodes has recently joined the team as a Wild team assistant to help further develop the group and accommodate the increase in volunteer numbers. They also now have two buses. Works across the area have included re-signing the SW, working with LPS on the Iron Age hill-fort route round Pontsford Hill, path clearance at Berrimill Hill near Craven Arms, and more tree and clearance work. Work is planned with the Wildlife Trust over the next few months.

Parish Paths Partnerships (P3): *Helen Foxall* read out the update provided by Helen Beresford who was unable to attend today's meeting (attached with meeting notes)

National Trust: *Patrick Edwards*: doing lots of work to improve various paths. P3 and NT, working together and they do not stop at NT boundaries. Problems with a footpath being used by mountain bikers. They discovered the path had been promoted as a bike route via cycling media. Regular volunteer groups.

➤ **Outdoor Partnerships feedback-** *Clare Fildes* advised the Forum of the current situation regarding funding. Public health funding is being withdrawn They will not have the monies available to deliver to the service; the funding simply is not there. This will create a £200,000 funding gap for the OP service. Government austerity measures are making balancing the budget even more challenging.

In view of the above;

- Four workshops were held over the last few weeks with volunteers from the WFH groups to look at how WFH is managed and the future, identifying where help is most needed.
- CF is in talks regarding the Wild Team and support for their continuation, looking at mental health team's link, as this should be seen as a therapy rather than purely a preventative measure.
- CF advised that the service is in a serious position and has its work cut out looking at how to secure funding and finding the best way forward. The emphasis is going to have to be on volunteer support and coordination, and income generation. The service is being as creative as possible.

ML- asked will support continue for P3. CF agreed this is essential.

CE- raised the future of this meeting in light of the funding situation. CF advised this will need to be looked at. Suggestion made within forum for the next meeting to be held as a workshop session to consider the Forum's position, future and priorities in light of the funding difficulties.

JP- raised the issue of the cost benefit to health and effects therefore of not having the Wild team. CF -working a lot on this. **JP** has done some work on this previously so **CF** to discuss with JP to learn from his experiences.

- **Visit England-Keith Pybus / Clare Fildes**– Visit England this year's theme 'Literary heroes', and links with walks. Some lovely examples on the Visit England website. No one came forward with suggestions from Shropshire from the group unfortunately apart from Keith. LC reported they are looking at this within HF holidays. GM from South Shropshire Ramblers flagged up a few walks with some links this last year. Rail Ramblers have not picked it up – ML reports, but maybe should look at this if it links with the train sites. ML – the problem is that the Ramblers and other organisations programmes sort their programmes so far in advance so need at least 18 months to 2 years advance notice really.

Next year's theme- at the time of the meeting there was no news back from Visit England, KP has since chased this and received this reply " We won't be having a 'year of ' for 2018, as there isn't a strong enough theme that works for regions across the country. Domestically, we'll be focusing on things that would appeal to a millennial audience – specifically free and easy mini-breakers – so anything quirky, unique and photogenic works well." ** To be put on agenda at the next meeting: **KP/CF/HF**

LC – do they ever have a geological theme? VS reported that CMFA's Prof Brian Wilkinson identified areas of geological interest to feature on Simon's way and Titterstone Clee walks.

- **Holiday Fellowship (HF) Holidays, Pathways fund - Liz Carr (LC):**
HF holidays is over 100 years old. They recently bought the Long Mynd Hotel and run many guided holidays, using existing walks as well as sightseeing and themed holidays, see website: <https://www.hfholidays.co.uk/>
Liz is one of three field advisors, who are tasked with writing new walks.
Members, who are shareholders, fund the holiday; some are elderly, so they are keen to look at holidays where they can still access.
Each week many people come to the Long Mynd Hotel bringing income to the area. All walk leaders and leisure leaders raise funds each week for the Pathways Fund- to be spent on bursaries for those who cannot get away on holiday, such as full-time carers and those with mental health issues, and to help with path improvements. Applications to the fund may be made. The fund can be used for

wooden walkways across boggy land, and gates. CF suggested to LC that it would be helpful to meet and look at the issues in the areas they use: **LC** and **CF** to arrange.

- **Feedback from Cleobury Mortimer WAW**- Val Simpson. A warm welcome back given to Val Simpson who attended part of today's meeting.

VS contacted the town council to ask if they could propose to SC, that the entry signs to Cleobury Mortimer be replaced declaring its status as a WAW town. (It was one of the first.) Given the funding issue at SC however, it is now unlikely. Funds will need to be raised via CMFA and local groups to achieve this.

Town benefits financially from visitors' spending, generated by the WAW badge of the town. CF - latest Natural England data –spend per visit to the countryside estimated to be £23.

DB – We live in an age of statistics, however we know walkers come to our towns, and they spend money, but it is difficult to pin down figures. CF – posed question “Next year could we do some spot survey's via volunteers / or children on geography projects to help with this?” - **CF / FORUM**

PJ - Some work done to look at this in 2010; this could help form an educated guess regarding the current figures. 'Reconomics Plus' report has some national data on this:

<https://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/reconomics-plus1>

CF using this data to make some reasonable assumptions for our area. BC Walking Festival do some data collection with local businesses JP report.

CF reports it is not just the people who visit to do walks only, but also those visitors who come and do other things and walk whilst here as an addition; walking is a big pull.

PJ- Clun Valley Challenge – brings in £3-4,000 for the school, but other businesses also benefit.

CF – suggested it would be good to do some collation of data through the new SHDC 'Shropshire Way 80K' challenge walk – **GW** to investigate.

NT/ HF hols – data discussed. NT cannot calculate how many visitors come to CM valley- multiple access points make this impossible. National spend has gone down in last 9 years but numbers spending in the NT shops are up.

AOB :CE- recommended that the Forum should have a workshop meeting, given the anticipated changes about the future and posed the question “what role should we have as a Forum regarding the future and footpaths and walking in the area”. CF agreed. The Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28 will be going out to public consultation in April 2018 and it would also be useful to have a workshop session to consider priorities for this.

Forum agreed next meeting to be held as a workshop to discuss future ideas and set priorities.

Date for next meeting agreed as **9th February 2018** – venue TBC.

****** Please note action points are noted in **red bold type**