

Enthusing the community

There are lots of really enthusiastic and talented people in the Shropshire Hills. How do you find them and get them interested enough to be involved?

Get to know the community-

- Look on notice boards- find out how active the community is and what sort of activities take place.
- Find out demographics- is it mainly older people or young families or a mix?
- Contact local schools, WI groups, family groups, the local church, youth service, Social Services etc. Get to know them and spend time with them in their own area.

Be approachable-

- Casual dress
- Open friendly manner
- Be enthusiastic
- Stick to your word- don't make promises you can't keep.
- If you don't know- say so! Someone in the audience may have the answer.

Build on success-

- Find out what events have taken place in the community, what worked and what didn't. Talk to the local council.

Make it easy-

- Help plan events, meetings and discussions with the community and make it as easy as possible for most people to get involved.

Get key players on board-

- Don't be put off by 'difficult' individuals, ask their advice and find out what motivates them.

Appeal across the ages-

- Family orientated events usually work because you can engage with youngsters and older people at the same time. Using the schools can be the easiest way to engage families.
- The difficult group to engage with is youth – try to work with people who already have a relationship with them – youth workers, teachers, special interest groups – cyclists, clubs etc. You may have to run separate events for this age group because they won't come along to the family events.

Take your lead from them-

- Find out what lights their fire, what are they passionate about, what are they interested in and what do they care about?
- Have a flexible agenda. Don't tell them what they need!

Think creatively-

- What would capture the imagination? Use the arts but keep it accessible and not too 'off the wall'.

Have Fun!

- People are doing things in their own time. Make it as enjoyable as possible.

Celebrate success-

- Think of where the work could be displayed and promoted.
- Put money aside for events if possible.

Case Study: Arbor Tree- The making of a veteran

Background

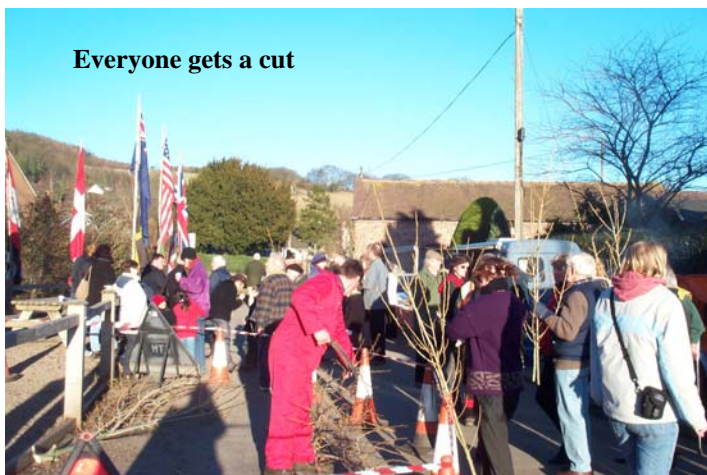
The Aston on Clun Arbor Tree has for centuries been the focus of a tree dressing ceremony and a symbolic wedding celebration. The old tree, a black poplar, which stood for centuries, finally gave up the fight in 1995 after falling without warning. In 1996, a tree grown-on from a cutting of the parent was planted on the site of the original. Since then it has grown so well that it is already developing the characteristic lean of black poplars.

Management Plan

For some years, the trustees of the tree wished to pollard the tree but it never quite happened. BRH suggested that management of the tree was something that the project could support. However looking at old photographs it was clear that pollarding might not be the most appropriate method of management.

The future of such an important tree should be considered carefully, BRH was prepared to fund a study into the past management of the old tree to determine the best course of action, the trustees agreed and the project commissioned a report and survey of the tree from ancient tree expert Neville Fay.

A study of old photographs suggested that a process known as 'shredding' might have been used to manage the original tree. Shredding is a form of management, which involves the removal of side branches to leave short stubs, which produce an abundance of small side branches for periodic cropping. In Aston on Clun this form of management may have been dictated by the tree-dressing tradition where there was a need for a trunk suitable for installing flags.



Shredding the Tree

The tree received its first cut in December 2003. Benbow Brothers tree surgeons were contracted to prune the tree in the form as detailed by the management plan. Not wanting to miss an opportunity to promote the tree, around 100 residents of Aston gathered around hot braziers to witness the event. The first cut was made, taking about 2 metres off the top followed by about 60% of the lower growth. In a few years time the first shred will be taken, and every few years thereafter. The continued encouragement of lateral growth will develop over many years the veteran traits associated with its parent.

Community Landscapes- The Down To Earth community engagement process

Down to Earth gives grants and advice to local people who want to care for and learn more about their local landscape.

What are Community Landscapes?

Aspects of a landscape that have significance for those people who live and work amongst the Shropshire Hills.

Landscape features could include-

- Archaeological heritage - locally important visible features e.g. hill forts, field systems, ancient village sites, etc.
- Natural heritage - locally characteristic landscape features and wildlife habitats e.g. hedgerows, copses, orchards, reed-beds, ponds, etc, and associated wildlife
- Built heritage - locally distinctive built heritage elements and small features, like field barns, wells, milestones, traditional signs, etc
- Customs & Traditions - historic & cultural associations with the land and activities of local people e.g. stories, poems, recipes, famous people, or heritage features relating to how people lived, worked and played, etc
- Industrial heritage - physical features related to locally important industries, such as mines, smithies, packhorse trails, etc

It is for the community to decide

What we will bring to the project?

- Community Landscapes Officer to facilitate the process
- Advice and support from the Shropshire Hills AONB team
- Grants

What we hope to achieve-

- Bring local people together
- Allow communities to make decisions about their landscape
- Give grants and advice to local community groups that want to care for and learn more about their local landscape, landmarks or traditions
- Inspire and facilitate local celebrations

How will it work in practice?

- Identify with the community the features that are valued as part of their local heritage and worthy of conservation
- Identify the issues that affect the landscape
- Identify, prioritise and develop community environmental projects designed to deliver actual improvements to the local community landscape through restoration of features, interpretation, management of sites or celebration events.

The Down to Earth Project is delivered in five phases-

1. Stakeholder analysis - to identify all the groups and individuals, within the community, who may wish to contribute to the project and to establish a steering group
2. Informing the community – 4 events
3. Community Consultation – DtE leaflet & questionnaire
4. Community Action – 3 projects
5. Celebration event

Stakeholder analysis-

A straightforward definition of a stakeholder is:

'Any individual, group or organisation who is affected by, or who can affect a project or programme'.

This is an exercise to identify who we feel are the individuals, groups or organisations that need to be involved in developing the Down to Earth Project in some way.

Think broadly; don't just think of the 'community' at this stage. The following questions will help us focus on who this range of stakeholders might include:

Who are the decision makers? What groups exist? Who lives in the area?
What businesses are there? What other agencies are already working there?

Think about any other organisations which might wish to work in partnership with us.

Process-

- Form small groups
- Nominate a writer
- Brainstorm onto cards as many possible stakeholders as possible (one stakeholder per card)
- Be as specific as possible – e.g. rather than writing 'Local History Group' it is often more useful to write 'Local History Group' – Di Bryan'. We need to know who to contact.
- Use a target-board to establish levels of involvement (i.e. people who end up in the middle, or bulls-eye, are the key stakeholders and should be in the local steering group)

Informing the community-

Provide the community with information on and interpretation of their local landscape and its constituent features. Techniques employed here will reflect the complete range of engagement techniques within the 'community workers toolbox' and may include guided landscape walks, illustrated talks, community action days, story tellers in local schools, photo montages etc. This raising of knowledge and awareness allows communities to then make informed decisions on the prioritisation and management of their local area.

Down to Earth projects created so far.

Five Down to Earth Projects have been carried out to date: Upper Onny Valley, Brown Clee, The Wrekin, Clun Forest and Titterstone Clee. These are the community groups that have been set up as a result of Down to Earth:

- **Upper Onny Wildlife Group**- monitoring and promoting local wildlife.
- **Norbury Walls Group**- mapping and surveying stone walls, extracting local stone and rebuilding them.
- **Upper Onny Valley Book Group**- publishing a book on geology, landscape and wildlife of the local area.
- **Linley Beeches Support Group**- replanting and maintaining an iconic avenue of beech trees.
- **The Brown Clee Story**- researching and collating information on man's activity on Brown Clee.
- **Brown Clee Toposcope Group**- creating and erecting a new toposcope on Brown Clee hill.
- **The Industrial & Transport Heritage of The Wrekin**- Producing a gazetteer of sites.
- **Creative Writing Workshop**- encouraging people to interpret the landscape in words.
- **All Friends around the Wrekin**- campaigning for the preservation of the Wrekin.
- **Little Wrekin Benchwalks Project**- locating benches along walks to help people appreciate the view.
- **Bettws Local History Project** – Researching the houses and people of the parish.
- **Linking children to their local landscape (Newcastle Children's Centre)**- working with young children.
- **Spring Concert** - celebrating the countryside through songs and poetry.
- **Land, Life and Livelihoods Project** – reaching a shared vision between farmers, conservations and the community.
- **Barn Owl Nest Box Scheme**- Encouraging the population of barn owls in the area.
- **Organic Farms Network at Brynmawr**- helping local people and visitors engage with an organic farm.
- **Titterstone Clee Heritage Trust and Friends of Titterstone Clee**- groups aiming to preserve & protect the hill.
- **Clee Hill Reminiscence Project**- enabling older people who grew up in the area to share and record their memories.

Case study- The Norbury Walls project

Background

Through the Down to Earth (DtE) in the Upper Onny project the stone walls in Norbury village were identified by the local community as a valued feature of the area's landscape. They also identified that the walls were in a poor condition and, left uncared for, might one day disappear and be lost forever.

One of the DtE events was a guided walk around Norbury, covering the history of the village and its surrounding landscape, focussing on various features along the way including the stone walls. 45 people attended the event led by David Pannett, who did a fine job telling the story of the walls and their links to the wider landscape. The event also gave us the opportunity to raise awareness of the state of the walls and that something needed to be done to protect them.

Community consultation

The results of the community consultation showed that people did in fact care about the walls and people were interested in developing a community walls project. A firm project proposal was presented to the community in October 2003 and people signed up to the project there and then. The Norbury Walls Group was formed.

Since then the group have:

- Mapped and surveyed all the walls
- £100 'seed corn' money towards the running of the group enabled them to secure £25,000 from the Local Heritage Initiative fund.
- Worked with DEFRA & local farmers to obtain additional grant aid through the ESA scheme (£9,528).
- Worked with local landowner to extract local 'Norbury' stone.
- Started repairing walls.
- Planned a series of activities with the local school and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, including a lichen survey.
- Organised 'If Only Stones Could Talk' celebration event that attracted over 300 people.



Dave & Robert Marpole, local walling experts, work on one of the walls in Norbury Village.

"I have lived here all my life and watched the walls slowly decaying. It will be marvellous to have them back."
Joyce Pinnock, farmer and local historian