

The Wrekin Forest Partnership
Monday 14th December 2009 Note of meeting
Closed Session
Buckatree Hall Hotel 7pm – 9pm

Attendees:

Cllr Jacqui Seymour TWC/SWT;
George Evans [GE], President of All Friends round the Wrekin;
George Chancellor, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Little Wenlock resident;
Robert Saunders [RS] Wellington LA21 with colleague Brian Herring;
Phil Holden, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Manager (Chair);
Pete Lambert [PWL] SWT;
Mike [MW] and Jackie White Wellington CS;
Michael Barker [MB] Head of Planning & Transportation TWC;
Mike Harris, Raby Estate Manager with Brian Davis;
Joanna Deacon [JD], Wrekin Museum Partnership;

Apologies – Julia Owen Leasowes Farm; Harry Vane Raby Estate; Cllr Stephen Bentley TWC; Craig Ball, UK Coal, Trevor Parkin, ENTEC, Dr Andy Wigley, Shropshire Council Historic Environment Countryside Adviser; Dorothy Roberts, Wellington Town Council.

1. Matters arising

- a. Quiet Lanes report - MB had just received a copy of the recent TWC commissioned report by consultants Jacobs who had been briefed to explore the potential for a Quiet Lanes scheme in the Borough. MB stated that the report was in its final stages of preparation and would be made available to the Wrekin Forest Partnership very soon thereafter. General assent to welcome the report and look forward to a fuller discussion of its findings in due course.
- b. Former public convenience at bottom of Wrekin – MB reported that negotiations had been continuing with the Orleton Trust with a view to demolishing the disused building. Peter Holt had asked for a further period of consideration whilst he explored the possibility of community based bid to refurbish and operate a toilet in that location. George Evans confirmed the Peter Holt had been in contact and that GE would speak to the All Friends Round the Wrekin members. MB agreed to seek a time limit on this period from the Orleton Trust in response to concerns from attending members that process would remain unresolved for too much longer.

Core Funding for Wrekin Forest Partnership – SWT had provided costs of £2,600 for 13 days of PWL's time towards core running of the WFP. PH was pleased to report that £2,000 of core funding had been allocated in the AONB Partnership's budget for next year, and that Telford and Wrekin Council had agreed to fund the remaining £600.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust would be contracted to provide secretariat services, organise the yearly schedule of meetings and assist effective communication between and without the partnership and help promote the whole landscape conservation approach embodied by the Wrekin Forest Plan by a limited series of walks and talks. The news was welcomed around the table.

2. Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Plan – PWL gave a short presentation that reviewed the structure of the plan, themes, the challenges faced, areas of success or difficulty, and some indication of potential areas of future concern and effort.

3. Development of a Wrekin Forest LEADER project

PH reviewed the background of LEADER, which is part of the Rural Development Programme for England. The Fund is locally administered by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership and in the West Midlands seeks to address community and social issues. The Shropshire Hills LEADER programme focuses on improving people's wellbeing through links with the landscape.

Applications are now welcome and will cover eligible projects for capital and revenue up to 70% of a total project cost with in kind costs such as volunteer time allowable up to 20% with a further 10% cash funding.

The measure most applicable to the Wrekin area was felt to be Conservation and upgrading of rural heritage [measure 323].

The eligible area for LEADER funded projects includes the whole Shropshire Hills AONB and an extended zone beyond. The Wrekin Forest project area coincides with the LEADER boundary. Fuller information can be found on the SHAONB website <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/leader/Leader.htm>

In the discussion that followed the points below were noted:

PH felt that involving people, via volunteering, learning opportunities should be the key theme in a LEADER project for the Wrekin Forest. He stressed the need to work from an identified need to defining project activities.

MB strongly stressed the importance of underpinning activity across the landscape in a strategic way that could contribute to the strengthening/extending of a whole landscape designation (Regional Park?). MB felt the concept of the Wrekin Forest should become a more tangible entity in terms of resisting development expansion from the Western edges of urban Telford and potential southern migration of housing from Wellington.

Robert Saunders [RS] was interested in the potential to extend woodland cover with particular reference to the Huntington Lane UK Coal operation as a carbon capture mechanism. Others could see how connecting the urban fringe by woodland planting would also strengthen ecological connectivity.

Joanna Deacon [JD] was concerned about how to link any potential projects firmly to the town and people of Wellington. JD was pleased to announce the newly developed Wrekin Museum Partnership website, web address to follow shortly. PH clarified that the LEADER boundary was fixed and its rationale came from it being part of the Rural Development Programme. LEADER projects needed to operate within the boundary, but could benefit people beyond.

Jacqui Seymour [JS] introduced members to the project being developed by Marilyn Peitroni in Little Wenlock focussed on access networks. The project was looking at ways to improve the value of Little Wenlock as a hub for access across the Wrekin Forest.

In relation to other potential projects GC stressed the need to promote understanding and increase opportunities for involvement in the whole landscape.

Mike White [MW] commented that the themes of dispersal of visitor impact and interest, diversity across the landscape and accessibility at all levels should be embodied in any forthcoming project.

JD noted concerns over sustainability of a project, what would the long term benefits be of any LEADER funded activity? PWL felt that a strengthened volunteering tradition coupled with an enhanced landscape identity might lead to a positive self sustained involvement by local people in the care of the landscape.

GC felt a review should be undertaken to identify clearly a list of 5 or 6 rural heritage themes or locations that would be targeted by a LEADER project.

RS suggested that a review of existing interpretation material might help identify gaps, he also proposed that a touring display might be designed to be placed locally to help interpret and promote the Wrekin Forest.

Cllr Jaqui Seymour felt that the concept of a gateway to the Shropshire Hills was good. PH said that linkage with the wider landscape was important, but that for sustainability reasons the AONB Management Plan was opposed to the concept of 'gateways' in locations or directions poorly served by public transport.

PWL talked through an outline of LEADER project ideas that the SWT team had prepared. He undertook to now develop this bid in the light of the ideas shared above.

MW proposed a show of hands to support SWT in leading a LEADER bid, and unanimous support was given. PWL agreed to prepare a LEADER project 'Expression of Interest'. PH suggested a sub-group of WFP members and possibly other partners to assist and asked who was interested to be involved. JD and RS offered to assist in drafting and development process, to meet with PWL early in New Year.

AOB

1. Cllr Jaqui Seymour announced that due to restructuring within TWC that the appointed TWC Councillor for the Wrekin Forest Partnership would in future be Cllr. Adrian Lawrence. PWL to add his email to contact list.
2. PH introduced the draft paper relating to sustainable transport study [distributed by email prior to meeting]. This is being circulated to a number of contacts for comment and development, but a contract will not be let until the Quiet Lanes report is released, to avoid duplication of effort.
3. PH reminded members that he was 'standing in' as Chair and that someone else would still be welcome to take the role. GC agreed that the Chair should ideally be drawn from the local membership. It was clarified that as GC had recently taken over as Chair of the AONB Partnership, he would not wish also to Chair the WFP.
4. Discussion relating to UK Coal operation at Huntington Lane SMS – PH attended a meeting with ENTEC in previous week. An operational Liaison Committee will be established and a panel to administer UK Coal's Community Fund. UK Coal and Entec would be invited to the next WFP meeting in February 2010.

The next meeting will be held on Monday 1st February 2010 in the Committee Room, Wellington Civic Centre 7- 9pm.

The meeting is an open meeting, PWL has offered to do a slideshow on the 2009 work programme on the Wrekin Hillfort. Please let Pete know if you would like to contribute a presentation, mount a display or have other ideas for the evening. Do we wish to provide simple refreshments for instance?

Meeting closed 9.15pm

Apologies and Agenda please contact:

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