

The Wrekin Forest Partnership
Monday 21st September 2009
Closed Session
Buckatree Hall Hotel 7pm – 9pm

Chair - Phil Holden SHAONB Partnership Manager

Attendees:

Cllr Jacqui Seymour TWC/SWT; Dr Chris Meads Buildwas PC;
Cllr Dorothy Roberts WTC; George Evans, President of All Friends round the Wrekin
; Dr Andy Wigley SC; George Chancellor , Peter Banford LEADER co-ordinator
SHAONB, Robert Saunders Wellington A21; Phil Holden, SHAONB Partnership
manager; Pete Lambert[PWL] SWT; Mike and Jackie White Wellington CS;
Michael Barker [MB]Senior Planning Officer TWC.

Apologies – Julia Owen Leasowes Farm; Harry Vane Raby Estate; Cllr Stephen
Bentley TWC; Chris Fry Wellington Town manager

Agenda

1. Matters arising
 - a. Website development – Pete Lambert [PWL] / Phil Holden [PH] reported no progress, though WFP content was posted on SHAONB website and future projects may meet the need for a web based resource for the Wrekin Forest landscape area.
 - b. Veolia Environmental Trust fund/SITA Trust – PWL summarised application criteria. Wrekin Forest fell within both funds eligibility zones [10 km radius of active landfill site] Veolia fund focus on single site wildlife habitat creation, public access species or habitat specific. SITA fund broader geographical extent though only funding capital physical improvements such as heritage interpretation or footpaths. PWL also reminded the Partnership members that the Natural England Aggregates Levy Fund was available to support landscape conservation projects in the Wrekin Forest particularly those involving volunteers.
 - c. Mountain Biking – PWL reported that following the public meeting in March little progress had be made in regard to the Ercall. Senior officers from TWC Environmental maintenance had been offered a site visit with SWT to look at issues meeting not yet taken place. Please note that long standing TWC Woodland Officer has just left Council.
2. Presentation – LEADER fund by Pete Banford – LEADER Co-ordinator-
Pete gave a full exposition of the background of the LEADER fund. The Fund is administered by the Shropshire Hills AONB office and seeks to address community and social issues. LEADER is a route to provide investment in our rural economy and benefit landscape conservation.
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.

One of the measures included the conservation and upgrading of rural heritage.

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>

The following discussion began to explore how the LEADER programme might bring benefits to the Wrekin Forest. George Chancellor [GC] suggested that a review of the Wrekin Forest landscape conservation plan would be important at this point to help identify clearly the projects that would help drive forward the aims of the plan and be positively received by the LEADER team. Pete Banford confirmed his availability to discuss and assist in the development of project ideas.

3. Wrekin Forest Visitor strategy feasibility study – feedback from TWC – Michael Barker [MB], Head of Planning and Environment Telford and Wrekin Council:
 - a. Quiet Lanes – MB believed that the contractor Jacobs had been commissioned to complete a scoping report on the network of lanes and roads within the Wrekin Forest looking at issues such as traffic calming, current flows and types of use.

Action - MB offered to confirm terms of reference of the Jacobs commission get back to the Wrekin Forest partnership via PWL. WFP members did request to be made known to Jacobs so they could make comment.

- b. Car Parking – MB gave an overview of the issues that TWC as the Local Authority and Planning authority would have to consider when coming to a view over the concerns relating to car parking. Many of the locations under discussion are held by private landowners and any strategic forward plan would involve multiple owner collaboration. MB felt that a broader long term strategy for the visitor would be helpful to identify core values in relation to car use, public transport options and whole landscape transport design.

MB stated that TWC can offer advice and guidance in relation to the development of broader transport initiatives [see next meeting 14/12].

- c. Defunct Toilet block at base of main track to Wrekin Hill – There followed a lively debate regarding the future of the existing toilet block and visitor facilities as a whole. The chair PH proposed a simple vote to determine the majority view on a proposal to remove completely the existing building, it was felt by a majority of the members present that removal had to be accompanied by a plan that addressed visitors needs in the long term and that the removal of the defunct toilet block was part of a wider strategy and the beginning of a process not the end. A simple vote followed in which a majority supported the two part view of removal and visitor plan. George Evans wished it to be noted that he on behalf of All Friends of the Wrekin objected to the view.

MB- has offered by 14/12 to 1. Clarify current status of building lease, and 2. As senior representative of Local Planning Authority the considerations in respect of options to either demolish, renovate or change use of structure

4. Wrekin Hillfort restoration project update PWL – the next phase of works is planned for mid October. The large baulks of timber placed on the Hillfort to redirect visitors away from sensitive areas had had mixed success. One had been rolled down hill and the other three have become very popular as benches which unfortunately have lead to erosion strips in front as people have scuffed their feet while resting! The next work phase involves repair to parts of Hell Gate and replanting of grass, heather and bilberry. Dr Andy Wigley will be supervising this work. In November the Heather and Hillforts team from the Clwydian Hills AONB will be visiting to share experiences and advise.

5. Shropshire Wildlife Trust news PL
 - a. Bat walk on Wrekin Hill – by kind permission of the Raby Estate, SWT and the Shropshire Bat Group organised a bat walk on 1/9/09. John Morgan and Adrian Bailey of SBG lead the walk and we were joined by 8 members of the general public. A very successful evening was had by all leading to the first records on the Hill of Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Daubenton's, Noctule and Whiskered Bats. We hope to run similar events in the New Year.
 - b. Moth survey on Wrekin Hill – by kind permission of the Raby Estate, SWT and the Wrekin Forest Volunteers organised a moth survey on the summit of the Wrekin Hill. We set up a survey area involving two light traps and recorded up till midnight. The numbers were not high despite good weather conditions but included Silver Y, Autumnal Rustic, Copper and Large Yellow Underwing and Strawberry Tortrix moths. These are the first officially recorded moths from the Wrekin Hill and we do hope to repeat and encourage further biodiversity recording within the Wrekin Forest.
 - c. Small Mammal Survey – SWT via the Sustainability Development Fund administered by SHAONB has secured funding to support a 12 month programme of survey activity for small mammals in the Wrekin Forest. Phase 1 has been fully funded and will involve the construction and installation of 200 nest boxes spread over 4 locations, volunteer training and setting up recording systems. More detailed information to follow.

6. Shropshire Hills AONB update Phil Holden
 - a. Small woodland project launched – project officer recruited – more details to follow as project gets underway.
 - b. SHAONB new partnership members are being sought – see SHAONB website http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/partnership/partner_members.htm
 - c. Friends group growing steadily for more details see- <http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/friends.htm>
 - d. 2009 events programme is in final few months, work has already begun on 2010. Stephanie Hayes of the SHAONB is co-ordinating the programme she is

very keen to include events such as walks etc from the Wrekin Forest. WFP members asked to see if there are local Wrekin Forest events that either explore or celebrate the area that could be included in the programme. Please contact Stephanie at Stephanie.hayes@shropshire.gov.uk

7. AOB –

- a. PH – high lighted need to secure funding to sustain Wrekin Forest Partnership core structures as SHAONB Working Group, acknowledged the current arrangement for SWT acting as co-ordinator for WFP without funding is unsatisfactory. PH would like consideration given on how to address issue of core WFP funding at next meeting.
- b. Chris Mead reviewed current situation at Devils Dingle – landscape and wetland creation scheme in Buildwas at site owned by EON. Civil engineering works for 2009 should have ceased, last site visit revealed positive signs of successful natural colonisation by native plants, noted bird life and very good results from butterfly survey work. Next year 2010 should see last of the major works. Public access is not permitted as it is still an active site and there are very clear public safety issues that remain to be addressed EON are very aware of these.
- c. Discussion focussed on timing of open meeting, agreed by members to hold this early in the New Year, date and venue to be arranged.
- d. The next meeting will be held on Monday 14th December at the Buckatree Hall Hotel – 7- 9pm

AGENDA – Please note all WFP members agreed that the agenda for this session should focus clearly on identifying project proposals arising from the Wrekin Forest Landscape Conservation Plan. All members present agreed to review the Plan in preparation for the meet to put forward ideas and proposals that can be worked up and taken forward for consideration by one or more of the funding sources available to support landscape conservation initiatives.

Meeting closed 9.15pm

Apologies and Agenda please contact:

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