

Wrekin Forest Partnership

Minutes Monday 15 October 2012, 7-9pm. Little Wenlock Village Hall

Chair – Phil Holden, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Manager

Secretary - Wrekin Forest Officer – Pete Lambert, Shropshire Wildlife Trust

In attendance – Brian Herring Wrekin Forest Volunteers/LA21, Robert Saunders LA21, Angela Pollard Small Woods Association, Bob Colebran Wellington Walkers Are Welcome, Naomi Wrighton WWAW, Cllr Jacqui Seymour, Cllr Tracy Hope, Marilyn Pietroni Disability Rep Telford Local Access Forum, Michael Barker Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC).

Apologies - Rachel Taylor TWC, Dorothy Roberts Wellington Town Council, Mike and Jackie White Wellington Civic Society, Juliet Esp Little Wenlock Parish Council, Sheila Hutchison LWPC, John Winterbourne Forestry Commission.

Pete Lambert announced that this meeting would be his last as Wrekin Forest Officer, as his new duties as SWT's River Projects Manager made it difficult to fulfil the duties required to support the WFP. PL thanked all members present and absent for their support and hard work, and wished the Partnership well for the future. PH very kindly thanked PL for his work over the last 6 years in supporting the landscape conservation of the Wrekin Forest. The secretarial support for the running of the WFP will for the meantime remain with SWT and in all likelihood be carried out by Liz Etheridge. PL will liaise with Liz to hand over the required documentation for the role.

1. Matters arising

RS noted that an invitation had been given for a representative from the Transport and Highways team at TWC to attend a WFP meeting. Stuart Freeman had been unable to attend the last meeting. MB advised that a further invite is sent [NB Stuart Freeman is due to leave TWC so an alternative officer needs to be sought] **PH to action**

2. Wellington Walking Festival – report from Wellington Walkers are Welcome representative

The inaugural Wellington Walking Festival held on the 6-7 October was considered a success by the organisers Wellington Walkers are Welcome committee. Over 200 participants took part in 11 themed walks, ranging from a 14 mile strenuous hike to a gentle tour of the National Trust property at Sunnycroft. Feedback forms used during the event revealed a number of walkers had travelled from outside the region to take part. Satisfaction levels were high and the organising team feel that they might make this an annual event. Links were established with the Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival held in May and positive links were made with local hospitality businesses.

A Walkers are Welcome leaflet has been produced by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership which features Wellington and other towns within the AONB which enjoy Walkers Are Welcome status.

3. Discussion - The Wrekin Forest Plan

The brief had been completed by TWC which describes the tasks and process required to produce the next 5 year Wrekin Forest Plan to a quality and depth required

to influence local development policy. Following this, a bid was made by SWT to the UK Coal Community Fund to cover the costs of preparing the plan and associated community consultation. The bid was turned down by a majority vote of the UK Coal LC panel which met recently. No official notification of this has been as yet received by SWT.

It was felt that the intention of the Wrekin Forest Plan had not been understood and that the pre-bid consultation period in relation to the funding proposal had been too short due to the late arrival of the brief document from TWC. It was unclear whether support had been forthcoming from LWPC and it was proposed that a letter be sent from the Wrekin Forest Partnership to them and the UKCLC chair, Peter Whittle **PH to Action.**

MB commented that he felt the plan brief was clear, and offered to follow up to help understand the problems as seen by the UK Coal LC panel. It was noted that the restoration plan as agreed by UK Coal does not constitute any form of long protection from development. The proposed democratic process of formulating the Wrekin Plan was designed to allow it to support and influence development policy. It was clear that the costs of doing this were an issue for the UKCLC panel. RS suggested cost reductions for the proposal in relation to the communications element such as hand delivery, PC websites and magazines.

MB noted that the revision of Local Development Framework for Telford and Wrekin is under way and part of this process will involve developers being able to put forward land to be considered as potential development sites. In lieu of a widely supported Wrekin Forest Plan, RS asked if supplementary guidance could be added to the Local Development Framework to support the protection of the Wrekin Forest. MB replied that these would carry little weight unless derived via a recognised public consultation process. Further any note to the effect that a Wrekin Forest Park or some such landscape designation could also not enter the LDP without evidence. MP commented that the planning threat posed by the end of operations at Huntington Lane SMS was not far away, as the works are set to end in 2016.

MB when asked stated that in absence of grant support, it would be very unlikely that TWC would be able to pick up the task of driving forward the process of writing the next WF plan. It was suggested by AP/PL that alternative sources of funding are available, and consideration could be given to a HLF funded project. **PL to explore with SWT development team.**

4. LA21 Wrekin Walking guide

Robert Saunders was pleased to inform the Partnership that funding was secured via the UKCLC to produce a walking guide for the Wrekin Forest. The walks would use a nature theme to support self-guided exploration of the Wrekin Forest. It is planned to publish the guide at the same time as the UK Coal operation closes at Huntington Lane and the Rights of Way are then re-established in a more permanent form. A focus group will be established to steer the publication of the guide. PL suggested that a number of the members present such as WWAW, Wrekin Forest For All and the Telford Local Access Forum might wish to be involved in the focus group. PL also requested that in the light of numerous walking/cycling guides for the Wrekin Forest that consideration could be given for a multi-user approach. Other members concurred with this view and a short discussion ensued around providing information in terms of walk difficulty, disabled parking, easy going trails and models such as Haughmond Hill with its grading system. A further request was made for the guide to affirm connections with the wider landscape, such as Ironbridge Gorge and Wenlock

Edge. Bob Colebran WWAW suggested that a small charge could be made to ensure that income could be accrued to support reprints and future developments, he also suggested this could be tied into local businesses. RS to keep WFP informed of development of the guide.

5. Small Woods Association update

Angela Pollard introduced herself as the new representative for the Small Woods Association. Angela's roles include the UK wide Woodland Initiatives project, England's Community Forest and local work with TWC. Angela is also the senior manager for the Social Forestry arm of the SWA. The social forestry initiative originally targeted young members of the community, and has shifted more to supporting an older age group who may be experiencing social isolation and other personal issues that could be addressed more easily by indirect means through therapeutic activity with others outdoors. Other SWA projects relevant to the Wrekin Forest are Heartwoods, a wood fuel initiative, coppice apprenticeships, Forest School, and they are engaged with the Telford Access to Nature Project run by the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust.

6. AOB

- **Diversion of Hutchison Way** – BC reported issues regarding the Hutchison Way diversion in the vicinity of New Works which appeared to relate to changes to the route before the commencement of the UK Coal operations. There was potentially a breach of planning condition. MP felt that the issues may relate to recent ploughing, but advised that a note to TWC RoW Team would be useful and a mention to the TLAF. **BC to follow up post meeting.**
- **Wrekin Forest For All** – update TH. The project development has advanced, a circular disk, a logo and supporting material are in production in relation to a series of trails that are designed to create looped walks from the planned multi user trail, The Trundle.
- **Donkey Field update** – Planning consent has been granted for the car parking and visitor infrastructure project to be located at the Donkey Field, near the base of The Wrekin Hill. Highways and detailed design issues are being worked on currently, in preparation for a bid to the UK Coal Community Fund in Spring 2013.
- **The Trundle update** – An environmental impact assessment is being prepared currently. The biodiversity elements of the complete and the project team are now focussing on the topographical design of the route. Cllr Tracy Hope and Ian Goffe TWC are the lead members of the Trundle project team.
- **SWT update** – PL. The LEADER funded 'Explore More of the Wrekin Forest' project is in the final quarter. The Wrekin Wakes held in early September were felt to be very successful by all involved. Two public events remain a guided walk to look at the limestone heritage of the Wrekin Forest [27th November] and a Pumpkin Patch family event [26th October] timed to coincide with half term. A set of interpretation panels are to be installed at the Forest Glen and an end of project event is planned.
- **Shropshire Hills AONB update** – PH. A LEADER event was held in July to bring together and showcase the 28 projects supported. As well as the SWT project, this included the Forest Schools activity at Tickwood. Discussions are just starting about the next potential round of LEADER funding, PH to update. The review of the AONB Management Plan is under way and is scheduled for completion by 2014. Finally the AONB Partnership has objected to the current planning application for Lea Quarry on Wenlock Edge.

Date of next meeting - Monday 21st January 2013 – TBC