

Wrekin Forest Partnership

Notes of meeting, Tuesday 23rd July 2015, Little Wenlock Village Hall

Present:

Bob Coalbran, Wellington Walkers Are Welcome
Jayne Davidson, Little Wenlock Parish Council
Brian Herring, Wellington LA21
David Hardwick, Shropshire Council, Outdoor Partnerships
Janine Hayter, Leighton & Eaton Constantine Parish Council
Phil Holden, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Manager (Chair)
Andrew Jenkinson, Shropshire Geological Society
Paul Kalinaukis, All Friends Round the Wrekin
Pete Lambert, Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Julia Owen, Leasowes Farm
Dorothy Roberts, Wellington Town Council
Robert Saunders, Wellington LA21
Cllr Jacqui Seymour, Telford & Wrekin Council
Richard Thomason, Smallwoods Association

1. Apologies

Michael Barker, Telford & Wrekin Council, Assistant Director: Planning Specialist
George Chancellor, individual member and Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Chair
Jim Roberts, Huntington Farm
Dag Saunders, Walkabout Wellington
Harry Vane, landowner, Raby Estate
Michael Vout, Telford & Wrekin Council, Team Leader Environment and Planning Policy

Janine, Richard and David were welcomed to their first meeting, and Julia who had attended some years ago.

2. Notes of meeting 11 June 2015

These were accepted.

Actions: The brief for the Landscape Sensitivity Study had not yet been circulated – **ACTION Michael Vout.**

The final draft Wrekin Forest Plan had been circulated and some comments received.

The Partnership's Terms of Reference had been updated and posted on the AONB website.

Contact with a number of organisations to encourage participation had resulted in the new members attending.

Comments from Michael Vout were passed on – the Local Plan was going through Telford & Wrekin Council's Cabinet today. It is no longer called Shaping Places. He also commented that 'permeable tarmac' is expensive and other solutions could achieve similar benefits.

3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Phil Holden was re-elected as Chair, and Robert Saunders was elected as Vice Chair.

4. Approval of the new Wrekin Forest Plan

Phil reminded members that the Plan was only advisory, but it would hopefully prove useful and a framework for future activity of the Partnership. He thanked Pete for much hard work in preparing the Plan. Very useful input had been made by Michael Vout on the planning

section. Jacqui said that the plan would be useful to Telford & Wrekin Council in taking forward the Local Plan.

After further brief discussion, the Partnership unanimously endorsed the Plan.

Pete undertook to neaten up the Plan document a bit, making minor amendments suggested, and to add more images. It would then be published and circulated as a pdf – **Action Pete**.

Publicity was discussed. Phil agreed for the AONB Partnership to issue a press release, and to get hard copies into local libraries – **Action Phil**. To ensure the connections with the Local Plan, he would also inform Michael Vout of the approval asap. Members were encouraged to refer to the Plan if they were making consultation responses on the Local Plan.

5. National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative

Phil outlined this new scheme, stressing that it was the very start of the process, and still had to be confirmed by Ofgem. Around 2km of high voltage power line on the south side of the Wrekin were the only National Grid lines in the Shropshire Hills AONB. The AONB Partnership had the opportunity to bid to National Grid for funding for projects to mitigate the landscape impact of the power lines. Since they are too big to be hidden by tree planting, this can include landscape/biodiversity enhancements which lessen the impact e.g. by drawing the eye away from them. This section of line had been assessed as having quite a low landscape impact due to the terrain and existing woodland cover, but the Wrekin and the southern paths up it had been identified as key 'receptors' of sensitivity. Phil felt that there was a good chance of securing some funding, and the AONB Partnership were keen to develop project proposals with other organisations. Any information members had about land ownership and relevant contacts would be welcomed, along with any ideas about possible schemes – **Action - All**. Projects would only progress if all concerned were supportive.

Julia mentioned the value of planting or developing large hedges as a screen when the power lines were close, e.g. to footpaths such as the Shropshire Way, and this could be very effective. The potential for upgrades to sections of the Shropshire Way was mentioned, along with Quiet Lanes. From a biodiversity perspective, Pete mentioned the potential for enhancing watercourses in the vicinity of the power lines, e.g. tree planting and enhancing riparian corridors.

6. Mountain biking

This item had been prompted by a recent conversation Bob had had with a mountain biker who mentioned plans to create formalised mountain biking facilities on the Wrekin. Phil said that discussions with the major landowners had revealed no such intention. Some information provided by Harry Vane was passed on to the meeting – the Raby Estate policy is that no mountain bikes are allowed (unless by specific agreement) and signs are in place saying this. No agreement was in place because it was impossible to distinguish legitimate users (e.g. a specific bike club) or to be sure that users would restrict themselves to agreed paths. The insurance and risk implications for the estate are also significant. Phil understood the Orleton Estate position to be the same. Pete said that there are some bridleways on the Ercall where cycling is allowed, but there is ground and ecological damage from mountain biking and he felt that on the Wrekin this is getting worse. It was mentioned that TWC have published a cycling map showing some routes which are public footpaths as 'multi-user routes'. The health and exercise benefits of cycling were acknowledged but a number of members expressed concern about safety and damage issues. The difficulty of engaging with a disparate mountain biking community was acknowledged, and it was felt the Partnership did not have the capacity to lead a broad review of the issue. It was however agreed to invite Andrew Careless, TWC Rights of Way Officer to a future meeting to discuss access issues, and to seek to build closer links with the Telford Local Access Forum (LAF).

7. Updates from partners

Phil said he had held a useful informal meeting that morning with Peter Holt and his wife. The Estate were happy to support individual projects such as coppicing, litter picks, etc, but were very hesitant to establish a long term relationship with for example a fundraising trust, due to the uncertainties. They would however be interested in the possibility of a commercial rent arrangement with another organisation. Members welcomed the dialogue and relationship building with the estate.

Andrew updated on the Shropshire Geological Society's plans for a grant-funded project relating to the geology of the 10km square SJ60, which would include interpretation.

Robert mentioned that Marc Petty of LA21 was progressing a Weald Moors walk leaflet.

Paul mentioned a historical survey which had been carried out of the rifle range.

Pete said that some funding proposals for Forest Glen had been turned down by Veolia, but the Trust were looking at other possibilities. He said the Trust would be providing a new representative for the Partnership.

8. Date of next meeting

To be confirmed