

Wrekin Forest Partnership

Minutes Monday 25th June 2012 7-9pm Little Wenlock Village Hall

Chair – Phil Holden, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Manager

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

Apologies - Stuart Freeman Telford & Wrekin Council (TWC), Dorothy Roberts Wellington Town Council, Rachel Taylor TWC, Joanna Deacon Wrekin Museums Partnership, Paul Kalinuackas All Friends Round The Wrekin

Attendees – Naomi Wrighton [NW] Wellington Walkers are Welcome, Julia Owen [JO] Leasowes Farm, Juliet Epps [JE] LWPC, Sheila Hutchison [SH] Little Wenlock Parish Council, George Chancellor [GC] Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, Brian Savage [BS] Wrekin Historical Society, Michael Barker [MB] TWC, Robert Saunders [RS] Wellington LA21, Jackie White [JW] Wellington Civic Society, Mike White [MW] WCS, Cllr Tracy Hope [TH] TWC and Cllr Jacqui Seymour [JS] TWC

1. Presentation – New Works community wildlife project - Speaker Bryony Carter, People and Wildlife Officer, Shropshire Wildlife Trust

The New Works project is a two year project funded by the UK Coal Community Fund which aims to support the establishment of a community wildlife group which can campaign, record and conserve the natural environment in the area that centres on New Works. The project area extends from the Ironstone development in Lawley southwards via Smalley Hill, New Works, Coalmoor, Lightmoor, the Devil's Dingle and finally Buildwas Nature Reserve. Many of these locations have an industrial past and the project area as a whole is under threat from increasing urbanisation. The project officer has been working hard to forge links to the new communities and creating fun activities for people of all ages. The events held so far at a number of locations include bird walks, small mammal trapping, bees and a focus on barn owls.

Discussion notes – MB suggested that Bryony get in touch with the TWC Community Engagement team to see how the opportunities could be enhanced. JO was concerned that corporate responsibility for the post industrial site restoration could be watered down by the involvement of the voluntary sector. GC also commented that post-restoration aftercare can and does fall into abeyance when the compulsory period of responsibility expires. SWT feel that their intervention can help maintain corporate focus on these sites by reminding them that they are there and need maintaining, encouraging and supporting community use of the land but not substituting corporate legal liability for their land.

The sustainability of the range of activities was questioned and SWT were able to respond that work was already under way via the Telford Green Spaces Partnership to build a bid to the Big Lottery fund 'Reaching Communities'. RS identified a number of extra opportunities to further the aims of the project – the new Morrisons, Lawley, PC grants and Ironstone Community manager. Final general comments were to thank Bryony for her presentation and from those engaged with the project a vote of support.

2. Discussion - The Donkey Field and The Wrekin Forest visitor experience

On 24 June 2012 the Telford and Wrekin Council Plans Board was to consider an application for a new car park with capacity for a mobile catering van on the piece of land known as the Donkey Field, near the northern foot of The Wrekin Hill. The planning application had been discussed at the panel meeting and it was felt that a site meeting would help clarify the issues concerned and a decision was deferred to 11 July 2012 when the panel would meet on site. The application details can be found on the TWC website. A Shropshire Star article and the planning application was distributed to WFP members before tonight's meeting. The discussion was lively and the following is to be taken as just a flavour of the viewpoints expressed. I have grouped comments around themes.

PH/MW were surprised that application had been made given the consistent opposition to the proposal to use the site. MW was disappointed that Planning officers had recommended approval. TH pointed out that the members of the Telford Local Access Forum were very supportive of the development.

The business model was questioned, PL though sympathetic to the frustration of applicants in regard to the lack of action to improve visitor infrastructure, felt the business model lacked substance. PH and others commented that the Haughmond Hill model had long term support from the Forestry Commission and was this sort of support to be forthcoming from TWC? GC felt the proposed business model was unsustainable. PH felt that charging/income generation of some sort would be required to produce revenue to maintain the facility. The development does not at present have funding confirmed.

JE commented on traffic regulation in the vicinity, no action had been taken prior to the planning application and little confidence that measures such as speed restriction would be enforced to ensure broad benefits from the development. MB mentioned that any planning conditions or planning gain [S106] may help with issues such as roadside parking. A sum of £5,000 has been referred to as planning gain to be paid by the developer to improve road safety. RS asked if the Plans Board will receive the Highways report before making a ruling on the application, MB assured members that this would be the case.

A number of the objections to the application have requested conditions to be placed on the development if successful. To give a flavour SH listed some of these requests from Little Wenlock Parish Council – limit development to just car parking, return to agriculture on cessation of car parking operation, long statement from West Mercia police that they would enforce car parking restrictions and finally a confirmation or covenant that TWC would take up the long term care of the development.

RS noted concern in regard to the impact and management of anti-social behaviour. PL concurred that the hidden costs of dealing with littering, fly-tipping, criminal damage and the difficulties of dealing with the public were of concern and needed adequate resources. JS felt that the planning permission was just the first stage in a process later works would have to focus on the problems.

3. **AOB: Wrekin Forest Plan – process update** – Michael Barker TWC/Pete Lambert SWT

Work has progressed slowly on the development of the consultation process to help write the next five year Wrekin Forest Plan. A main part of the work has been to ensure that Telford and Wrekin Council are fully engaged and behind the development of a realistic and deliverable plan. At this date TWC officers are preparing a brief of work that will include the WFP members in helping to shape and edit the new plan and the running of a public consultation exercise to ensure local support for the plan. SWT are to function as facilitators for this process and will seek funding support to cover the staff time that this process will take. It has been suggested that the UK Coal Community Fund may be a suitable source to support that plan process. If so it is clear that the plan scope will have to include the eastern fringes of the Wrekin Forest as the fund is specifically established for the benefit of those directly affected by the Huntington Lane Surface Mine Site.

To ensure balanced development of the brief MB will circulate a draft to the WFP members for comment. In the meantime PL will circulate some material to help continue the development of ideas for the final content and intent of the new Wrekin Forest Plan. The provisional timeline for the work is as follows:

- Draft brief circulated by end July – TWC
- Funding bid deadline 1st October
- Public consultation end of year 2012/early 2013
- Draft plan early spring 2013
- Final plan April/May 2013.

It is likely that extra focus sessions will be run to allow different aspects of the plan to be developed. PL will also consider the suggestion to establish a sub-group of the WFP to help steer the plan process. Further communications will follow.

Wellington Walkers are Welcome – Walking Festival – Naomi Wrighton

NW was very pleased to announce the first Wellington Walking Festival on 6-7 October 2012. Nearly all the walks are to be held in the Wrekin Forest and cover a varied number of themes and levels of challenge. You can find the full programme at <http://www.wellingtonwalkersarewelcome.org.uk/Festival.html>

Wild Wrekin Trail - Wellington LA21 – Robert Saunders

RS kindly distributed copies of the latest cycle trail leaflet for the Wrekin Forest, which focusses on the natural world. WFP Members were very impressed with the content and quality of the booklet. The booklet is available from the local Visitor Information Centre in Wellington.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust update - Pete Lambert

Interpretation panels are being designed for the Forest Glen and Dairy Pits coppice project. Work has been delayed due to drainage issues at the Forest Glen in relation to the Victorian sewage pipes but will be resolved very soon.

Wrekin Wakes – preparations for this year's event, which is planned for Saturday 8th September are well under way and it promises to be bigger and better than last year's popular event.

Shropshire Hills AONB – Phil Holden

The Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan is being reviewed over the next year and a half and the process will link with the WFP Plan. The Shropshire Hills has applied for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected areas.

Next meeting – Monday 15th October 2012 Little Wenlock Village Hall, Committee room 7-9pm