



WALKERS ARE WELCOME TOWNS NETWORK

Towns and villages with something special to offer walkers



Newsletter June 2014

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Chepstow Get-Together

Have you ever thought of coming to one of our Annual Get-Togethers?

On 18/19 October we are meeting in the historic walled Welsh border town of Chepstow which is only 2 hours from London and just over half an hour from Cardiff and Bristol. This event is a wonderful opportunity to meet other members, share experiences and ideas and perhaps learn something new but above all go away inspired and refreshed with confidence to do more in your WaW town or village. The event is fantastic value costing only £50 for this Welsh flavoured weekend to include dinner at St Pierre, Marriott Hotel and Country Club and a traditional Welsh Ceilidh. Full details and booking form are now available [online](#). (Lost your password, [e-mail](#))

Local Green Space—a poor substitute

Kate Ashbrook tells us about 'Local Green Space' designation

When the government changed the law to make it much more difficult to register land as a village green in England (see April newsletter), it said that the new Local Green Space designation would be a substitute. Local communities would be able to 'give special protection to green areas of particular importance to them by designating such areas as Local Green Space in their local or neighbourhood plan'.

But it has not yet explained how such land is designated, nor has it provided any encouragement to local authorities or communities to do so.

Local Green Space appears in paragraphs 76-8 of the National Planning Policy Framework, but the definition is vague and the tone negative. We are told that the designation is not appropriate for most green areas or open space. They must not be extensive; they must be reasonably close to the community, local in character and special.

In fact, it appears that not one new area of open space has been designated as Local Green Space in a neighbourhood or local plan—any areas which have been designated were already open space with some protection.

The Neighbourhood Plan at Thame in Oxfordshire received government funding as a flagship project. Yet it does not propose to designate Local Green Space and the community was not told that it could apply for any. Local Green Space is an arcane and well-kept secret.

Towns which are involved in neighbourhood and local plans should identify areas of open space which you want to protect for people to enjoy, and lobby for them to be designated as Local Green Space. Information on neighbourhood planning from the Department for Communities and Local Government can be found [at](#) New planning guidance can be found [at](#).

Community Planning

Sorry if this is more stuffy government legislation but you can do an awful lot with the Localism legislation if your community prepares well and all local plans should evolve according to local vision and aspiration as time changes views and circumstances. Does your Community Plan have a Tourism Policy or Tourism Strategy or even a web based Marketing Strategy with relevant actions to further your community's aims for tourism expansion? This might even address local fears that visitors will be detrimental for residents rather than the means to making local facilities more sustainable.

Your Neighbourhood Plan as well as identifying Local Open Spaces might think about protecting landscape and views vital for a good walking experience and tourism, commercial land being available for a five star hotel, and the conversion of redundant barns into holiday or local accommodation or your community might want to preserve barns as they are, your choice. This is the opportunity to write down what the community actually wants or needs and not what might be developed if you do not have a Neighbourhood Plan in place.

VisitEngland

Two members of the national executive committee were invited to Liverpool recently to debate rural tourism. 'VisitEngland is in the process of revising the Strategic Framework for England (2010-20) so that it is better aligned with these changes and with developments in the tourism industry.' There has also been 'significant reductions in the budgets of both VisitEngland and those partner organisations such as other Government agencies and local tourism organisations.'

Some headlines were our call to promote rural tourism all year round as the countryside does not close out of summer and it is hard to survive in a business with a very short season. What is wrong with crunching through a wood with bright autumn colour, jumping in puddles and splashing about in wellingtons or strolling along a deserted beach in winter, even with an umbrella and squirrels are adorable in snow whatever their colour.

There were also voices asking for an increase VAT limits to put Britain in line with our European partners. This is currently seen as making Britain uncompetitive and preventing the growth of life-style businesses that keep under the VAT threshold. Tim Farron MP has pledged his support to cut tourism VAT and has recently tabled at question in the House for debate.

We extolled the virtues of volunteer community led destination management through Walkers are Welcome towns and villages and the tremendous work on the ground which is leading the way in rural tourism growth for our communities.

There were a lot of positives and good understanding of rural tourism from many around the table. We look forward to hearing the results of VisitEngland's debates (sorry to members in Scotland and Wales this time).

Japanese Visitors

You may recall that last year one of our committee was invited to Japan to discuss the WaW concept as part of their plans to create National Parks and trails in Japan. We should also be considering Japanese visitors to Britain. There is an English Lake District Japan Forum which runs a Japanese [website \(English translation\)](#) and employs a manager in Japan. This group have had considerable success in attracting Japanese visitors to the Lake District hotspots.

This is a good model perhaps for the future as at the moment Japanese visitors are visiting the Lake District, Cotswolds and London on guided tours and walking very little. However, independent travel is increasing and there are now walking tours being offered to Japanese visitors going to Dover cliffs, Cotswolds and the Lake District.

If your town is receiving increasing Japanese visitors and particularly walking we would be pleased to know. As visa restrictions ease we are likely to see more visitors from Japan and China.

Making a Long Distance Trails

We have been looking at making more fact sheets to offer advice to the network and to share experiences. The first new fact sheet is 'Making Long Distance Trails' but it does come with a health warning. 'Making your own trail is not an action to be taken on lightly, it will be time consuming but it can be fulfilled with dedication'. Some of the principles also apply to shorter new footpaths. This fact sheet has been loaded onto the [website](#) for members to download.

Children's Walks

There are a lot of walks published every month for adults of varying lengths and difficulty. Some highlight a special interest like the Historic Trails in Hartland or the new geology walks as The Path-or-Nones in Martley have published.

We often forget walking in families and what children might find more exciting. Mytholmoyd have shared their experience in producing a booklet of six walks aimed at children together with Kirkby Stephen's simpler family walk leaflets. Have a read of the [Children's Walks fact sheet](#) and you might also be inspired.

More fact sheets are being prepared but we also invite you to share your experiences and networking at the Annual Get-Together is always a wonderful opportunity.

In closing.....

Most of you will be astonished to know that a few towns and villages still have not forwarded their Annual Return for 2013. This was due between 1st January and 31st March but there are still some outstanding. If both subscriptions and Annual Returns are not received by the end of June, We are afraid the town or village in question will no longer be deemed to be a member. This resolution was passed at the AGM two years ago and carried unanimously by members. We don't want to lose anyone.

Till next month and why not send a subject suggestion.

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