

Chairman's Report at Swaffham Get-Together

Dear Members,

The Get-Together at Swaffham is a fantastic event for networking with other members and learning what innovation is being used by other towns and villages all over Britain to inspire bigger and greater action. Executive committee member Kate Francis has worked hard to plan an interesting packed two day event that will allow delegates to arrive and leave in the daylight especially as so many of you will have a significant journeys. We will squeeze in a short Annual General Meeting to complete formalities but committee members will be available throughout the weekend, so come and have a chat. Swaffham is the first member town in Norfolk and offers us a new area of the country to explore, hopefully there will be more towns and villages in East Anglia clamoring to be accredited after the Get-Together. The cost per delegate is £50 which includes a Saturday evening meal and lunches plus tea and coffee over the two days, remarkable value.

I thought I might take this opportunity to tell you about some of the work that your voluntary national executive committee have been doing in the past year. In view of the increasing work load, we moved to monthly telephone conference meetings at the beginning of the year. Abergavenny became the 100th town in February and we used the occasion to generate lots of lovely press. We have approved seventeen new quality applications for accreditation and we are constantly receiving inquiries from towns and villages seeking accreditation, our inboxes are overflowing.

Early in the New Year the national website was revamped, thanks go to Randall Metzger and Rob Talbot for their huge effort in bringing this project to fruition. I sincerely trust that you are pleased with the new look. Twitter and facebook have also been added and are generated by Ruth Coulthard, don't forget to send us your news to publicise.

Our other main issue is the annual subscriptions and Annual Returns. For the majority of members this does not seem to present much of a problem however, there are a dozen or so who seem to find this simple request an enormous mountain to climb. Despite our offers of assistance this request has, for some, proved to be impossible to comply with, therefore it is with much regret that we have removed accreditation status and any links from our website. As agreed at the last Annual General Meeting, we all feel that it is essential to maintain a quality welcome to walkers.

In addition to our monthly telephone meetings and e-mails we also have two face to face meetings, not just so we know what we all look like but we find a whole day discussing issues really assists the administration process. Our last meeting was held as near as we could get to the middle of the country in Stafford to make travel as easy as possible. The next one will be at Swaffham whilst attending the Get-Together.

The executive is constantly seeking funding, however because Walkers are Welcome are a national membership organisation this seems to be a major stumbling block when talking to various funders. Should any of you have any constructive ideas, please bring them along to the AGM and help.

At this year's Get-Together we will be asking you to take home to your towns some raffle tickets. The prizes are outdoor related; HF Holidays have kindly donated two weekend breaks for two. Other outdoor activity companies are also donating significant prizes. Thanks to Terry Stephenson of the OIA and Britain on Foot for his help in facilitating this.

I am sure you will all join me in thanking those that have given of their time in helping to get Walkers are Welcome so well established. Also a big thank you to all the towns that take their national publicity seriously and have mentored new members, well done.

I guess you all know where this is leading to!

Yes, we need new blood on the committee. Although it can be demanding, it is also very rewarding knowing that you are part of a team helping to organise a national enterprise whose profile is growing a pace. Three of the committee attended the Houses of Parliament on two separate occasions. Walkers are Welcome has been mentioned in a debate in the Commons with regard to the health and wellbeing of the nation and in the Welsh Assembly. We have been discussing the future with MP's, GREAT Adventure, Britain on Foot, HF Holidays and many other national entities.

I and colleagues from Walkers are Welcome Market Weighton have recently been interviewed by BBC Television Look North for our perspective on the Yorkshire Wolds Way. Sam Phillips of Ross-on-Wye is also very active promoting Walkers are Welcome locally and many other committee members are busy being interviewed for television, radio, magazines, newspapers and attending promotional events to help raise the organisation's profile

I am certain that once we can get ourselves on to a stronger financial footing, Walkers are Welcome will become a nationally recognised body with a good deal of influence.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in Swaffham

Nigel Botting
Chairman

Walkers are Welcome Towns Network National Executive Committee