



Walkers are Welcome Handbook

Now you are a member

1 Purpose of this Handbook

You have worked hard to prepare and submit an application for accreditation with the Walkers are Welcome Network. Congratulations on securing that status! Now comes the second stage - maintaining and developing your accreditation. Every member's situation is different, so there is no magic formula or single route to continuing success; what we hope is to provide some ideas and suggestions for you to consider and judge their use to you. But first, a brief reminder of what Walkers are Welcome (WaW) is.

2 Where did it all start?

The Walkers are Welcome scheme is different from most other accreditation schemes, which tend to be 'top-down': Walkers are Welcome emerged from, and is promoted by, communities themselves. (It is very important to emphasise that the scheme is led by ordinary citizens, not councillors of whatever rank or level. Councils and Councillors are important facilitators but cannot be the leaders of any local steering group or committee.)

The idea, which was first discussed in 2006, became a reality when the Pennine town of Hebden Bridge became the first Walkers are Welcome town in Spring 2007, closely followed by Moffat in Scotland's Dumfries and Galloway region and by the north Wales town of Prestatyn.

Since then, the number of towns and villages that have gained accreditation has grown, at one time topping 100, but recent difficulties (following the impact of covid) has caused a fall in numbers; nevertheless, we are pleased to continue to welcome new members.

3 WaW Mission Statement

Our Mission is to enable and assist the development and maintenance of nationally accredited Walkers are Welcome towns and villages across England, Scotland and Wales thereby contributing to their communities' economic, physical health and mental well-being.

To deliver this mission, the WaW network is committed to supporting potential and actual members to continually improve the walking environments in members' communities and nationally. There are the interlocked purposes of assuring top quality walking experiences for residents and/or visitors and encouraging local spending to support and develop the local community.

4 The six criteria

To gain Walkers are Welcome accreditation a town or village must satisfy the National Executive Committee that they satisfy six criteria. You have done this to secure accreditation, but you will need to demonstrate annually that you continue to meet them, so we repeat them here.

- 1 **Demonstrate popular local support from the community and local businesses for the concept.** Detail how other groups or partners and residents you are working with have helped you to achieve your goals.
- 2 **Demonstrate that the local council formally endorses the application for Walkers are Welcome status.** This would have been originally demonstrated by the local council (Town, Parish or Community Council) passing a resolution in support, being represented on the steering group and making a financial contribution where possible. How is this being developed?
- 3 **Demonstrate a commitment that the local path network will be maintained in good condition.** This might be ensuring that all the local paths were walked in the last year and problems reported to the relevant authority (or landowner in Scotland) whilst checking that faults are rectified and/or reporting the actions which your own maintenance team have undertaken.
- 4 **Demonstrate that there is adequate marketing of the town's Walkers are Welcome status.** This can be demonstrated in several ways: for example, online presence, press coverage; signs/map in the centre of town advising visitors of walks they can undertake; waymarked walks starting from the town centre; leaflets readily available; local shops encouraged to display Walkers are Welcome stickers.
- 5 **Demonstrate how the town encourages the use of public transport.** This can be demonstrated, for example, by including clear public transport advice on marketing leaflets or lobbying for improvements.
- 6 **Demonstrate the mechanisms in place to maintain Walkers are Welcome status.** This can be demonstrated through having a well-balanced and committed Walkers are Welcome steering group from within the community.

As you can see, there are many ways to interpret and satisfy the 6 criteria and this is one of the many good things about the scheme - every town and village can be different.

5 Benefits of being a WaW town

Being part of a national organisation means that you are taken seriously. You can use the logo and your Walkers are Welcome status when:

- applying for grants,
- issuing press releases and promotional items to the media,
- dealing with Town, District and County Councils,
- approaching other organisations as prospective project partners, and
- dealing with local businesses and landowners.

You will receive a monthly Members' newsletter by email, with news and ideas. Make sure you circulate it to the others on your steering group - it may contain just the idea you were looking for. You are also invited to contribute your own items to the newsletter. More recently, we have started a quarterly newsletter (*Walk This Way*) aimed at outside our organisation, which provides an opportunity to promote yourself more widely: please feel free to distribute this as widely as possible and of course, contribute.

Walkers are Welcome has produced many Fact Sheets for members, with tried and tested advice on everything from running a walking festival to creating children's walks to generating income. They are posted on the website in the Member's section.

There are many ways that we can help you to spread your news through the network and beyond.

- Share the website news <https://walkersarewelcome.org.uk/news/>
- Enter your news on the website through your membership login <https://walkersarewelcome.org.uk/members/>
- Enter your special events through the Submit an Event form <https://walkersarewelcome.org.uk/members/>
- Enter and tag our Facebook page WalkersareWelocme <https://www.facebook.com/WalkersAreWelcome/>
- Join and post on the Facebook open group Walkers are Welcome Towns <https://www.facebook.com/groups/walkersarewelcome>
- Join and post your queries in the private members Facebook Walkers are Welcome Members <https://www.facebook.com/groups/525428565138404>
- Tweet and retweet WrW twitter <https://twitter.com/WalkersrWelcome> include tag @WalkersrWelcome
- Send your news to the Secretary by email particularly for the members' newsletter secretary@walkersarewelcome.org.uk
- Copy the Walk This Way newsletter to associates. Send in articles for the season's subjects and obtain small ads. to widen our marketing.

By promoting your membership of Walkers are Welcome and your local successes, you may be asked to give talks at a variety of events from local social groups to high level tourism and countryside access events. This in turn means you will become recognised and highly regarded by those in the audience.

Local newspapers scan websites for regular news updates, which can lead to being approached by the national media for stories. Make sure you contact your local newspaper to make them aware that you exist. If you have a website, add the address to the bottom of your emails and on all publicity.

Membership can have local benefits too: many towns have found that more local people are walking because there is more information on routes. Some join walking groups or health walks and can end up becoming more involved in the community. Better social interaction can improve health, combat exclusion, and give people pride in their community, which shines through to visitors.

Walkers are Welcome is a really useful mechanism for bringing all the walking related bodies, organisations, groups, and activities together - not only does that help share

the load of the responsibility, but it helps you get more done, generates more ideas and makes it easier for the visitor and resident to access all the opportunities. The best benefit of all is that you are part of a huge family who are there to support you. To make the most of that family you need to get involved, attend Get-Togethers, visit other towns and make yourself known, volunteer as a mentor or join the National Executive Committee.

6 What's next?

Post accreditation activities are up to individual towns and the road ahead is not always clear or obvious. It is easy to think that, once accredited, the world will beat a path to your door, simply because you have become a WaW town, but it doesn't work like that. Fortunately, the opportunities post-accreditation is virtually limitless and offer huge scope for imaginative, innovative activities and projects.

Before going on, it may be timely to remind members that if you have ANY doubts, concerns, or questions, you are not alone. Get in touch with your mentor or one of the National Executive Committee and ask for advice.

The Walkers are Welcome network has the objective of promoting your town/village/area. Whether we like it or not, we are all marketeers and should be aiming to create a demand for what our community has to offer. The National Executive Committee oversees the arrangement each year of a number of 'Themed Events', where members can organise their own events to a common theme - this should increase local publicity (as part of a national event) and the national publicity (showcasing the range of local activities).

At a purely local level, the following are just some of the possibilities you may like to consider or develop.

Walking Festival

The first and obvious idea (but it isn't essential) is a walking festival: the following are just some points to consider if you decide to do this.

What sort of Festival do you want to organise - big (all comers) or small and local? It's up to you to do what you feel comfortable with. A big event will take quite a lot of organising and may cost a fair amount of money for printing and marketing etc. BUT it publicises your town and gives you the chance to promote your town to a wider audience. Do you have sufficient available accommodation to cope with a short influx or nearby larger towns to attract visitors?

Small and local will be easier, cheaper and gives the opportunity to demonstrate that Walkers are Welcome is for locals as well as visitors. One option is a one-day weekend festival with, say, 3 or 4 walks, advertised in the local press (costs nothing if you write an article) and on local radio (also, usually, free).

Festivals cost money to organise so get sponsorship or consider charging a small fee to cover costs. Don't be shy, get out there and sell the '*Brilliant concept*' of Walkers are Welcome - you may well be surprised at the reaction of local businesses. Festivals

aimed at a wider audience will bring revenue into your cafés, pubs, restaurants, B&Bs and hotels, so ask them to help.

Our recommendation is not to take on too much too soon unless you have a really good group of people on board with a wide range of skills. Also, give yourselves plenty of time to plan it properly, visit a few other festivals and think about ways to make it sustainable financially, especially if you hope to make it an annual event.

Of course, you should also think about carrying out risk assessments of walks and investing in public liability insurance. Check out our Fact Sheets for more guidance.

Organise “twinning” visits This is where a party from one Walkers are Welcome member visits another. The host town may just recommend walking routes or may even lead the visitors.

One town hosted a very successful “twin” visit when 50 walkers stayed in the town for 4 nights. The hosts arranged 6 led walks over 3 days and provided entertainment on 3 evenings. It was hard work, but not as hard as a festival and the hosts estimate it brought nearly £15,000 into their economy.

Several other towns have organised very successful “twin” visits and the best place to find a “twin” is at the Annual Get-Together.

An alternative is to promote your town/area by cooperating with other local Walkers are Welcome towns. Sometimes working with others can produce excellent results and, by pooling resources, it is easier to ask for, and justify, funding requests for projects.

Some towns have no near neighbours so can't organise a “cluster”. This is not a problem: read on for some ideas for “solo towns”. But before you do so, consider that you may, when travelling on business or on holiday, find yourself near another Walkers are Welcome member: if so, take the opportunity to make contact with them and see what you can learn from each other.

Leaflets

Produce local walk leaflets; be creative with funding or just design the leaflet on a PC and print it: if it takes off then ask for funding for a proper print run. Always remember to promote your sponsor(s), or they may not be so generous next time you ask. Selling leaflets brings in an income to cover a reprint but may also limit distribution - many outlets might carry a stock of free leaflets for you, but not want to collect and account for sales money. Similarly, some people may take a free leaflet but not be willing to pay for it (and on the other hand, those paying may value the leaflet more than those taking a free leaflet and throwing it away soon after).

Easy access walks

A great project to work on is a route for buggies, shopping scooters and wheelchairs. A number of towns now have them, and they are simple routes with no kerbs or steps. This is a project that will require the involvement of the local authority and in these days of austerity getting their help may be difficult, but a lot can be done for relatively little money.

Bus/train walks

Produce a simple leaflet that contains the information that enables walkers to take the bus or train from town, alight at an appropriate stop and walk back. In one town the leaflet was paid for (enthusiastically) by the local bus company; the walks in the leaflet are also used by local people. In some areas, the main line rail company promotes walks from stations along the line and another town has a heritage railway which offers special deals for 'train out/walk back' events.

Themed walks

Some members have staged themed walks, which prove popular. The number of themes is endless, ranging from wildflower and butterfly walks, to sketching walks and even a singing walk. History is always a popular subject, so is a visit to a farm with a talk from the farmer. Find out what is special about your area and think about how you can create a walk to demonstrate it.

Long distance walks

Creating your own long-distance route can attract many more walkers to the area. You could also consider working with neighbouring towns to create a route that links the towns together. An example is the Welcome Way in Yorkshire which was devised to link WaW towns in West Yorkshire (Baildon, Bingley, Burley-in-Wharfedale and Otley). WaW Towns in West Wales - Tregaron, Lampeter (Llanbedr Pont Steffan), Llandysul & Pont-Tyweli, Cilgerran and St Dogmaels are currently working on the Teifi Valley Trail. Another useful way of doing this might be to produce a route, or series of routes, on the Slow Ways network to join you to a neighbouring WaW town.

Winchcombe has devised a much longer 42-mile walk/trail, "The Winchcombe Way", and obtained funding for a professionally printed guide book. The figure of eight route brings walkers into the town three times.

Dog walks

Perhaps you could devise and publish a booklet of dog-friendly walks with few, or no, stiles. Its not always easy for visitors to know the best places to walk dogs.

Link with other local groups

Think "visitors" not just walkers. Work with other local organisations to help them with their event(s). One Walkers are Welcome group helps marshal the Annual Pancake Races and provided marshals when the Olympic Torch came through their town. Partnership work is always good: one member has jointly run town history and heritage walks and written leaflets about them - which appeal to members of both organisations. On a similar theme, see our Blue Plaques Fact Sheet.

Advertise yourself

Consider adding your square to the WaW wall hanging, and/or displaying it at significant events. The wall hanging must be booked in advance and you will need to send it on to the next user. For full details, log in to the website and view <https://walkersarewelcome.org.uk/membership/wall-hanging/>.



The walking infrastructure

Be willing to take part in working parties that maintain and/or improve local paths, taking care to consider Health and Safety and appropriate insurance. If possible, consider a project to replace stiles with gates. This is, by definition, a costly exercise but funding is available, and one source is your local waste disposal company (many have environmental funds that could fund such projects and have done so).

Learn who is responsible for what under legislation or locally and work in partnership with your Rights of Way Authority (even something like waymarking disks should not be added without permission).

Set up a team of volunteers to check paths on a regular basis and report problems.

One town designed and bought some small roundels (about 1½ inches in diameter) that stick into the middle of a standard waymarker, thus clarifying a particular route. Ross-on-Wye produced 3 of these roundels. One clarifies a 20-mile section of the Wye Valley Walk. Another points the way for the Ross Buggy Route and another that is used just outside the town says simply “This way to Ross-on-Wye”. Get the visitors into town! Don’t forget ROW Authority approval.

7 You’re not on your own - using your mentor

When you became a Provisional member, you were allocated a mentor, someone as close as possible to your area who had already been involved with Walkers are Welcome for some time. The mentor’s role was to offer advice and help you through the application process, but it doesn’t stop once you’re accredited. Further support can be offered after accreditation, and the mentor will also be the person who assesses your Annual Return (see Section 11 below).

Once you have found your feet, you may want to consider becoming a mentor yourself. It can be very rewarding and need cost virtually nothing except some travel expenses (for which a claim may be possible) and a few phone calls. If you appreciated the help you received from your mentor, perhaps you would like to help others in a similar way. The National Executive Committee appoints mentors around the country to help aspiring towns in their patch get through the accreditation process, assess Annual Returns, and offer help and guidance throughout the year. We arrange occasional mentors’ meetings by Zoom and/or at the Annual Get-Together to enable the spread of best practice.

All that is needed to become a mentor is to have been through accreditation and be willing to talk or meet the representatives from interested towns and advise them on the process. You will get lots of contacts from other places and every time this happens is an opportunity to promote your town, because by helping others you promote yourselves.

8 What does the National Committee do?

Walkers are Welcome became a Community Interest Company (CIC) in 2015 and some of the National Executive Committee agreed to become unpaid Directors of the CIC.

There are up to 12 elected Directors who are responsible for the make-up of the National Executive Committee which may contain elected and co-opted other persons from the membership or outside the organisation. The National Executive Committee has the usual conventional officers, Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

See the Articles of Association <https://walkersarewelcome.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Articles-of-Association-2021-1.pdf> for more details. There is also a Policy document which includes essential guidance not in the Articles. See all National Executive Committee documents <https://walkersarewelcome.org.uk/membership/national-committee/exec-reports/>

The National Executive Committee administers the whole scheme. Its membership usually comes from accredited members who are appointed by the Directors of the CIC.

The National Executive Committee currently meets by Zoom each month and face-to-face at the Annual Get-Together. Occasionally subgroups are formed to work on specific projects, reporting back to the full Committee with recommendations.

The responsibilities of the National Executive Committee are wide and varied.

- It maintains a register of Full and Provisional members.
- It receives expressions of interest from potential members and receives and reviews applications for full membership.
- When a town or village submits a successful application, the National Executive Committee issues a membership certificate. In cases where an application is not successful the National Executive Committee refers the application back and discusses the reasons with the applicant with the objective of helping potential members gain accreditation.
- It oversees the annual checking by mentors of members' Annual Returns.
- It is responsible for compiling and maintaining the accounts of the CIC and all meetings are minuted.
- It is responsible for promoting the entire network and to this end is constantly contacting organisations and individuals who may be able to help the network in any way. Examples of this include making representations to government; discussing items of mutual interest with like-minded bodies; ensuring that the network's activities receive as much press coverage as possible; and speaking at various meetings and conferences.

- It is responsible for maintaining the national website and keeping policy documents up to date.

9 The WAW web site - www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk

One of the most important means of promoting the network and attracting interest in it is the website, so considerable time and effort is spent to keep it topical. The website is an extremely useful source of information and advice for members. In addition to providing basic *who's who* and *what's what* information, it has a list of Policies, Fact Sheets, details of Get-Togethers and News items. As a member you will have been given a password to access the Member's section, where most of these resources can be found.

The website is only as good as the content, which needs to be accurate, readable, attractive, and up to date. It is up to each member town to check the content for its town and to provide news and images. When submitting content please make sure it is the finished article, well written in web style (concise and lively) in the third person and that suitable images are provided in jpg. format. (Please note that the webmaster is a volunteer, and it is not their job to write content, just to load it on the website.) Here is a useful link to a BBC article on 'How to write for the web: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/resources_for_teachers/9600548.stm

Please make sure that you add a link to our website from your own website and that the website address is added to publications and articles.

10 The Annual Get Together

An Annual Get-Together is held in a different town each year. Towns interested in hosting the event are asked to bid for the honour and bids should ideally be with the National Executive Committee in March of the year preceding the year in which they hope to be the host. This enables the successful bidder to attend a Get-Together in the year prior to the one they host. It is customary for the successful town to give a short (approximately 10 minutes) presentation on their ideas for their Get-Together. The Get-Together is normally held towards the end of October.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Annual Get-Together. It's the "glue" that has the potential to bring people from members together; to promote your town to a receptive audience; to make new friends; to get a better understanding of what fellow member towns have to offer; to create opportunities for towns to visit one another and to work together to boost our towns' economies. The list really does go on and on. Many towns also provide a display stand with information about their town and area, a valuable opportunity to "sell".

The format and content of the Annual Get-Together varies from year to year, as these are largely determined by the host member, subject to the inclusion of time for a General Meeting to hear from and ask questions of the National Executive Committee. Typically, the host will arrange workshops relating to their locality and arrange a programme of walks or other events of interest to attendees.

The Annual Get-Together also hosts a General Meeting. This too is an opportunity to air points of interest, to hear the review of the past year and, importantly, to elect the National Executive Committee. Although there is usually a small charge to attend the Get-Together to cover costs, there is no charge to members wishing to attend the General Meeting only.

11 The Annual Return

Each year every member (except those accredited for less than 6 months) is required to submit an Annual Return. We aim to issue this early in December, for return no later than the end of January. This is an important document, showing progress made in the past year and setting out targets for the following year. It should prove that the Walkers are Welcome criteria are still being met and that your town or village merits membership of the network for another year. The Walkers are Welcome brand is one of quality and it is important that standards are maintained, otherwise the brand and other members may suffer.

Your Annual Return will be assessed by a mentor, and you will be given feedback. In cases where there is concern that the criteria are not being met, your mentor and/or the National Executive Committee (depending on the nature of the issues involved) may ask for additional information or offer help and advice to get you back on track.

It is always a good idea to keep a record of everything you have done during the year, to make the Annual Return process quicker and easier: put it in your diary now!

The Annual Return form is available in the Members' section of the website - [Annual Returns - Walkers are Welcome](#).

12 Annual subscriptions

The annual subscription rate is agreed by members at the General Meeting. It varies according to the population of the town or village. A request for the annual subscription will be issued, with the Annual Return, in December and is due in January by the end of the month. The subscription should be paid promptly, so if it is being funded by another body, please make arrangements in a timely manner to ensure that payment can be made on time.

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Chair: Ken Hawkins