



North Shropshire Tourism Ltd AGM

Minutes of the Meeting

The Old Rectory Hotel

Thursday 10th February 2011

Attendees

Doris Ankers, North Shropshire Tourism
Anne Ashton, Souldon Hall
Christine Boddy, The Rowans
Carol Chapman, Story of Drayton North Shropshire Tourism
Gillian Dunne, Bon Accueil
Shirley Haycocks, Whitchurch Heritage & Visitor Information Centre
Debbie Hayward, North Shropshire Tourism
John Jenkins, Wollerton Old Hall Garden & Vice Chair North Shropshire Tourism
Simon McCloy, Shropshire Tourism
Claire Owen, Shropshire Tourism/Secretary North Shropshire Tourism
Richard Powell, Park Hall Countryside Experience
Claire Simcox, Newton Meadows Holiday Cottages
Jenny Surridge, North Shropshire Tourism
Hazel Wakefield, Ellesmere College

1. Apologies

Jo Abraham, Ternhill Farm House & The Cottage Restaurant
Jane Bebbington, Dearnford Lake
Rob Bebbington, Dearnford Lake
David Boddy, The Rowans
Julia Roberts, The Dorothy Clive Garden
Heidi Briggs, English Heritage
Sharon Brumpton, Wharf Tavern Caravan Park
Sarah Callander Beckett, Combermere Abbey
Selina Cuss, Old Rectory Hotel
Dilys Gaskill, Glen Helen Holiday Cottages
Helen & Stephen Gilbert, The Pentre
Mike Gillett, Brynallt Country Park
Roger and Jane Good, Chestnut Croft Cottages
Paul Gossage, The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
Jane McGrath, 1 Oak Cottage
David Mee, Severn Valley Railway
Alison Patrick, Shropshire Council

Clive Shingler, Lower Lacon Caravan Park and Chair North Shropshire Tourism
Lesley Simcox, Newton Meadows Holiday Cottages
Angela Smith, Mill House and Granary Higher Wych
Roger Sturley & Carolyn Yates, Byways Breaks
Judith Tildesley, Fernwood Caravan Park
Clive Wilson, Yew Tree House Bed and Breakfast

2. Minutes of the last AGM and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last meeting were deemed to be a true and accurate record and signed by Chairman John Jenkins.

There were no matters arising.

3. Welcome Address

John Jenkins welcomed everyone to the meeting in the absence of Clive Shingler.

John expressed his thanks to all on the board for their support and their invaluable contributions over the last year and to both Jodie Stephen and Claire Owen from Shropshire Tourism who had supported North Shropshire Tourism. He also expressed his thanks to Carol Chapman, who was stepping down from the Board, for the invaluable contribution she had made to the company over the years.

John reported that the last 12 months had been particularly challenging for everyone involved in tourism, not just in North Shropshire but county wide. There had been many changes in both local authority structures, a new northern area partnership had emerged and there had been a reduction in local authority funding. John advised that although North Shropshire Tourism's service level agreement with the council was still in their budgets for next year the company were yet to see what and where the council would be making its inevitable cuts and whether the SLA would still be intact.

John reported that 2011 had been the first year since North Shropshire Tourism was formed when it had not produced an Essential Shropshire visitor guide. The board took the view that if sufficient advertising could not be generated to make it a viable production, it would not be in North Shropshire Tourism's best interests to subsidise it or produce it at a loss and use up some of the company's limited reserves.

He expressed the Board's disappointment but said it was probably a sign of the times as more businesses were turning away from print and to the internet as their main route to market.

John reported that with the support of Shropshire Council, the Company would be producing a North Shropshire Discovery map targeted at the day visitor markets.

He said the board were still very keen to work with Oswestry Borderland Tourism and develop some joint working with them for the benefit of both North Shropshire and Oswestry members. It had long been recognised that visitors to North Shropshire travel to Oswestry and the borders and vice versa.

John expressed hope that the new Northern Area Partnership with support from Shropshire Council would see joint working making some progress to reduce duplicating marketing activities.

North Shropshire Tourism would wait to see whether the new Marches Local Economic Partnership (or LEP) could actually help and support tourism in Shropshire and indeed what the new Tourism Strategy Group – which had replaced the DMP – would actually bring the north of the county.

John advised that local authority funding would be put under continued pressure over the next few years and that it remained as important as ever for the tourism industry and the tourist associations to be strong and represent the views of the industry and ensure that local issues were given the prominence they deserved.

John ended his address by reiterating that the future would inevitably be about co-operation and collaboration and each Association would need to be a lot more effective in how they use their limited resources to attract visitors and support the local economy.

4. Marketing Activities Report

Claire Owen reported on the activities of the Company over the past year.

Claire began by saying that many attendees to the AGM would know that the SLA had been reduced from £10,000 last year to £3,000 this year. As a result the association no longer employed a Visitor Promotions Manager.

However, North Shropshire Tourism continued to have a joint membership scheme in place with Shropshire Tourism so members featured on the North Shropshire Tourism website and the Shropshire Tourism website for no additional fee and secretarial and member support was being provided by Shropshire Tourism. North Shropshire Tourism had 89 members.

Claire reiterated that the Board had taken the decision to cease production of the Essential Shropshire brochure. She explained that unfortunately the company struggled to generate enough income from advertisers to cover the costs of producing it. Claire advised that in the economic climate many members were reviewing their marketing spend and increasingly choosing to advertise purely online. This was a trend Shropshire Tourism and many other tourism associations across the county were also experiencing.

However, with funding drawn down by Shropshire Council, North Shropshire Tourism and Shropshire Tourism were now producing a North Shropshire & Oswestry Discovery Map. It would remain in the same format as Essential, an A5 16 page guide but it would be targeted at day visitors to Shropshire and would ensure that staying visitors could find the best attractions. The print run would be 50,000 copies.

Shropshire Council had already funded a South Shropshire attractions map so this would ensure the north of the County was equally well represented.

The company was close to signing off the new brochure and hoped to begin distribution early March. It would be supported by a targeted distribution campaign to Shropshire and regional Visitor Information Centres and key outlets in surrounding counties including North Wales, the North West, Cheshire, Staffordshire and the West Midlands. It would also be available to download on the North Shropshire Tourism website.

The North Shropshire Tourism website had received some 15,000 unique visitors last year. The website was undergoing a revamp with a fresher, brighter design to make it much more attractive to visitors. Further search engine optimisation work would also be undertaken. This would be going live very shortly and North Shropshire Tourism was confident it would have a positive effect on both visitor numbers to the website and the business it would generate for members.

Claire reported that Shropshire Tourism had undertaken a Northern Area Partnership Campaign on behalf of Shropshire Council last year. A new portal website www.shropshiredaysout.co.uk had been set up with information about Oswestry and North Shropshire and links to the North Shropshire Tourism website and others including Oswestry Borderland Tourism. Vouchers for participating attractions were included on the website for visitors to download including 10% off admission at Park Hall Farm and 2 for 1 entry to Hawkstone Park.

Press & PR activity had also been undertaken which had generated over £18,400 worth of coverage in a range of publications such as the Shropshire Star, Shropshire Life magazine, Radio Shropshire, Yattar Yattar magazine, The County Times and so on. A press visit also took place in August; a journalist from BBC Countryfile Magazine took a trip on the Llangollen Canal, taking in Pontcysyllte Aqueduct. This had resulted in 2 pages of coverage in Countryfile magazine.

A regional advertising campaign had also been undertaken and adverts had been placed in the Stoke Sentinel, Warrington Guardian and The Leader (Wrexham & Chester).

Claire concluded by saying that Shropshire Tourism would continue to work very closely with North Shropshire Tourism and provide all the help and support they could over what would be very challenging times.

There were no questions arising from the marketing activities report.

5. Finance Director's Report

Simon McCloy presented the Financial Statements on behalf of the Finance Director.

5.1 Final Accounts 2009/10

The turnover of the company had been £15,160, gross profit £9,532. The majority of income had been from Essential Shropshire and the SLA. The operating profit and retained profit for the financial year after administrative expenses (largely the Visitor Promotion Manager's salary), had been £1,415.

5.2 2010/11 Budget Update

There was a significant variation in income and expenditure between the adopted budget for 2010/11 and the actual budget to date as Essential Shropshire had not been produced. The only income was £3,000 from the SLA. Total expenditure to date was £2,629, leaving a profit of £371.00. Reserves stood at £15,717.

5.3 Adoption of proposed budget for 2011/12

The 2011/12 budget was based on the company retaining its £3,000 SLA. Simon stressed that if this was reduced or withdrawn altogether the Board would need to revise the budget as soon as possible.

Expenditure was set at £2,765, leaving a profit of £235.00 and a projected reserve of £15,952.

Simon explained that the Council had indicated their budgets include the SLA, but there were no guarantees. The decision would be taken by elected Councillors and it was hoped the final position would be known in 2-3 weeks.

He stressed that it was incumbent on North Shropshire Tourism to generate new income streams for the company.

A discussion ensued about Shropshire Council's financial position and other tourist associations who were also affected by funding cuts such as Cheshire. Richard Powell said it may level the playing field. Simon commented that big budgets did not always equal marketing success and Shropshire Tourism had generated over £12million worth of press and PR coverage for Shropshire so far this year with a very limited budget.

Simon said that North Shropshire Tourism should work more closely with Oswestry Borderland Tourism to save members money and provide a more collective and effective route to market. However, this had been mentioned at the AGM 3 years ago and as far as the company was aware, Oswestry Borderland Tourism had not consulted their members on joint working. It was agreed by all present that it was time the two companies worked together but Simon said that if Oswestry Borderland Tourism were not willing to debate the issue it would not progress.

Claire Simcox asked whether people were worried about congestion. Simon said that Shropshire could not be sustained without the visitor economy and the issue had never been about getting volume, it was about value. A sensitive approach to destination marketing was critical. A conversation ensued about what brings visitors to Shropshire.

John Jenkins said that if cuts at Shropshire Council were internal, they would need to replace capacity. Simon said that this was not necessarily true and that it was up to the tourism associations to plug the gap. Richard Powell commented that the money could be better spent by Shropshire Tourism or other experts anyway. Simon said there could be potential for Shropshire Tourism, North Shropshire Tourism and the other associations to put in a combined funding bid to the LEP but he cautioned that the Tourism Strategy Board would not necessarily support this. Simon said that Shropshire Tourism had not been invited to join any of the DDP's.

Shirley Haycocks said she felt that many of the town councils did not recognise the value of tourism and suggested that Simon should visit them. Simon said that Newport and Albrighton had already approached him and he was pleased to offer advice. However, he added if the towns didn't provide parking and toilets people would not "stop and shop".

Gillian Dunne asked if Whitchurch Heritage Centre was closed on Saturday due to budget cuts and Shirley confirmed this. She also said that the museum had received full accreditation thanks to Dr Hoyle and other volunteers.

6. Appointment of the Board of Directors

Carol Chapman and Jo Abraham had indicated their wish to step down from the Board of North Shropshire Tourism.

Clive Shingler, John Jenkins, Debbie Hayward, Anne Ashton, Selina Cuss, Jane Bebbington and Jenny Surridge had all indicated their willingness to remain on the Board.

Richard Powell from Park Hall The Countryside Experience, Oswestry, had indicated a willingness to join the Board

Simon suggested that the existing directors and Richard Powell be elected on block.

Proposed Claire Simcox. Seconded Doris Ankers. Unanimously agreed by all present.

7. Any Other Business

Claire Owen reported that the Shropshire Tourism AGM would take place at RAF Cosford on Wednesday 30th March and extended a warm welcome to all those present to attend.

Claire also reported that Shropshire Council was arranging a Sharing Our Shropshire training session for northern Shropshire at Hawkstone Park on Thursday 17th March.

The session (10am - 4pm) would be a one day development programme to help staff and proprietors in front line businesses increase their confidence and knowledge in promoting the area to visitors, suggesting places to visit and recommending experiences visitors would enjoy.

The sessions would be organised and run by Alison Caffyn and Stuart Graham. Claire had been advised that there was no fee to attend and further information would be circulated to members in due course.

Claire had also been asked by Alison Patrick at Shropshire Council to invite a representative from North Shropshire Tourism Association to attend a planning meeting with Alison Caffyn and a representative from Oswestry Borderland Tourism for this Sharing Our Shropshire event.

Richard Powell volunteered to represent North Shropshire Tourism.