

Sevenside Group Annual Report 2007 - 2008

Finance

Expenditure was lower this year as a result of fewer expenses associated with footpath maintenance activities, and there was no donation of surplus to RA Central Office. Expenditure on promoting walking ie programmes, website, stamps, envelopes has remained the same as last year.

Income has reduced slightly as a result of less funding from RA. A quarterly fee is received for an RA advertisement in our programme, and there is also a small amount of bank interest.

Footpaths

Two Footpath Officers were appointed in early 2008 and have established good links through the South Gloucestershire Joint Footpath Users Committee particularly with the Field Officers from the Public Rights of Way Department. Links have also been made with several Parish Wardens.

To date most of the problems reported have been resolved.

The Footpath Officers have also attended the Footpath Officers' Sub Committee with the three main Footpath Officers from the Area and have found their commitment, knowledge and assistance very beneficial.

In July 2008 both Footpath Officers attended a volunteers' course at Central Office which gave them useful information and clarified their new role.

As part of the RA's 'use your footpaths' initiative there was a survey of the footpaths in Tytherington, looking for obstacles that had been identified via the Clerk to the Parish Council. Several stiles and bridges were cleared and one 'sleeping beauty' path was discovered which when cleared will give a local circuit of paths. A report of the findings is being prepared for South Gloucestershire Council and the parish council. We hope to be able to organise clearance of the 'sleeping beauty' path and to persuade South Gloucestershire Council to finance footpath signs in the south of the parish where way marks and public footpath signs from the road are woefully missing.

Membership

The problems with the RA's new membership database have meant it has been very difficult to track the membership numbers for the group. Fifteen new members have joined following successful publicity for the Group resulting from the appointment of a Publicity Officer in March 2008. There have been six transfers in from other Groups and three transfers out.

Eleven members have resigned and these people have been contacted to establish why they have left. The information is treated in confidence and there has been a good response rate to date. Reasons for leaving have been: other commitments; age / ill-health; too much mud on walks. All those responding to date have found the Group friendly and welcoming.

Total membership at 30 September 2008 was 175

Publicity

Every quarter A5 leaflets setting out the Group's programme are distributed to six local libraries, a tourist information centre, and to Sainsbury's at East Filton. These special 'Library Copies' split the programme into two separate blocks with a two week overlap eg 3 August to 14 September 2008, and 5 September to 31 October 2008.

There are regular entries in various local publications as follows:

Weekly: Bristol Observer.

Monthly: Bradley Stoke Matters, Thornbury Magazine, Severn Beach In View and 5 Villages Alive.

Quarterly: Patchway People - What's On page

All the above are free. An entry into Standbrook Guides for nine local districts within the Sevenside Group's area is currently being negotiated.

In addition there is information on and links to three websites, two of which are local and one national. Another is being planned

Survey

In spring 2008 we carried out a survey of our membership. There was a 46% response rate which was very encouraging. The replies have provided some useful feedback for the Committee particularly in respect of locality and length of walks.

Local walks

With the increased cost of fuel, being mindful of the environment and comments in the survey we are encouraging Walk Leaders to put on more walks within shorter travelling distance of our meeting point of Bradley Stoke. The tendency over the years has been to travel further afield to seek out new and more challenging areas to walk, but we are enjoying 'rediscovering' some of our more local vistas.

Length of walks

Again in response to the survey we are including more walks of 8 – 9 miles and these have attracted greater numbers to attend.

Friday morning ambles continue to be a successful way to attract new members particularly those who are new to or returning to walking. We have also been joined by members from other Groups including the Isle of Wight. The walks are of 3 ½ miles to 4 miles in length and take about 2 hours, finishing with coffee at a local café or pub. Despite the dreadful weather this summer we have only had to abandon one Friday amble and the three intrepid walkers who turned up at the meeting point enjoyed coffee, cake and a good chat in comfortable surroundings while the rain poured down.

Map reading day

A map reading day was held on Saturday 6 September 2008 led by one of our members who is a geography teacher. Post-course homework was set but by Sunday 28 September none had been submitted! We hope the course will have encouraged those who attended to offer to lead walks for the Group.

Electronic mailing

In the survey, members were encouraged to reply using the electronic format available on our website. A quarter of the replies were received in this way. We now offer the option to receive the Group's quarterly newsletter and Avon Area News electronically. To date a total of 51 people receive the electronic mailing. Twenty two are Severnside Members but most established members still prefer to receive the distinctive yellow programme through the post.