



Dereham Walkers are Welcome

21 March 2017

Although it has been operating for a mere 9 months, *Dereham Walkers are Welcome* has published its first Annual Report¹. It records a busy period, commencing after securing almost 1000 signatures of support from local people and meeting the other criteria needed to gain national accreditation. (*Walkers are Welcome*² is a nationwide initiative of over 100 locations, launched in 2007 to encourage towns and villages to be 'welcoming to walkers'.)

To fulfil its aim "to promote Dereham as a good location for recreational walking for the benefit of local residents, visitors and the tourism economy" it has engaged in two main areas of activity - working to keep walking routes open and easy to use, and encouraging people to use them.

The Committee includes Dereham's Footpath Warden (Ken Hawkins), which has enabled a close working relationship with Town Council, as well as regular contact with Norfolk County Council (which carries most of the responsibilities relating to public rights of way). As well as lobbying the official bodies to keep paths open and clear, we have undertaken almost 100 hours of direct work, mainly with a hedge trimmer, secateurs and saw. Where encroaching vegetation was too much for us, we have been able to call on The Ramblers – Peter James brought their heavy duty cutting machine to Dereham twice, as well as jointly renewing 50 metres of wire mesh on a boardwalk alongside Scarning Fen. Another partnership has seen the Norfolk Wildlife Trust build up the ground around a small bridge on their land, replacing a very muddy approach. Looking forward, we are working later this year with The Conservation Volunteers to remove a plethora of sawn off tree stumps

which present a significant tripping hazard along one of the town's 35 public rights of way.

Having kept the paths clear, we have also taken steps to encourage people to use them. We took over the distribution of the very successful pack of *Dereham Walks* guides - all 3000 copies of this have been taken - and plan to publish an much bigger version later this year.

We organised a short walk on our launch day, but our first substantial public event was a choice of walks, followed by a garden party tea, in October last year. This was quickly followed by 3 walks as part of Norfolk County Council's Walking Festival (also in October), for two of which we partnered the Mid-Norfolk Railway in a 'train out, walk back' trip to Thuxton - prefaced by drinks at Dereham Station. These all attracted good numbers of walkers, some from out of town (as far away as Norwich). This success was repeated on New Year's Day, where we arranged a 'Bolo Rei' walk - a bracing start to the New Year, ending with coffee and Portuguese Christmas cake at New Flavours café in town.

Current plans are for two events at Easter. The first, in liaison with Dereham Windmill, is a walk on Saturday 5 April³, ending at the windmill café for a drink and slice of Simnel Cake. And for children (and their families), a 'Walk in Wonderland'⁴ - a treasure hunt around Neatherd Moor, with an Easter Egg for every child who finds their way through 'Wonderland'.

Later in the year, we are arranging an Annual General Meeting in June, and welcome anyone interested in our plans to come along and meet us. Much more information is available on our website <http://www.DerehamWaW.org.uk> - or contact Ken Hawkins via dtc.fpwarden@talktalk.net or on 07505 426750.

NOTES to editor

All photographs in the Annual Report can be supplied separately if required.

¹ The Annual Report is available on our website
<http://www.DerehamWaW.org.uk/docs/2016AnnualReport.pdf>.
Hard copies will be available at the AGM on 8 June.

² Walkers are Welcome (<http://www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk/>) aims to encourage and support towns and villages to

- be attractive destinations for walkers with top quality information on local walks
- offer local people and visitors excellent walking opportunities within their areas
- ensure that footpaths and facilities for walkers are maintained, improved and well signposted
- contribute to local tourism plans and regeneration strategies
- promote the health benefits of walking and increase participation
- encourage the use of public transport

³ The Simnel Cake walk is on Easter Saturday 15 April. It's a 6½ mile walk (about 2½ hours) in what we hope will be early Spring sunshine, ending with tea or coffee and a piece of Simnel Cake (alternatives available) at Dereham Windmill. The Windmill will also be open to visit (at small extra cost). The walk starts at the Windmill at 0930. Booking is strongly advised: tickets (£6, including drink and cake) are available from Ken Hawkins at dtc.fpwarden@talktalk.net or call 07505 426750.

⁴ The 'Walk in Wonderland' is on Monday 17 April: families are welcome to join us at the car park near the pond on Neatherd Moor any time between 2pm and 3pm. Children will need to bring a pencil to jot down what they find. The cost is £1 per child. The 'Treasure' will be found around a designated walk on the moor so sturdy footwear is recommended as parts may well be muddy. It should take just over an hour to complete the walk at the end of which there will be an Easter egg for every child who finds their way through 'Wonderland'. For more details and to book places, please text Jean Stratford with the name and number of children to: 07941 264728, or email her at jeanstratford@hotmail.com.