

MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 18 NOVEMBER 2016

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN THE MALVERN HILLS AONB

Background

1. The following AONB Management Plan policy is relevant to this work:
 - a) RP6 – Establish a strategy and programme of action to realise the health benefits of the Malvern Hills AONB.
2. Ecotherapy is a new coinage to express an old wisdom; the natural environment has many health benefits for humans, both therapeutic and prophylactic. Though many felt this to be true, it lacked tested evidence to support it. That is now changing with many studies evaluating the beneficial effects of the natural world and ecotherapy. This is especially the case in the field of mental health where it is now widely recognised that even just looking at greenery and views adds to the joy of living, and improves moods. The Malvern Hills AONB clearly offers a fantastic resource of beautiful landscapes and access to nature which benefit the physical and mental health of so many people but which could, potentially, benefit so many more.
3. These revelations are now working their way into policies such as those within the Malvern Hills District Health and Well-being Plan 2016-21, which acknowledges we should make more use of 'our superb environment', to meet the objectives it sets itself.
4. To help achieve these objectives, Malvern Hills District Council has employed a Physical Activity and Well Being Officer, both to encourage fitness within the Council, but also with the citizens of the area. Staff from the MHAONB Unit have met with her and hope to engage with her ideas and programmes.
5. In the meantime there have been two initiatives to encourage the sometimes-forgotten citizens to take their ease in the fresh air. The first is the Trumper project, and has been spoken of before. The SDF helped to fund the lease of an electric mobility scooter, known as a Trumper, which allows those with limited mobility to ascend to the Worcestershire Beacon and to enjoy the fantastic views afforded from the highest point on the Malvern Hills. It is run by Jamboree who have the café at the Wyche Innovation Centre, and their combination of Trumper ride, followed by café lunch has proved popular with families and friends of relatives using the Trumper. In this way, many more than just the Trumper pilot benefit from the 'ecotherapy'. The publicity from the project has attracted the donation of another, barely used Trumper vehicle to join the fleet.
6. The second project has been a collaboration with the local branch of the National Childbirth Trust (NCT). The SDF provided a small grant to buy some sturdy baby slings to allow new mothers (and fathers!) to walk on the hills with their charges. The

NCT has organised and publicised regular walks which have been well attended, with 15-20 people turning up most weeks.

7. One of the aims of the project was to reach the mothers for whom wealth and health were all too linked. The NCT has targeted with their publicity, connection points such as the Malvern Food Banks, to recruit new mothers to the walks. The offer of the free use of the baby slings is an enticement; and Malvern Hills Conservators have kindly helped out with car parking; so removing financial barriers.

8. It seems the combination of fresh air, exercise and the social side of walking with a group of people in a similar situation is working well. Of particular note is that a number of the new mothers are medical professionals, experiencing the uplifting effect of the walk for themselves; they would recommend such 'ecotherapy' to their patients. And so the health benefits of living within, or near to the MHAONB, should percolate into the local institutions.

Recommendation

9. The Committee is recommended to:

- 1. Note and comment on the report,**
- 2. Consider and discuss other opportunities through which the Partnership could engage with the 'Health and Well-being' sector.**

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