

Kington Walks AGM
3rd December 2024
Chair's Report 1st December 2023 to 30th November 2024

Kington Walks, a registered charity, comprises a group of charity trustees, a 'Main Committee' of volunteers that steers our work, and several groups of volunteers that either lead and back mark festival walks, lead and back mark Walking 4 Health walks, or carry out footpath maintenance. Often individual volunteers are involved in more than one of these areas. The following report seeks to cover our main areas of activity as well as recognising and celebrating the contributions made over the year.

Walking Festivals

Both the spring and autumn walking festivals were well supported. In the Autumn Festival, 29 walks were offered and there were 300 bookings overall. In the Spring Festival there were 14 walks and 111 bookings.

We put on a very popular Spring Festival quiz night held at The Swan. The Autumn Festival events comprised the Goulash Evening in the Kington Market Hall, catered by Fork and Chicken, The Hicksters performing at the Burton, a talk, 'Another Man's Shoes,' by Ellie Somme and a map interpretation workshop. All sold well, with was overwhelmingly positive feedback. As in 2023, the photography competition was very well supported.

We continue to be very appreciative of the crucial contribution made by our volunteer walk leaders. New walk leaders, to add to our numbers, are very welcome and will be offered training and support to undertake the role. In September 2024, we introduced a new travel expenses policy to reimburse walk leaders for travel expenses they may incur in planning and leading their walks. We were successful in applying for a grant from Kington Town Council to purchase first aid kits to issue to all our walk leaders to carry during festival walks. Previously they were asked to supply their own kits. We continue to review and seek to improve the ways in which we support our walk leaders and backmarkers, all of whom are offered free tickets to the Goulash Evening, as a token of our appreciation.

Our thanks go to all our walk leaders, and to our 2024 Festival Organisers, Nigel Sheath and Marianne Peedell.

Website, Marketing and Sponsorship

The current Kington Walks website, launched early in 2023, has undergone further improvements and is the means by which most of our bookings are made, with the Kington Tourist Information Centre and the Festival Office, which runs during the Autumn Festival, providing local in-person bookings.

The Walk Sponsorship Scheme has now run since September 2023 and is very well subscribed, mainly by local businesses. Walks are sponsored for a fee of £25.00, enabling us

to maintain the basic cost for a walk booking at £5.00. As well as supporting the festival financially, walk sponsorship strengthens our local partnerships and gives sponsors the opportunity to publicise and get involved with their particular walk. The photography competition prize was sponsored by Paramo, and the Goulash Evening by Tarmac.

Marketing analysis based on information provided by online bookings for the autumn 2024 shows that we reach festival-goers via a range of communication and publicity, spread fairly evenly across word-of-mouth, Facebook, our emailed newsletter, and online listings, with 21% accounted for by 'other'.

Our thanks go to Andy Lauder for the development and management of the website, Helen Lauder, for our marketing and publicity, and to all our generous sponsors.

Footpaths

Our footpath work has developed considerably since it began in 2019. Its overall purpose is to promote and encourage walking locally, and so benefit health and wellbeing. We seek to do this by improving accessibility; addressing footpath and right of way problems; sharing information to celebrate, publicise and enable greater awareness of local walks. We are aware that accessibility is not only a matter of addressing physical barriers, but also developing the confidence and knowledge that enable people to take part. Hence the footpath work is closely linked to other initiatives such as Walking for Health, the Free Walk at the start of each festival aimed at local people, and our information about local paths shared on the website and via the Six Great Walks around Kington booklet.

We now have 9 footpath maintenance volunteers who form the Footpath Maintenance Team. In the course of the last year, the team installed 14 new metal kissing gates, repaired 12 damaged stiles and cleared over 20 miles of footpath undergrowth. Since 2022, when Kevin Robinson took on the role of Kington Footpaths Officer, the team has dealt with around 150 footpath issues. As a mark of our appreciation, all those in the team were offered a free ticket to the Goulash Evening.

The team covers Kington Town, Kington Rural, Titley Parish and now Huntington Parish. We have accepted responsibility for a third of the Mortimer Trail running from Kington to Stansbach, the other two sections are covered by the Ramblers groups from Mortimer Cross and Ludlow. The trail was re-opened in 2023 after several years of decline in relation to maintenance and signage. We joined with the Ramblers groups and a new guidebook was created with new signs at both ends of the walk (Places de Marines in Kington & Ludlow Castle).

Colour-coded way marker signs were obtained late in 2023 for the signposting of the Six Great Walks around Kington, as featured on the Kington Walks website, the Kington Town Map and the free booklet, in line with our plans to promote further the Six Great Walks, and hence local walking. These have been installed in 2024 along all 30 miles of the trails which begin and end at the Places de Marines. Another initiative we introduced this year is the Six Great Walks Challenge, a self-led challenge to complete all six walks, supported by clippers

we have installed along the routes and a recording, reporting and certification system for those that complete it.

We have also recently obtained new Kington Walks stickers to attach to replaced and repaired gates or stiles. These feature the Kington Walks logo, a link to the website, and the information 'Installed by volunteers from Kington Walks'. They will be in use by the Kington Walks Footpath Team in 2024.

We have been fortunate over the last 3 years to receive grants from Kington Town Council for purchase of equipment to facilitate footpath maintenance. This has significantly improved and increased our ability to tackle most footpath issues. This in turn has resulted in a close working partnership with Hereford County Council Public Rights of Way Team, who accept our level of ability and are happy to provide the necessary structures for installation (stiles/kissing gates/signage).

As the Footpath Officer for Kington Town/Kington Rural Kevin Robinson has prepared the applications for replacement kissing gates and self-closing gates linked to the Parish/Lengthsman scheme, which have been successful. Both councils have been granted around £1500 for the materials to be installed by the Kington walks footpath team. This work, recently begun, is expected to carry on into 2025.

Our thanks go to Kevin and the Kington Walks Footpath Team, and to Geoff Cooper who developed the Six Great Walks Challenge. We also thank Kington Town Council and Hereford County Council for their partnership and their financial support.

Walking for Health

The Kington Walking 4 Health scheme, set up and run by Kington Walks, has now been going for just over two years. It has been well supported by volunteer leaders and backmarkers, 10 in total, with one more due to start in 2025. There are now 32 walkers plus the local Social Prescriber from Kington Medical centre and Occupational Therapist. As well as a weekly accessible walk on the Recreation Ground, there is a monthly social get-together for all involved at the Lion Café. Participants have given us feedback about the benefits of the scheme to wellbeing and social interaction, as well as physical health. It is publicised locally and via Kington Medical Centre and is open to anyone who wishes to take part.

In addition to the weekly short walk on the Kington Recreation Ground, there is now a need for a regular longer walk for those in the W4H group who want to increase their level of challenge. The scheme will take a short break during the winter months, and return in the spring, when we will be able to offer two grades of walk, as above.

We were fortunate enough to be selected as a chosen charity for our locality by the Co-Op community charity scheme. We received a generous charitable grant of £4,583 in November 2023. This has been of great assistance in maintaining and expanding the scheme in 2024, for example to ensure safety through training, equipment and DBS checks, and funding the social events.

First Kington Scouts

Kington Walks was fortunate to receive a donation from local author Andy Johnson and from Kingspan Insulation UK. The conditions were that the money should be used locally to encourage young people to walk in our beautiful open spaces, connected to an aspect of education.

As a result, we have funded equipment to be used by 1st Kington Scout Group during local expeditions and whilst undertaking their proficiency badges. This equipment includes compasses, emergency survival shelters, head torches, OS maps and a set of two-way radios for the adult leaders. We are also funding the hire of a minibus from Lady Hawkins School to facilitate travel to locations identified by the Scout Group over the coming year.

The Scouts were very enthusiastic about the equipment donated to their group and were keen to explain how it would be used. Jon Lloyd, one of the adult leaders, said, 'This is a great opportunity for our Scout Group to improve their map reading skills and to use the new equipment when undertaking hiking and overnight proficiency badge activities. We are very grateful to Kington Walks for this equipment and hope to team up with Kington Walks during the Walking Festivals'.

Kevin Robinson and I presented the equipment to girls and boys of the Scout Group this November and they have already put it to good use on a night hike in the Elan Valley. Thank you to Kevin for leading this project which we believe will develop into a mutually supportive relationship between Kington Walks and the young people of the First Kington Scout Group.

Finally

My thanks go to all who contributed to Kington Walks activities this year. We continue to depend on the willingness of our committee of volunteers to support each other and to take the lead when needed. I am extremely grateful to all of you for your commitment and generosity.

At the end of this year, Adrian Wilcox will be stepping down from Kington Walks. Adrian has been a longstanding trustee, committee member, walk leader, and treasurer, to name but a few of the roles he has undertaken, as well as wise friend and supporter to all of us. Although no longer a member, he will continue to be a friend to Kington Walks. We will miss your contribution, but we wish you well in your future projects. Thank you, Adrian.

After serving for four years as Chair, I will be stepping down from this role but continuing as Chair of Trustees. It's been an exciting time, mostly in a good way, even though it included the period of Covid lockdowns and Zoom meetings! Thank you to all of you for your support and tireless work as part of this volunteer organisation that puts walking in the Kington area at the heart of all it does.

