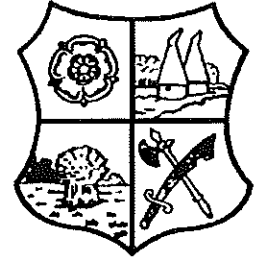


ALTON TOWN COUNCIL



PRESS RELEASE

16 January 2012

Town Bids to Officially Welcome Walkers.

Alton's reputation as being a walker-friendly town could get official recognition, if a bid by the Town Council is successful.

Obtaining *Walkers are Welcome* status, as a growing number of communities across Britain are doing, brings a number of benefits. It helps strengthen a town's reputation as a place for visitors to come to enjoy the outdoors, bringing useful benefits to the local economy. It helps to ensure that footpaths and facilities for walkers are maintained in good condition, benefiting local people as well as visitors. It can contribute to local tourism plans and regeneration strategies.

The bid is being master-minded by the Town Council's Parish Paths Working Party, which was established in 1996 to work with others to improve the areas' footpaths and raise awareness and promote the network.

To be eligible for the prestigious status, the town needs to show that it meets certain criteria, including demonstration of popular local support for the concept, action to ensure that the footpaths are maintained in good condition, and active promotion of walking and local paths.

Chairman of the Parish Paths Working Party, Cllr Kevin Stevens said "Alton already is a very popular place for walkers, demonstrated by the huge demand for many of the maps and leaflets about paths in the area. We have an enviable network of footpaths in beautiful countryside, including two long distance Recreational Paths: St Swithun's Way and Hangers Way. In gaining accreditation we will be the first town to do so, not only in Hampshire, but also the wider South of England. Much work has been done over the years to not only promote walking in and around Alton, but also ensure that the network itself is maintained to a reasonable standard by working closely with volunteers and Hampshire County Council who are responsible for the network. So in actual fact we already meet

most of the criteria to get the status. What we need now is evidence of community support, so we have launched a petition which can be signed at the Town Hall and Assembly Rooms and hopefully other venues in due course, and also you can vote on the Alton Society's website www.altonsociety.org.uk. We are also writing to many groups and organisations in the town asking for their support. With the South Downs National Park now right on our doorstep, now is the perfect time for Alton to be shouting its perfect walking credentials to a larger audience.”

Ends

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Note to Editors

For further information about *Walkers are Welcome*, visit www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk