

POLEGATE STROLLERS

Who are the Polegate Strollers?

Polegate Strollers began in 2009 with the 2012 Active Challenge promoted by Walk Wealden. I was a Councillor at Polegate Town Council at the time with responsibility for the Young and Elderly and was also Chairman of Environment and Leisure. I volunteered to go on a walk leader training course and held my first walk on June 29th 2009. Thirty six people came and we walked around Polegate with a local historian looking at the Victorian architecture and heard about Victorian founders of the Railways, Brick Yards and Farms and then enjoyed a Ploughman's lunch at the Church Hall. That was to be a one off, however many people asked to come on more walks and now the membership stands at 61 and we meet bi-monthly throughout the year whatever the weather.

What are the aims of the group?

Primarily it is a social interest group with physical exercise and appreciation for historical facts. The benefit of the group is the reduction of possible social isolation, that offers an opportunity to go somewhere as a group that maybe someone on their own would not venture. People's health has improved and has encouraged other forms of fitness with increased physical exercise. It has been proven that walking can also reduce the risk of depression and improve wellbeing. Additionally people have formed friendships within the group and as a result their social circle has widened. Furthermore they have been introduced to other clubs and activities in the area and now lead much more active lives.

How do people become members of Polegate Strollers?

The group is advertised locally, in the papers and has its own face book page. Most members have been introduced through friends or have seen us out walking and asked to join. A programme is also available on the Town Council website or upon request.

There is no cost to become a member. Each person has to complete a joining form and is given a membership card; this is carried on each walk. No computer records are kept, nor are personal details passed to third parties; the forms are filed alphabetically in a safe place.

Walks are organised in advance and involves asking different people and organisations to host our refreshments and/or give talks when we arrive at our destination. All walkers offer a donation to the host or if we stop at a café they buy their own food and drink. If we go out of Polegate it is by bus, and the majority of Strollers use their bus passes. On rare exceptions we use the train, we seek the cheapest fare and often by group passes.

We have three trained walk leaders, myself, Terry Wright, who is our back marker and Gill Wright who goes alongside anyone who is a first timer or perhaps a little slower or assists when we have to cross roads. We also hold insurance.

What is involved in running the group?

In order to run the group effectively it has been helpful to have knowledge of the local area and the demographic and a clear idea of the aims and objectives. It is important to want to explore the history and geography of the area and further afield in order to offer interesting walks and create memories. Each walker is also given a handout every time we meet which gives a potted history of where we are going and any information that needs to be known for the next walk. It is important to have access to the internet to research places and people.

In order to organise a yearly programme walks have to be arranged months in advance, this involves contacting people and places to book our visit and contact bus companies and or trains to ensure we can get to the places we want to visit on time. The biggest trip this year has been to the Houses of Parliament, 49 Strollers went on this visit and it was very interesting. We organised a coach and each person paid £10, this included coach parking and a tip, the tours of the House were courtesy of Norman Baker MP. David Cameron PM has permitted a visit to Downing Street in October so we will shortly be collecting names for people that are interested in that trip (This is to visit the outside of the houses and have photographs taken).

The other large event we hold is Christmas Lunch and this was enjoyed by 45 people last Christmas, this year we shall look for a larger venue.

What are the disadvantages?

The disadvantage of this group is the frequency of the walks, we are only able to meet bi-monthly and sometimes monthly, due in part to the preparation required.

As the group meet during the day we are unable to cater for working people or students that may also enjoy the walks and extended friendship.

Whilst most of the Strollers are on the internet not all are and therefore communication can be a slight issue, in an ideal World everyone would be on email and a group mail could be sent ensuring everyone got the information at the same time.

What does the future hold for Polegate Strollers?

The Strollers now celebrate three years of Strolling and keeping fit together. I do not envisage this changing. I generally get one or two new enquiries weekly.

Whilst Polegate Strollers cater for people wishing to enjoy a happy medium between walking and rambling, whilst learning some facts they perhaps did not know, there is no reason why a dedicated walking group would not be successful in Polegate.

When do the Strollers and other walking groups meet?

The Strollers meet on **Tuesdays**, unless it is for a special trip such as the Houses of Parliament. Tuesdays were chosen on purpose as on the 1st week of the month the Residents' Association have a coffee morning, the 2nd week of the month, Ladies Circle meets, and we may do a short walk in the morning, therefore the 3rd or 4th week we have a walk or a visit somewhere. We did it like this so that even if a person is alone (the majority are female) they would at least always have Tuesday's to look forward to. Those who are more active can also join the Polegate Ramblers who meet every **Thursday** at the Wannock Road Recreation Ground. St Wilfred's Church in Broad Road Willingdon also has a very active walking group that attracts people from Polegate, it may be **Friday's**, and there are a variety of activities taking place at the Polegate Community Centre. Polegate is very well served with its clubs and associations, however as I stated before they are generally geared toward the retired, therefore a new group would be beneficial to all age groups particularly if it was on a Saturday or Sunday, or an evening during the summer months.

Walks for Health in Polegate

If the aim was to walk for approximately an hour regularly once a week, weather permitting, then there is no better place than Polegate and the Cuckoo Trail.

The same walk each week could be offered or there could be a selection of walks available. They could be repeated on a four week cycle like so.

Week 1. Meet at the Community Centre, walk to the beginning of the Cuckoo Trail, the first part of the walk is slightly downhill, it levels and then rises up onto the bridge, turn left onto the path and then up again over the next bridge and then levels, turn left again and slightly downhill back to the start. *The advantage of meeting at the Community Centre is that there is a car park and toilets.*

Week 2. Meet at the Community Centre, walk to the beginning of the Cuckoo Trail, Slightly downhill to the crossroads, turn right this takes you slightly uphill and then flat coming out at Shepham Lane. Turn left (on a dry day) and follow the walk through the field back onto the Cuckoo Trail, turn left at the entrance to the path and back uphill slight to the start.

Week 3. Meet at the Community Centre, walk to the beginning of the Cuckoo Trail and straight on as in week 1. Once over the bridge keep going, crossing two small roads (not busy at all) depending on time and speed you could walk to the Loom Mill and have coffee before returning or walk to the island with the seat mounted on and turn round and walk back to the start.

Week 4. Meet at the community centre, walk toward the school, turn left into Oakleaf Drive, follow road round and continue uphill slightly to Sayerlands Road, turn right, over bridge and down onto Cuckoo Trail at end of path turn right onto Bridge which declines onto the lower Cuckoo Trail which levels out and approaches crossroads, continue slightly up hill back to the school and eventually back to the Community Centre.

I am happy to walk someone through these walks so better directions can be gained, they can also be timed and risk assessed before being advertised.

If I can provide any further information please do not hesitate to contact me on jaynebiggsby6@msn.com or 01323 486264 or 07761612132.

Thank you.