

WREXHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

CONFIRMED MINUTES

of the twentieth meeting held at Guildhall, Wrexham on 5 May 2006

16/06 ATTENDANCE & APOLOGIES

Attendance:

CHAIR

Ieuan Lewis

SECRETARY

Emma Haldane

MEMBERS

John Cooper-Poole

Mike Crawshaw

Sue Gittins

John Marchant

Mavis McBride

Clive Menzies

Margaret Murphy

Gerald Moss

Tim Rosselli

NON MEMBERS

Martin Howorth

Alun Price (CCW)

Irene Evison

Apologies: Tim Stevens, Gwynfor Jones, Karl Praker, Mabyn Pickering, Edward Wardle

17/06 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF LAST MEETING ON 3 FEBRUARY

The draft minutes were distributed to members on 10 March 2006. A few minor amendments were made and the minutes were confirmed correct on 28 March 2006.

(39/05) Wynnstay Estate – request for a meeting.

Member Sue Gittins, met with Captain Bell from the Wynnstay Estate, on 25 April 2006 to discuss access. A report of the meeting was distributed to all members on 2 May 2006.

Captain Bell was happy to show the forum around the estate at a future date.

AGREED: Members to visit the Estate.

ACTION: Secretary to arrange.

(11/06) Countryside Council for Wales – Secretary to request copies of 'Countryside Code Information Pack' for members.

Copies were distributed to all members at the meeting.

(13/06) The Balance of the Forum – Secretary to write to retiring members.

Letter sent 6 February 2006.

18/06 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman gave a brief report on the LAF Conference meeting held in Builth Wells on the 30 March 2006. He reported that Mike Ogden (Chair of Monmouthshire LAF and Welsh LAF representative on the National Access Forum) was to resign. A number of LAF Chairmen asked him to reconsider, but unfortunately he didn't feel that enough progress was being made. The Chairman expressed concern at the loss.

Unfortunately the scheduled speaker, Carwyn Jones AM, Minister for Environment Planning and Countryside, was unable to attend the conference. However, in his place Mike Dunn, Head of Environment, Conservation and Management, stepped in at short notice.

19/06 SECRETARY'S REPORT

- The latest 'Recreation and Access Newsletter' was distributed to members at the beginning of the meeting.
- The secretary read out a letter received from Ceriog Uchaf Community Council thanking the forum for all their support in their efforts to keep the public toilets open in Llanarmon DC during the winter months. The problem had now been resolved. As from April this year the toilets were now under new management of the Community Council and would be open throughout the year. The Community Council felt that the forum's interest in the matter had helped to achieve this result.
- A further letter had been received from Ceriog Uchaf Community Council with regards to a problem encountered with a path. The secretary confirmed that a response had been given. Mike Crawshaw stated that this problem had been brought to attention of the council previously. John Marchant explained that if the path was on a promoted route this could be looked at, budget permitting.
- LAFs had been added to the WAG's standard consultation list when publishing orders under the Highways Act. LAFs would in future be consulted via the LAF secretary.

20/06 MOTOR VEHICLES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE (08/06)

- ***Secretary was asked to contact the Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham (AVOW) for information on their insurance and volunteer groups.***
Secretary confirmed that contact had been made with Ann Vaughan, AVOW Volunteer Co-ordinator and Insurance company details taken. British Trust Conservation Volunteers were used by AVOW for the majority of path and environmental projects, all volunteers were trained and covered by BTCV insurance.
- ***It was agreed that the Council contact Community Councils in problem areas to find out what work needed completing.***
John Marchant stated that his team did not deal with Unclassified County Roads. He confirmed that the request had been passed onto the highways maintenance manager but had not yet received a response. At the time of the meeting it was not apparent whether Community Councils had been contacted.

- **Forum to pass on CRAG details to Tim Stevens to pursue.**

Unfortunately, Tim Stevens was unable to attend the meeting, but in a statement asked the forum to consider contacting the Council again asking them to reconsider its decision with regards to volunteer insurance.

Clive Menzies suggested to members that the agenda item be discussed at the next forum meeting, as Tim Stevens was not present and was the main driving force behind the item.

AGREED: Item to be discussed at the next meeting under 'Any Other Business'

21/06 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Irene Evison presented the draft assessment phase consultation report to the forum.

She explained how she had been contracted to support the council to put together the assessment phase of ROWIP. This would assess how adequate the network was and what base the council was starting from, by following the guidance at the Welsh Assembly Government. She stated that the draft document broadly followed what WAG were looking for. There was a heavy element of public consultation, the condition survey, the review of the definitive map and the strategic review. The idea of the assessment report was to bring together all information and to pull out key messages from all these different sources. The report was presently at the completion stage.

Clive Menzies commented on how well the document was presented. Some further comments were made from members and noted.

The forum were asked to look at the consultation document in greater detail and advise the council of any recommendations, so that agreement could be made and the document could be put out to public consultation.

Shelagh Roberts, under 'Specific Suggestions', page 45 of the document, did not agree with the statement 'Awareness-raising with landowners to ensure public use of legal public rights of way over their land'. She commented that farmers were already aware of their Rights of Way and wanted it noted that no awareness had been made to mountain bikers or the general public.¹

22/06 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2005/06

The draft annual report produced by Clive Menzies, was agreed by members.

ACTION: Annual report prepared to be submitted to CCW.

23/06 NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM REPORT

Clive Menzies gave a report outlining items discussed between December 2005 and March 2006:

- He reported that English and Welsh NAF's were to meet in June 2006 to discuss 'Encouraging Access to the Outdoors'
- 'Access to the Coast' was mentioned. There was some indication given that this could also include non tidal waters and was questioned whether this was being considered in the ROWIPs?
- The topic of 'Dogs' was raised once again. This seemed to be a concern in all areas of access nationally.
- The NAF was starting to look at standards for national trails.

- A Walking and Cycling strategy had been developed and due to be published by July. Some concerns remain about WAG's ability to co-ordinate between transport and the countryside.
- PROW registers came into force in January 2006. These would be required by July 2006.
- 'LAF Training Requirements' were discussed.
- There would be no draft action plan coming from WAG nor CCW for LAFs.
- He reported that the Audit office study of 'Public Access to the Countryside' is due to be issued in July and would probably state that Open Access went well and be complementary about LAF's. However, it will probably conclude that the rights of way generally are in a poor and possibly worsening state.
- NAF member Tim Stevens pointed out the inconsistent and laboured way that consultations on rights of way currently took place and asked for a standard system which matched England. This will be taken forward.

24/06 REPORT FROM ACCESS RANGERS

John Marchant presented a report prepared by Access Rangers, Sion Roberts and Dave Smith on work completed in the county over the previous months.

- Work had recently started on strimming various footpaths and bridleways throughout the county.
- Significant improvements had been carried out to a number of urban paths in Rhos, Bersham, Allington and a path in Garden Village.
- Bwlchgwyn residents group have shown interest in improving their footpath network. Work had been carried out on footpath 80 in Brymbo which runs on the eastern fringe of Bwlchgwyn quarry. Public concern over the true line of the path had now been resolved.
- Two guided walks lead by Sion were due to take place over the coming months around Ruabon. Details of these can be found on the Council's website www.wrexham.gov.uk/walks
- There had been no reported significant issues with walkers with regards to open access and no applications made for restrictions or exclusions.
- Working in partnership with CCW, Denbighshire County Council and the RSPB, Access Ranger Dave Smith, attended a black grouse count at the newly renovated bird hide in Llandegla forest and counted 7 lekking males. This was a good sign of a steady grouse population.

25/06 COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES

There was no report on this occasion.

26/06 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

As Wrexham County was currently experiencing regeneration through a number of new and significant developments, Clive Menzies reported that some of these would impact upon the Rights of Way network. Rights of Way Practical Guidance notes were compiled by a broad sector of public bodies, charities and interested organisations, and details guidance for matters relating to the Rights of Way network. As this guidance was probably the best practice he asked that the forum recommend to the Council that it formally adopts the Rights of Way Review Committee Practice Guidance notes numbered 1 to 6 as policy for its officers. He also asked members to recommend that the forum be added to the list of consultees' where stipulated in the guidance. If approved by the Council, the

Local Access Forum would create a structure to enable it to work within the specific timescales required by regulations.

The Chairman and John Cooper-Poole were concerned how realistic it was for the forum to be consulted, as it met infrequently and delay may be caused in processing applications. Shelagh Roberts was under the impression that planning applications received were already checked.

John Marchant stated that his department was already consulted by the Planning Department. The planning application list was monitored and concerns picked out.

As Wrexham was expanding very quickly, Sue Gittins agreed that the forum should be consulted, though Mike Crawshaw did not think that the forum would have much influence. In response, Clive Menzies stated that the forum was a statutory committee and would have an influence and a valuable input.

AGREED: Letter to be sent to the Chief Executive with a copy to Chief Planning Officer asking the Council to adopt the guidance notes.

27/06 DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDERS

A report was given by Clive Menzies on outstanding orders within the County Borough.

At the meeting held on 10 June 2005, the Local Access Forum were provided with a list of outstanding orders. The number of outstanding items had increased with some being fifteen years old.

It was reported that between 1 April 2005 and the end of March 2006:
26 applications had been brought forward
5 applications had been received
0 applications had been processed
31 applications were reported outstanding.

Some members of the forum were dismayed to find that the list of outstanding orders had increased by five and now totalled thirty one, and that no definitive map modification orders had been completed in the intervening months.

John Marchant stated that out of the 31 orders outstanding, many of these paths were open for public access.

Member Tim Rosselli thought that some issues with regards to orders were not always straight forward and that considerable time could be taken up to resolve these issues with the amount of council resources available.

Proposed: Sue Gittins proposed that the forum write to Chief Executive stating that the situation be urgently resolved.

Seconded: Clive Menzies

ACTION: Secretary to write

AGREED: Item to be brought forward for discussion in 12 months time

28/06 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Member Shelagh Roberts, asked if clarification could be given to members on what the public could do on a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Alun Price, CCW referred members to the latest edition of 'Recreation and Access Newsletter', under Section 2, 'Rights of Way'. Shelagh Roberts

asked if more could be done about signage. She reported that publicity had been given to motor bike problems, as helicopters had been seen monitoring areas and notices issued, but she was still encountering problems with cyclists and horse riders in her area. Alun Price agreed that unfortunately there were a small minority of cyclist/riders who were not members of a particular clubs or societies and disregard rules and cause problems. He explained that education was an important factor and working with the police was the first port of call. Members of the public could work together in informing each other and reinforcing the message.

- Member Gerald Moss, feared that the 'Countryside Code' was being ignored. He had increasingly encountered dog owners irresponsibly leaving their dogs off leads in country areas. He reported that when on holiday in England recently, around 50% of dogs were on leads. In Wales he had noticed considerably less.

Many members agreed that this was an education matter.

Clive Menzies referred to the NAF report, and that concerns had been raised and these were being addressed. He suggested that the forum write to the NAF asking if more publicity could be given. Alun Price referred members to page 10 of the recent edition of 'Recreation and Access Newsletter' where the subject had also been raised.

AGREED: Forum to write to the NAF with their concerns

29/06 ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA

- Layby Parking
- Budgeting Issues
- Members Training
- Balance of the Forum
- Access Assessments for the Disabled to the PROW Network

30/06 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Friday, 7 July 2006

Forum meeting to start at 1.45 pm in **Committee Room 2, Guildhall**, Wrexham.

The meeting closed at 3.30 pm

Note: Shelagh Roberts, referring to the booklet 'Walking in and around Wrexham County Borough', wanted the Council to note that the heather pictured on the front cover was found in Denbighshire not Wrexham County and felt it was misleading. She also commented that there were a number of SSSI's in the area promoted and nothing had been mentioned in the leaflet.

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