

# WREXHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

## CONFIRMED MINUTES

of the twenty first meeting held at Guildhall, Wrexham on 7 July 2006

### 31/06 ATTENDANCE & APOLOGIES

#### Attendance:

#### CHAIR

Clive Menzies

#### SECRETARY

Emma Haldane

#### MEMBERS

Sue Gittins

John Marchant

Gerald Moss

Margaret Murphy

Mabyn Pickering

Shelagh Roberts

Tm Stevens

Edward Wardle

#### NON MEMBERS

Martin Howorth

Alun Price (CCW)

John Pugh

Pete Bland (Item 43/06)

Apologies: Ieuan Lewis, Tim Rosselli, Gwynfor Jones, Karl Praker, John Cooper-Poole, Mavis McBride, Mike Crawshaw

### 32/06 Matters Arising from Minutes of Meeting on 5 May 2006

Draft minutes were distributed to members on 5 June 2006.

A few minor amendments were made and the minutes were confirmed on 14 June 2006.

*(26/06) Planning Applications*

To date no response had been received from Chief Planning Officer.

**ACTION: Secretary to chase.**

*(27/06) Definitive Map Modification Orders*

Letter received from Chief Environment Officer. Members were dissatisfied with the response.

**ACTION: Secretary to write to Chief Environment Officer asking what steps the Council is intending to take to improve the service.**

*(39/05) Wynnstay Estate Visit*

Members visited the Estate on the morning of 7 July 2006.

On behalf of the Forum, member Sue Gittins thanked the secretary for arranging the members field trip.

**ACTION: Secretary to write to Captain Bell, of the Wynnstay Estate extending the forum's appreciation of the time given by him on the day.**

### **33/06 Chairman's Report**

No report on this occasion.

### **34/06 Secretary's Report**

- The latest 'Recreation and Access Newsletter' was distributed to members at the beginning of the meeting.

### **35//06 Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

Martin Howorth, Parks, Countryside and Rights of Way Manager presented his latest report on the progress of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

He reported that the assessment report had now been completed and that comments were being sought on the priorities in the Assessment Phase.

This consultation finishes at the end of August and comments on the priorities will be assessed to see if they need changing. A report will then be submitted to the Councils Scrutiny Panel in September for views. Once agreed, the next phase will be the Action Plan.

He asked members how they would like to be involved in the Action Plan phase and what input the forum would like to make.

Sue Gittins agreed that the forum should be involved either as a whole or as part of a sub-committee.

Tim Stevens was concerned about council resources. The Chair felt that it was important for the forum to use this opportunity to give further input at this stage and influence the amount of resources that would go into it.

Martin Howorth stated that this would be the first time the council had a strategic document within Wrexham for ROW and the forum's input would be appreciated. He suggested that a meeting be arranged early September to discuss the next stages of the action plan.

Tim Stevens felt that visitors to the area should also be consulted.

The Chair complimented the presentation of the document produced.

### **36/06 Report from Access Rangers**

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

- Sion reported that there had been no issues with walkers with regards to Open Access and there have been no applications for restrictions or exclusions.
- Strimming work had recently been completed on approximately 60 footpaths and bridleways throughout the County. The paths will be strimmed again in August as part of the annual strimming programme.
- There was a good turn out for the Ceiriog Valley walk which was held on Sunday, 11 June. Sion will be leading another walk around Nant Mill and Bronwylfa in October, details of which can be found in the Wrexham Parks, Countryside and Public Rights of Way Service Events guide.
- Sion is currently working on maintenance issues and along with Dave and Alison, is preparing a list of 50 signposts to be erected on various paths within the County in the autumn and winter.
- Alison had attended Community Council meetings in Brymbo and Bangor on Dee to discuss footpath projects within these areas. Brymbo was keen to go ahead but Bangor on Dee was a bit hesitant. Bwlchgwyn has already

produced a survey and a list of maintenance issues. This is on hold until the rest of Brymbo Community has completed its survey.

- A Cefn Mawr heritage coffee morning had been attended to discuss a footpath project within the area in conjunction with the heritage trail and urban link. As yet no feedback has been received.
- Alison has been concentrating on cropping issues around the County with promoted routes and footpath project areas given priority. Several landowners have already been written to regarding the clearance of crops across the footpaths and one notice has been served.
- Alison has liaised with Groundwork Services in the improvement works on WebWalk 6 (Rhos) Circular walk and Rights of Way hope to have 'The Big Walk' of 8, 12 or 15 miles around Minera, Esclusham and Ruabon Mountain up and running in the next few months.
- All three rangers were involved in the Wrexham Walking Week in May.
- A group from Chirk have inquired regarding a 'task day' in the Ceiriog valley in September, which will involve local residents and Cadbury's staff. The details of this are still to be finalised.
- Alison has liaised with the Probation Service to provide a task for a Community Service group to carry out each Sunday. The task involved cutting back the vegetation on Bersham Bridleway. A new task will be given this Sept/Oct.

In response to Edward Wardle's question about whether the council was providing unpaid work to people on community orders, John Marchant said that this was in the experimental phase in basic clearance project work. He explained that progress tended to be slow but there was a benefit.

Martin Howorth stated that this type of help was also used in the country parks and proved very successful. Tim Stevens queried what insurance cover had been given to the workers. Martin Howorth explained that the workers carried their own insurance.

Mabyn Pickering asked what type of insurance cover was provided and where it came from. Edward Wardle thought that it may be provided by the Probation Service, but would make his own enquiries.

**AGREED: Members wanted insurance cover clarifying.**

**ACTION: Secretary to write to Chief Environment Officer for clarification.**

The Chair asked whether the erection of Footpath Destination Signs was now council policy. John Marchant stated that as part of the Best Value Review in 2002, it was agreed that these signs be put up, though he reported that the work was time consuming.

The Chair asked that the forum's thanks be passed on to all the Access Rangers for their hard work.

### **37/06 Countryside Council for Wales**

Alun Price of CCW stated that 'Coastal Access' was now the main item at other forum meetings.

The Chair asked whether Coastal Access was being extended to inland waterways and inland lakes. Alun Price confirmed that the Assembly was only looking at the improvement to coastal access at present.

The 'Wrexham Road Assessment' had been received and comments would be given in due course when other assessments from neighbouring counties had been received.

He reported that there had been no exclusions and restrictions with regard to Open Access.

Sue Gittins referred to the publication 'Managing Public Access' and asked if members could be provided with a copy. Alun Price confirmed that copies would be given to members on request.

### **38/06 Budgeting Issues**

Sue Gittins wanted the forum to have access to budget plans in order to see what money was being allocated to ROW, staff costs and ground work.

Martin Howorth confirmed that for the present year £69,432 was currently allocated for maintenance and £184,971 on staff costs.

As a statutory committee of the authority, Sue Gittins thought that the forum should have a say on money allocation. Martin Howorth said that the forum are welcome to state their concerns to the authority and that the budgetary process was just starting for the coming year. He stated that the Councillors make the final decision on where the money gets allocated. The Chair thought it may be useful to invite the Chief Executive and Council Leader to the next meeting to enable a discussion over budgeting issues affecting this important area and thus enable them to explain their pressures and considerations that have to be balanced. This would give the forum the opportunity to provide them with feedback over their concerns.

**AGREED: Invite Chief Executive and Council Leader to the next meeting.**

**ACTION: Secretary to invite.**

### **39/06 Member's Training**

The Chair was concerned that new members were not given basic knowledge training to help them deal with jargon spoken at forum meetings. He asked members if they felt induction training, explaining the basic principles of footpath law and how the forum works would be beneficial to them.

Sue Gittins suggested that a new member's pack may be useful but also agreed that face to face training stating what the forum's responsibilities were, would be of interest.

Alun Price confirmed that CCW did not organise any induction training and felt that forums should be training themselves.

Tim Stevens felt that forums were too small to train themselves and suggested that WLAF contact other forums in the area to look at setting up training sessions between them.

John Marchant suggested approaching Flintshire and Denbighshire as a start. Members agreed.

**ACTION: Secretary to write to the NAF for further information on training.**  
**ACTION: Secretary to contact Flintshire and Denbighshire.**

**40/06 Balance of the Forum**

Members were asked if they were happy with the present balance.

The Chair felt there was a lack of expertise in the cyclist area, but thought that the present balance was just right.

John Marchant stated that the council was happy with the present balance, but this would be monitored and adjusted in the future if needed.

Tim Stevens felt that the youth element was not presently given a voice.

Members agreed that young people should have a voice in future processes.

**ACTION: Secretary to write to the Councils Head of Young People's Inclusion, with a view to arranging a future meeting with young people.**

**41/06 Access Assessments for the Disabled to the PROW Network**

The Chair asked what the council's policy was regarding access for the disabled and for ensuring that their needs were met. John Marchant stated that the council contributed towards providing easier access for the disabled and also received a grant from CCW. He explained that if there is suitable room for wheelchair access the council would look at the possibility of providing this for them. The Council subscribed to the 'Gap – Gate – Stile' policy wherever possible. Kissing gates do cost more money than stiles to erect but consideration is given to where a path is in relation to settlements and the council acted accordingly.

Tim Stevens suggested that the item could be included in forum training to get a feel of what other things effect disabled people in the countryside and get an opinion. People would be happy with some provision instead of nothing, rather than trying to do everything at once.

The Chair suggested that the forum monitor access for the disabled and look at the item again in 12 months time.

**42/06 Lay-by Parking**

Tim Stevens felt there was a shortage of lay-bys in the countryside. The Chair thought there was some concern about parking in passing places in the Ceriog Valley. Shelagh Roberts and Gerald Moss also had concerns.

As Mike Crawshaw was not present at the meeting and had asked for the item to be put on the agenda, members agreed that the item be carried over to the next meeting for discussion.

**43/06 Any Other Business**

**• Motor Vehicles in the Countryside**

Tim Stevens asked that members look at the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) and asked members if they wished to discuss it in more detail as a future agenda item, as it was quite a lengthy piece. When the Act is adopted in Wales he advised the authority to take a copy of their definitive map and a copy of their list of streets and keep them in safe keeping for future reference.

Tim Stevens also asked that the authority clearly make the list of streets available to the public on demand. Pete Bland, Assistant Rights of Way

Officer, confirmed that a list of streets was held at Crown Buildings and was available for public viewing when required.

- **Gating of Certain Highways for the Prevention of Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour – Consultation Paper.**

Pete Bland, referred members to the Gating Order Consultation document from the Assembly and that responses were required by the 31 August 2006. He stated that the Authority would be making its own response, but suggested that the forum may wish to submit its own. He explained that the gating of alleys was more of an urban problem and not a problem commonly encountered with countryside paths. He explained that the legislation allows the law to be applied to any minor highway, as long as it is not a classified highway or a motorway and confirmed that the whole process was in the control of the local authority and that there was no requirement to go to court.

Margaret Murphy asked whether gating literally meant gating an alleyway, by putting a gate on each end. Pete Bland explained that an alleyway could be potentially closed off with residents being provided with a set of keys for access. One of the problems encountered though was the maintenance and repair of the gates.

Tim Stevens asked if authorised gates could have signs displayed on them to save confusion. Mabyn Pickering agreed. In response, Pete Bland stated that there is nothing in the current English regulations requiring that the closed highway be signed. Sue Gittins was concerned that in the event of a fire, would the emergency services know where to find an alleyway key. Pete Bland agreed that this could be a potential problem which needed clarifying.

The Chair asked if the members wanted to respond as a forum or as individuals.

**Secretary agreed to collate responses for submission if received by 31 August 2006.**

#### **44/06 Items for Next Agenda**

- Lay-by parking
- Dogs in the countryside

#### **45/06 Date and Location of Next Meeting**

Friday, 8 September 2006 at 1.30 pm in Committee Room 3, Guildhall.

Meeting finished 4.20 pm