

WREXHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

CONFIRMED MINUTES

of the twenty third meeting held at Guildhall, Wrexham on 10 November 2006

46/06 ATTENDANCE & APOLOGIES

Attendance:

CHAIR

Clive Menzies

ACTING SECRETARY

Katie Birks

MEMBERS

Mike Crawshaw

Sue Gittins

John Marchant

Mavis McBride

Mabyn Pickering

Gerald Moss

Karl Praker

Shelagh Roberts

Edward Wardle

NON MEMBERS

Martin Howorth

Mark Pritchard

Alun Price (CCW)

Emma Haldane

Janet Williams

Apologies: Ieuan Lewis, John Cooper-Poole, Margaret Murphy, Tim Rosselli and Tim Stevens.

60/06 Matters Arising from Minutes of Meeting of 8 September 2006.

36/06 Insurance clarification

Acting Chair, Clive Menzies expressed concern that people seemed very willing to carry out voluntary work, but were receiving little assistance. Sue Gittins stated Powys had their own Training Officer. Martin Howorth said volunteers in country parks are covered as they are supervised. The Acting Chair suggested there seems to be a 'grey area' where community volunteering is concerned.

ACTION: Secretary to seek advice on best practice from Powys.

38/06 Budget issues

The Forum welcomed Cllr Mark Pritchard from WCBC to answer questions. Sue Gittins asserted that the Forum is a statutory body; however it has no input into budgeting or a budget in its own right. Clive Menzies also stated that DMMO's were failing to be progressed by the Council, which was felt to be unacceptable.

Cllr Pritchard stated there were very limited resources across the board in the Council, but he would take the Forum's concerns to the Chief Executive.

The Forum thanked Cllr Pritchard and appreciated his attendance.

ACTION: Cllr Pritchard to take Forum's views back to Chief Executive.

39/06 Members training

John Marchant issued a PRow FAQ document, which will be discussed at the next meeting.

ACTION: Forum members to read the FAQ document and prepare questions for the next meeting.

40/06 Youth involvement.

Juliet John, Wrexham Youth Forum Facilitator had been contacted and was very interested in learning more about the LAF and opening up communications between the two forums. Juliet suggested a pre-meeting with a LAF representative. Clive Menzies asked for volunteers to help with this issue but as none were forthcoming undertook to represent the LAF.

ACTION: Clive and Secretary to chase up this issue.

53/06 Lay-by Parking / Rural Development Plan Consultation (Sue Gittins)

Sue Gittins reported that Wrexham was bidding for further funding, especially concerning the Ceiriog Valley area, and that the Welsh Assembly Government are holding £76.8 million plus a further £32 million to be divided between 16 local authorities. Plans were moving very quickly. Sue also secured a place for the Forum on the Northern Marches Partnership Board to discuss and emphasise LAF interests.

Bids for funding will go in during December 2006, then potential projects can be discussed/ taken forward.

Sue requested that if members have ideas regarding the promotion of open access and countryside recreation to let her know.

Sue also highlighted a 'visioning' event for the Ceiriog Valley being held on 11th November. Karl Prakes stated he was attending and the Forum requested an update after the event.

Mike Crawshaw pointed out that the road in the letter to the Principal Engineer was incorrect. The road in question was from Llanarmon to Swch-cae-rhiw which is being used to access the Berwyns from that point.

ACTION: Karl Praker to report back on ‘visioning’ event at next meeting, and the Secretary would clarify the road in question with the Principal Engineer.

54/06 Dogs in the Countryside

The NFU report on “Dogs in the Welsh Countryside” was distributed among Forum members.

Clive Menzies stated the issue was very important, and deserved debate, he asked Members for views on the guidance, and any suggested amendments and queries.

Mike Crawshaw stated that this is a critical time of year for farmers and he felt dogs should be kept on the lead at all times and that sheep worrying is common.

Sue Gittins asserted she felt it was a question of educating dog owners and wondered if any research had been carried out that suggested any increase in problems since the CROW Act.

Gerald Moss argued that unless signs had some sort of statutory force, these issues may continue.

Clive Menzies, and Shelagh Roberts concurred, that, in summary, the LAF had many concerns regarding dogs in the countryside, but the document was broadly supported.

ACTION: Clive Menzies to take these concerns back to the NAF.

56/06

- Environment Agency Wales “Strategic Planning for Water-related Sport & Recreation” workshops.

Due to Environment Wales pushing back the date to engage with the consultants to run these workshops, dates have not as yet been set, for them.

ACTION: Secretary to chase for dates and further information.

- Clarification of expenses (John Marchant)

John reported that no receipts were necessary for LAF members to claim mileage expenses.

61/06 Chairman’s Report

Clive Menzies reported back on the LAF Chairs Meeting he attended on behalf of Ieuan Lewis.

Clive stated that Paul Bucknell (from Conway East) gave a presentation on the problems facing ROWIP implementation. The Chairman of the NAF fully

supported some of the points Paul made, and at LAF level, we will begin to see increasingly that the Local Access Forums will have a large, and key role to play during this period.

Funding (and ring-fencing which Wrexham LAF has requested) was also discussed. However, ring-fencing, is unlikely to be mandatory from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), as during the implementation of 'open access' most councils exceeded their budget, so WAG feel there is no reason to ring-fence that resource.

However, there is nothing to stop local authorities ring-fencing it voluntarily, which is something the LAF's could push for.

Increasing the LAF profile and partnership working was addressed also, and Clive will be putting together a strategy on this which will set out how the LAF's could expand it's influence.

Clive stated he would bring this strategy to the next Wrexham LAF meeting for discussion, before it goes out to a wider audience.

Chairs also felt the need to get down to Town and Community Council level.

Clive requested anyone involved at these levels to talk to others about the LAF and its associated issues.

ACTION: Clive Menzies to bring strategy to January's meeting for discussion.

Last presentation was headed "Implications for Access Land from Wind Farm Applications", although this rapidly broadened into a far wider debate, it is an issue Wrexham LAF will need to think about in the future.

At the end of these discussions, a broader view of LAF remit was suggested, and that the LAF look at any application that would affect PRoW, and "LAF's should be consulted on all planning applications where the implementation of the plan would impinge upon the experience of users of Public Rights of Way, access land and other access opportunities. This includes any plan which would effect the users visual or aural experiences".

Clive suggested the statement was quite broad and other LAF Chairs were going back to implement this. Clive suggested further action would need to be agreed by Ieuan Lewis

However, Clive suggested that maybe he and another volunteer could informally start monitoring these types of applications just to gain a feel of what it may involve. Sue Gittins volunteered to help Clive with this issue.

ACTION: Clive and Sue to start the monitoring the applications informally.

Clive was also appointed as the LAF Representative.

The final session of the meeting focused on how the LAF Chairs felt the LAF's were performing. In general it was felt that smaller local authorities had more effective LAF's that were listened to more often.

Clive stated that Wrexham LAF has made several recommendations to Wrexham County Borough Council but personally felt the response had not been positive.

Clive asserted that the feeling from the meeting also was that the LAF's should be consulted on wider issues, engage the public more and put out increased publicity to increase their profile.

Feedback from the Council was also a key issue that needed pursuing.

The final session also looked at other areas the LAF could look into, these included: planning issues, disabled access, care of the countryside and joint activity in opening routes across boundaries.

Sue questioned whether WCBC held opened days that the LAF could be involved in. John Marchant stated various departments have held open days on different themes and the Guildhall has also hosted an open day.

Sue stated a booklet comes around on what the council does, and Clive suggested maybe the LAF could have a presence in it.

Clive also suggested a presence in the "Walking Week", with members attending walks to casually chat to the public.

Sue Gittins also suggested having a display/ poster of some sort in the County Parks and public places. John Marchant agreed to design a poster which members could put out in their communities.

ACTION: Secretary to find out who organises the 'Connect' council booklet. John Marchant to bring events programme to next meeting and design a poster to publicise the LAF for distribution through the members.

62/06 Secretary's Report

Katie directed member's attention to the Welsh Assembly Governments "Countryside Access Newsletter" and National Access Forum agenda on the side table.

The Secretary also stated that after last meeting there was a bit of discussion about some of the points from the unconfirmed minutes.

Additional comments/ views cannot be added to the Minutes if it didn't take place during the Forum.

As the Forum covers some emotive issues, the Secretary recommended that if members feel strongly, they can speak out and have their individual view noted. However, when members feel it is crucial that the Forum have an 'official line' they can ask for a Forum vote to be called.

63/06 Coed Llandegla (Janet Williams)

Janet Williams attended to highlight the developments in Coed Llandegla area (which borders Wrexham), and which currently serves a wide range of outdoor activities, including mountain bike trails, bridleways for horse riders and now carriage driving also.

Janet highlighted the safe facilities at Coed Llandegla (there is little cross-over or conflict with other users) and that access will only be through the Visitor Centre area to aid policing of the activities.

Also, once an individual becomes a member of the carriage driving association, arrival times etc will be staggered to minimise pressure on the site.

The project is also looking to link to other areas for safe routes without traffic.

Clive Menzies thanked Janet for her input and presentation, and said that if the project needs support or advice from Wrexham LAF in the future, the Forum would be more than happy to oblige.

64/06 Ordnance Survey Wales (Aaron Sollis)

Clive stated Aaron had been unable to attend, but wished to attend a meeting in the future to discuss the work of OS Wales.

65/06 Rights Of Way Improvement Plan (Martin Howorth)

Martin Howorth said the assessment phase of the ROWIP has now concluded and the assessment had been viewed by the Scrutiny Committee (before it goes to the Executive Board which gives the final decision). The Committee was pleased with the assessment, but had serious concerns over reduction of the budget and how this would impact upon the ROWIP.

The Action Plan stage has now begun, which addresses practically how plans will be implemented on the ground. This stage has involved looking at best practise elsewhere and seeing how WCBC performing against other authorities.

However, at the end of the assessment process, some of the objectives were quite vague. Martin explained how the priorities were taken from the assessment phase consultation and specific actions attached to them through workshops with both staff and the LAF.

The 10 Year Action Plan will also be complemented by annual Action Plans, stating what should be achieved in each year, making the whole process measurable.

Martin stated he had now asked other Rights of Way users for further specific recommendations, and had approached community councils for input, particularly regarding funding improvements.

The draft Action Plan will be written by the end of March 2007.

Martin asked the Forum how they would best like to comment on the draft Action Plan and it was agreed that a separate meeting would need to be held to discuss this complex and diverse issue.

ACTION: Forum will agree a date (towards last two weeks of March) to meet and discuss the draft Action Plan at the next meeting, and Martin Howorth will continue to work on the draft version.

66/06 Interactive Maps

Clive referred to the interactive mapping information which had been sent out to members on Shropshire's mapping (Shrop Map) and Flintshire's Planning Mapping websites.

Members had been directed to these to see what can be achieved by interactive mapping, and Clive suggested further implications of interactive mapping for Definitive Maps and Planning Applications, and make access in general a lot easier.

Gerald Moss also asserted that the Ramblers Association had interactive maps and they were a good resource.

The Forum agreed to send a letter to the Chief Executive of Wrexham Council recommending that the Council adopts interactive mapping to help improve public service.

ACTION: Secretary to write to the Chief Executive with this recommendation.

67/06 Report from Access Rangers

Sion has mainly been dealing with general complaints and continues to work on the current signpost lists. He has also liaised with Denbighshire Signs on producing a new method for putting destinations and footpath numbers onto the flags and hopes to put the list out to tender shortly.

Sion has taken a guided walk from Nant Mill to Bronwylfa accompanied by Alison. Six members of the public attended.

Dave reports that he has been working on and designing the maps of six updated circular walks – three County Walks Around Wrexham and three around the Overton area. These will be downloadable or on paper when requested from the Rights of Way section.

Alison reports that the Brymbo footpath project is progressing, and a schedule of works is being put together for signposting. Alison and Sion are working together to produce map extracts for the Best Value Performance Indicator Surveys which are due to be carried out during November.

Cropping complaints have declined slightly, however a few complaints have been received about sugar beet and turnip crops.

Clive queried the current situation with dog signs. John Marchant indicated he would contact Denbighshire and Flintshire about their sign suppliers and also get a costing for the Forum.

Clive expressed the Forum's thanks to the Access Rangers for their hard work.

ACTION: John Marchant to investigate the situation with dog signs in Denbighshire and Flintshire, and get some general costings for the next Forum meeting.

68/06 Countryside Council for Wales

Alun Price stated that under the 2000 Act, landowners can notify for closure of land, and as such the Llanarmon Estate will be closed for twelve days during November and a further six in 2007 for game shooting. The closures are displayed on the CCW website.

69/06 Any Other Business

Members had been sent previously the CCW/Natural England Consultation Paper. Clive Menzies requested comments and views to be gathered to formulate a composite response from the LAF.

ACTION: Members were requested to read the consultation paper and respond with comments to the Secretary at the latest by JANUARY 5TH 2007.

Mike Crawshaw also noted that the Farmers Union Wales (Ruthin Office) had not received a copy. Alun Price confirmed he would send them one.

Gerald Moss also tabled the issue of volunteer surveys on the PRoW network. Gerald had been undertaking surveying work of his local area.

John Marchant supported this initiative and suggested Rights of Way could produce survey sheets for interested parties to complete on their local areas on a voluntary basis.

ACTION: Interested parties to approach John Marchant to voluntarily undertake surveying of their local network.

The Forum had also received a letter regarding the old Pen Y Fron road in Wrexham. The correspondence related to a case whereby Wrexham County Borough Council had appeared to own the area where a path had run, and subsequently sold it off, despite the area being walked over for over 20 years.

ACTION: The Forum agreed that this was not really a LAF matter but gave authority for Clive Menzies to write to the individual in question and provide reference points to assist his efforts.

70/06 Items for Next Agenda

Clive suggested items for next agenda to go to Secretary, and that potentially the LAF need to examine when and where it meets in the future to make it more inclusive.

71/06 Date and Location for Next Meeting.

Guildhall, Committee Room 3, Friday 26th January 2007 at 1.30pm.

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