

# WREXHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

## **CONFIRMED MINUTES**

of the tenth meeting held at Guildhall, Wrexham on 17 May 2004

### **27/04 ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES**

Attendance:

CHAIR Andrew Kelly

SECRETARY John Marchant

#### MEMBERS

Sue Gittins  
Dave Liddy  
Gerald Moss  
Mabyn Pickering  
Colin Simpson  
Edward Wardle

#### NON-MEMBERS

Iestyn Thomas<sup>1</sup>  
Dave Smith<sup>2</sup>  
Sion Roberts<sup>2</sup>  
David Bateman (Speaker)  
Rob Wilkinson<sup>3</sup>  
G Poppe  
Ron Williams (Ramblers' Association)  
<sup>1</sup>Countryside Council for Wales  
<sup>2</sup>Open Access and Improvement Officers  
<sup>3</sup>Chief Transportation and Engineering Officer

As neither the Forum's chairman nor the deputy chairman could attend, the Forum unanimously decided that Andrew Kelly should chair the meeting.

Apologies were received from members Mike Griffiths; John Lawton Roberts; Ieuan Lewis; Sheila Roberts; Gwynfor Jones; Naomi Klenerman; Mike Edwards; Paul Davies.

The chairman welcomed new member Sue Gittins, who then briefly addressed the meeting. The speaker, Dr David Bateman and the two Open Access and Improvement Officers, Sion Roberts and David Smith were also introduced.

### **28/04 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF WLAf9 (5/3/04)**

The minutes were circulated mid-March and confirmed on 2 April 2004.

13/04 The council sent a delegate to the Off-Road Motorcycling Conference in Merthyr Tydfil and Mike Ogden the LAF's representative on the National Access Forum had prepared a report (item 2 in the bundle supplied).

13/04 A letter had been received from Welsh Assembly Government about ring-fencing (item 3).

14/04 A breakdown of Rights of Way expenditure has now been supplied by the Council (item 4). EW asked where the grass-cutting money was spent. The secretary explained that two-thirds was spent in urban areas. In rural areas it was only the well-used enclosed paths that were strimmed.

15/04 Gwersyllt and Brymbo Community Councils were the only ones to respond to the forum's letter inviting them to attend meetings.

18/04 A letter has been sent to Ceredigion LAF.

## **29/04 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

IL had attended the meeting at Ysbyty Ifan between Carwyn Jones AM and representatives from the North Wales LAFs. A note of the meeting was included as item 5.

## **30/04 SECRETARY'S REPORT**

The secretary said that he had attended the workshop organised by CCW for LAF secretaries.

## **31/04 PRESENTATION FROM DAVID BATEMAN**

Before his retirement, David Bateman was professor of agricultural economics in the University of Wales. Most of his working life was concerned with the economic problems of agriculture, particularly in Wales and he still has some involvement in this as an assessor for awards of the Royal Agricultural Societies. Since retiring however he has also been active with the Ramblers' Association, the Open Spaces Society and CPRW, and he is currently a member of the National Access Forum for Wales and of the Ceredigion Local Access Forum.

The first part of Mr Bateman's address concerned the problems of farmers, who used to be seen as the unpaid landscape gardeners of the countryside and as such had strong public support. They need to regain that reputation. There was great concern about loss of jobs in agriculture. The history of farming has also been the history of the support system since 1939 and the changes now being made were important to all of us. Subsidies were usually greater than net income and farmers were dependent on the public market and fickle governments. The single farm payment will replace the current scheme and has nothing to do with the number of animals kept.

Responsibility must be shared for the living landscape and farmers should look to walkers and other users for help. Farmers must be persuaded that public access is not a problem and they should start telling the public about farming.

Mr Bateman then moved on to recreation. Rights of Way in Wales required an initial £26m to put right and then £8m a year to maintain. The estimated economic benefit was £240m a year, creating 7,000 full or part time jobs. There were also benefits in social health and to farming. For every £1 spent on the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, tourists using it spent £57. Every kilometre of path in England supported one job, but in Wales this was only 0.2 job. Farming organisations and unions should be more constructive about access. They would make more money and win more friends, and farmers need friends. At present they were giving the wrong message.

Moving on to open access, Mr Bateman said that the costs to landowners are very small. Many landowners already allowed the public onto their land with no problems. In England there was the Access Incentive Scheme which provided money to support management measures including the provision of stiles. In Wales the position was less clear and LAFs

should campaign for funds. Benefits would be substantial with many additional jobs. Farmers and ramblers should be working together to exploit the benefits of the CROW Act and lobby WAG for resources.

## **32/04 CHIEF TRANSPORTATION AND ENGINEERING OFFICER**

As a result of the request for the Chief Executive to speak to the Forum, she had asked Rob Wilkinson to attend as he had greater responsibility for rights of way. RW told the forum that he was a user of rights of way and he accepted there was insufficient funding for them. He assured the forum that he will raise the problem as a service pressure to try to secure increased funding and/or another member of staff beginning in the next financial year. However, at the end of the day it would be up to the council members to decide. There followed a question and answer session. Questions submitted by email from ME were covered elsewhere and answers requiring collection of data will be supplied later by Council staff.

*Q. (From AK) Would the council give consideration to an Equestrian Strategy for the county?*

A. Yes, there will be something along those lines but as part of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, not on its own. There are plans to improve the facilities for riding and the Council was pushing ahead with the 'horse bed and breakfast' scheme. Separate strategies had been written for walking and cycling because they had more to do with transport issues rather than leisure issues. Funding had been available for these through Transport Grant received from the National Assembly.

*Q. (From SG) How much of Wrexham's share of the £2.4 million allocated to implement the CROW Act was actually allocated to access and rights of way work?*

A. The Council started putting money towards CROW Act before there was any allocation made. A service pressure was first raised 3 years ago and a temporary assistant rights of way officer's post was made permanent. This officer works mostly on the Definitive Map. Last year's extra money was used to fund the Open Access and Improvement Officers' posts. As this was late in the year, the unused money was allocated to improving footpath links.

*Q. (From AK) In England the CROW Act money is ring-fenced but in Wales it is not. Is this the decision of the National Assembly?*

A. Yes. In Wales all we can apply for is Transport Grant but in England authorities can apply for money for various maintenance functions including right of way, so it is ring-fenced.

*Q. (From AK) Who should the forum target over the ring-fencing issue?*

A. The Welsh Local Government Association. It has been identified that there is a cost bringing the rights of way network up to standard and a cost in maintaining it thereafter. Maybe that improvement should be identified as a capital cost. The more we improve the network the greater will be the maintenance costs.

*Q. (From MP) As in Wales the money is not ring-fenced there is a danger of us falling behind England. Could not a case be made for change on this basis?*

A. There is no reason why the Welsh Assembly could not make a capital grant and that would be ring-fenced. Apart from that, the revenue item was not ring-fenced so we will be raising a service pressure and with the forum's support, I am hopeful that additional money will be found.

*Q. (From AK) Would it help if the Forum wrote to the WLGA?*

A. Not really, it is a national issue and perhaps the National Access Forum should write to them. The WLGA represent all 22 unitary authorities, and all 22 are signed up to not having ring-fencing. The best way forward I feel is to go for a capital allocation combined with raising service pressures.

### **33/04 COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

Iestyn Thomas reported that the Access Map for Northeast Wales was still at Appeal stage. Site visits are coming to a close and the next month or so will see the decisions start coming in.

The new Open Access and Improvement Officers had visited the CCW offices to see the mapping process in progress.

Through the summer the final versions of the various documents the forum had commented upon will be released.

A training programme is being developed around the new publications and publicity is also being worked on.

A pilot study is being carried out in conjunction with Denbighshire County Council on part of the Clwydian Hills, trialling the Restrictions and Exclusions procedures.

The LAF has an input into the minimum standards for national trails.

### **34/04 NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM**

No NAF meeting had taken place since 5 March, so AK had nothing to report. The secretary read out a note from IL that local authority spending on access was on the NAF agenda for 8 June and did the forum have any comments on this subject? David Bateman said that NAF hoped for a unified way for LAs to present their expenditure.

### **35/04 OPEN ACCESS AND IMPROVEMENT OFFICERS**

CS said there had been an opportunity for members to talk to the new officers before the meeting and during the interval. They were two months into the job and the training procedure had begun. They had been working on both rights of way and access issues.

## **36/04 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN SUB-COMMITTEE**

CS thought that it was up to the sub-committee itself to decide if it wanted a fourth member. The Council had made a little progress with the ROWIP.

## **37/04 PUBLICITY**

It was decided to hold this over until more members were present.

## **38/04 AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that Andrew Reeks of Trail Riders Fellowship should be invited to a meeting. The forum would also welcome CCW's presentation on LAFs involvement in ROWIPs.

## **39/04 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

*(discussed immediately following 35/04)*

Countryside Code MP read out the bullet points of the new Countryside Code. There was dismay that the code seemed weak on wildlife protection. SG said the code had been thinned down from the original she had seen. IT explained that a feedback document explaining the reasons behind the adoption or non-adoption of the advice offered would soon be available. DL reminded the forum that the forthcoming meeting was essentially about promotion. MP would attend the meeting and return with some notes.

Wind-farm Graham Poppe of the Oswestry Equestrian Centre spoke from the floor about the scoping study for the proposed wind-farm at Cefn-y-maes. Although over the border in Shropshire, the generators would be very close to the equestrian route forming part of the Ceiriog Trail. In Mr Poppe's opinion the Trail would be finished if the scheme went ahead. CS said that this was a consultation to establish the scope of a study yet to be prepared and it could be some time before a planning application was ready. The members decided to wait.

## **40/04 NEXT MEETINGS**

The date of the next meeting was already fixed for 9 July. It was decided that the following meeting would be on the 10<sup>th</sup> or the 17<sup>th</sup> September.

The meeting closed at 4.55pm.