

# WREXHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

## CONFIRMED MINUTES

of the thirteenth meeting held at Guildhall, Wrexham on 26 November 2004

### **69/04 ATTENDANCE AND APOLOGIES**

Attendance:

CHAIR Michael Edwards SECRETARY John Marchant

MEMBERS Paul Davies  
D Gwynfor Jones  
Andrew Kelly  
Naomi Klenerman  
Gerald Moss  
John L Roberts  
Shelagh Roberts  
Colin Simpson  
Edward Wardle

NON-MEMBERS  
Ann Barnes  
Martin Howarth (Countryside Service)  
Trefor Jones (CCW)  
Alun Price (CCW)  
John Pugh  
Andy Reeks  
Mark Schwarz  
Angela Williams

Apologies were received from members Mike Griffiths, Ieuan Lewis, Dave Liddy, Mabyn Pickering and Harry Prankard.

The chairman welcomed Andy Reeks to the meeting.

### **70/04 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF WLAFL 11 (9/7/04)**

Unconfirmed draft minutes distributed to members for comment: 26 October 2004  
Deadline for comments: 12 November 2004  
Amended and confirmed: 13 November 2004

55/04 (42/04) The meeting about equestrian strategy and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan had not yet taken place. AK reiterated that it was still needed.

56/04 CS commented on the LAF conference at Builth Wells and said that unfortunately as the council was short of resources it had not done much work towards the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. It was hoped, however, that next financial year with increased resources a start could be made in earnest. A meeting between IL or CS and the ROWIP sub-group would be beneficial. SR was appointed to join ME; AK and GM on the sub-group to give it more balance.

57/04 In reply to the forum's letter asking that resources are made available so that the Council may fulfil its obligations to produce and implement the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, a reply had been received from the Chief Transportation and Engineering Officer. It stated that a service pressure for 2005/06 had been submitted for additional funding for rights of way maintenance and improvements and also for an additional staff member to address the DMMO backlog. It was stressed that the additional funding was required to ensure that the council's responsibilities under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act are met. The letter reminded forum members that it was up to the elected members of the council to determine the final budget allocations.

67/04a Carwyn Jones' reply to Mike Ogden's letter regarding national concern over rights of way funding and Mike's response were drawn to the attention of the forum.

## **71/04 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

There was no report on this occasion.

## **72/04 SECRETARY'S REPORT**

Shropshire and the Borough of Telford and Wrekin Joint Local Access Forum had sent a copy of the agenda for their next meeting and minutes of the last meeting. It was decided that any member wanting to see papers from forums adjoining Wrexham should contact the Wrexham LAF secretary. The information would also be left on the front table for members to look at during the meetings.

## **73/04 MOTOR VEHICLES AND THE CEIRIOG TRAILS**

Andrew Kelly presented the results of his survey into the condition of the two Ceiriog Trails. He said that many of the minor roads had suffered severe erosion due to both drainage problems and use by motor vehicles. Indeed, some UCRs were now difficult or even impassable for 4X4s. The condition of many was inappropriate to their status as promoted routes.

Andy Reeks suggested that the council looked at a hierarchy system but CS said that the manpower was not available to do that. He suggested that the user groups could perhaps identify important routes that could be kept open all year and those that should be subject to limitations. GJ said that most of the damage appears to be water related and asked about the cost of correcting poor drainage.

From the floor, Angela Williams told the forum about an accident on 13 July 2003 when her horse stepped into a very deep water filled rut on a UCR. She had written twice to Wrexham Council's Highways Maintenance Manager but not had an answer. CS said he would follow up the matter.

AK summarised by saying that Wrexham Council had spent a lot of money in implementing the two Ceiriog Trails but now, if the routes cannot be properly maintained, that would be wasted along with all the effort from others who have contributed to the projects. People were coming from all over the country to ride these trails and going away very angry.

EW suggested a field meeting to look at both these trails and open access problems and this met with the approval of the forum.

**Action: Secretary will arrange a field meeting in spring or summer 2005.**

***Proposed:** Andrew Kelly proposed that the Forum makes representation to the Council that action is taken to address the problems being experienced with the unsealed unclassified county roads forming parts of the Ceiriog Trail and Upper Ceiriog Trail.*

***Seconded:** Edward Wardle.*

***Voting:** For: 9; Against: 0*

**Action: Secretary to write to Wrexham County Borough Council.**

## **74/04 MOTOR VEHICLES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

Andy Reeks presented the case for the responsible motorcyclist. He said that there was no map to show where off-road motorcyclists could legally go and understandably many were confused about their rights and responsibilities. He would like to see a readily available map showing the status of the byways in the whole of the Borderlands and to have them properly signed.

He then gave his views on how those that were less responsible should be dealt with. The law was adequate to deal with illegal use, including confiscation of the vehicle, but the enforcement of it was ineffective. North Wales Police should set up a properly equipped off-road unit with a dedicated hotline so that the public could easily reach them and reports could be properly collated. They then may be able to break through the apathy that currently exists with people not reporting problems because experience has told them that the police would not respond.

There should be official properly controlled off-road venues, which would reduce the number misusing the countryside. Mr Reeks also called for the rights of way network to be properly maintained and a fact-sheet to be handed out at point of sale to everyone buying a motorcycle to help counteract the ignorance about where they could be taken.

CS assured the forum that the Council was very aware of the problem and had attended meetings on the subject. The council maintained the roads in a suitable state for the traffic that is generated upon them. In the past this had just been agricultural vehicles but now there were more recreational vehicles and the maintenance regimes had not changed. Any repairs came from the same budget as all other roads and it was a question of priorities. CS would attend a further meeting in January as a member of the Highway Authority. AK had also received an invitation because of his bridleway interests and wondered if he should also represent the forum. The Chairman asked if he would act as an observer for the forum.

CS explained that even though the UCRs were recorded as public roads, they do not necessarily carry vehicular rights. Some are too narrow and too steep even for a trials bike; some have steps. Before any vehicular definitive map could be produced they would all have to be assessed for suitability.

From the floor, John Pugh said that he had seen UCRs signed as footpaths and this causes problems. A lot of routes were not maintained as well as they should be but this was not a criticism of the Wrexham Highways Departments. He had seen repairs done and they had lasted very well but now some serious repairs are required. He called for accurate signing work to be carried out so that everyone knew who had a right to be there.

#### **75/05           CONSULTATION ON FIRE PREVENTION APPEALS**

SR asked if the landowner needed to notify the local authority when a danger was perceived. Alun Price (CCW) said that closures to open access due to fire risk depended on information from the Meteorological Office and were only envisaged during abnormally hot summers.

PD thought that a major risk of fire was from the roads rather than from the footpaths. GJ confirmed that no fires started by graziers on Ruabon Mountain had ever gone out of control. JLR agreed with this but said that similar fires on Llantysilio Mountain had. The forum confirmed that there was to be no response to Welsh Assembly Government's consultation.

#### **76/04           COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

Both the Berwyn and the Northeast Wales Open Access Maps were now out in conclusive form. The date for commencement still had not been fixed but was likely to be in May 2005. CCW were working on the procedures for exclusions, restrictions and closures. The least restrictive option will be used and where possible a closure would not take place if a problem could be dealt with by waymarker arrows directing people away from an area. EW

hoped that the mistakes made on open access starting in England would not be repeated in Wales.

JLR reported on a recent meeting convened by CCW on the possible impact of open access on ground nesting birds. It was felt that the best way to afford protection to birds like the red grouse was to guide people onto waymarked paths, especially on SSSIs and other special designation sites. However, there was one area in Wrexham on Ruabon Mountain where it may be necessary to do more to protect a Black Grouse lek. A procedure will be put in place where CCW and the Local Authority would, jointly, try to find the best solution, this probably involving a meeting on site.

#### **77/04 NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM**

There was nothing to report on this occasion.

#### **78/04 TRAINING**

A presentation had been arranged for 8 April 2005 on the subject of Common Land.

#### **79/04 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

National Conference: CS reported on the second national conference on Local Access Forums in Wales held at Llanellwedd on 13 October 2004. (IL also attended.)

Council Management Structure: CS also reported on the review of management structures presently being undertaken within the Council. Public Rights of Way and Access may be moving away from Transportation and Engineering Department and links with Country Parks may be strengthened.

Proposed Appointment to Forum: Tim Stevens, development officer for Land Access and Recreation Association, has asked to join the forum and CS invited the forum to comment. Andy Reeks also expressed an interest if Tim Stevens was not appointed.

**Proposed:** Andrew Kelly proposed that the forum asks the council to appoint a member to represent motorised access interests.

**Seconded:** Gwynfor Jones.

**Voting:** In favour: 7; Against: 2.

**Action: CS to advise Chief Transportation and Engineering Officer that the Forum approves the appointment of a member to represent the interests of motorised users.**

Green Network Strategy: AK sat on this group and asked for clarification about whether he was formally representing the forum when he attended. He was asked if he would act as an observer and bring back relevant topics for the forum to discuss and decide on.

#### **80/04 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

The dates of the next two meetings had been fixed for 4 February 2005 and 8 April 2005. It was decided that the following meeting would be on either 10 or 17 June 2005.

The meeting closed at 4.58pm.

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