



WLAFF 26

WREXHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

CONFIRMED MINUTES

of the twenty sixth meeting held at Guildhall, Wrexham on 31 August 2007

25/07 ATTENDANCE & APOLOGIES

Attendance:

CHAIR

Clive Menzies (**After Item 26/07**)

SECRETARY

Emma Haldane

MEMBERS

John Cooper-Poole

Sue Gittins

John Marchant

Gerald Moss

Margaret Murphy

Mabyn Pickering (**Deputy Chair after item 26/07**)

Karl Prakes

Shelagh Roberts

Edward Wardle

NON MEMBERS

Martin Howorth

Alun Price (CCW)

Janet Williams (Observer)

Apologies: Mike Crawshaw, Gwynfor Jones, Mavis McBride

26/07 Election of Chair

Further to Ieuan Lewis's resignation as chair, on 4 May 2007, secretary asked that nominations for a new chair be received by 14 June 2007. All 3 nominations noted were for Clive. As no other nominations had been received, secretary announced Clive Menzies as the new chair of the Wrexham Local Access Forum.

Secretary asked members to nominate a new deputy chair. One nomination was received and seconded for Mabyn Pickering. This was accepted.

27/07 Matters Arising from Minutes of Meeting on 4 May 2007

40/06 Youth Involvement

In June, Clive conducted a Youth Workshop at the Victoria Centre in Wrexham. The objective was to explore the wants and needs of young people accessing the countryside.



The three main areas looked at were:

- What they liked about the countryside,
- Whom they used it with,
- What were the factors stopping them using the countryside.

The answers given had provided a snap shot of the priorities and difficulties that young people of Wrexham experience in the countryside. Some positive feedback had been received and the workshop had proved quite successful. Margaret asked whether the children and young people involved in the workshop had spent much time in the countryside. Clive confirmed that the young people involved did occasionally participate as a group in countryside activities.

To gain further young person participation, secretary agreed to contact NEWI students after September enrolling. It was felt that Environmental students could provide valuable feedback to the LAF.

66/06 Interactive Maps

Ongoing

Secretary to put on next agenda for discussion.

53/06 Lay-by Parking

Secretary had written two letters to all Community Councils concerned, asking them to identify suitable projects that could be funded by Northern Marches Cymru Leader+ Project. Sue asked whether any feedback had been given to the Council from Northern Marches Cymru. Martin Howorth was not aware of anything at present.

28/07 Chairman's Report

- **Access to Access Land in the Ceiriog Valley**

In the last meeting, member Gerald Moss outlined various difficulties with obtaining access to access land in the Berwyn Mountains. Signage problems had been addressed with Wrexham County Borough Council.

During that meeting Clive agreed to write to Ceiriog Uchaf Community Council, to highlight the concern and advise on how this could be resolved. Two letters had been sent.

The Community Council felt that any action which involved farmers and landowners and any decisions relating to farm land such as increased access points could not be decided or influenced by the Community Council, but should be left to the individual farmer to decide.

- **Ministers Letters**

Clive, in his capacity as National Representative had recently written to Jane Davidson, Minister for Sustainability and Rural Development, highlighting a number of issues concerning LAF's in Wales. No responses had been received to date, though Clive was meeting with the Minister in October to discuss further.

ACTION: Response to be discussed at the next meeting.

- **Communication Strategy**

The Chair had produced a Communication Strategy for LAF's. It was felt important to raise LAF profiles and outline ideas that may assist the LAF's to

reach a wider audience. The need for this strategy came out of the last Chairs meeting held in September, where the need to raise the profile of the Local Access Forums was recognised. It was felt important to publicise the work of the LAF, as a forum's work impacts across the whole population and that the public know that there is a local independent statutory body looking at issues that affect them in a balanced and impartial way. It was agreed that it was important to engage with Community Councils, for their knowledge and expertise could help the LAF achieve maximum influence on the relevant authorities to improve the service it provided.

It was a statutory requirement that meetings are held in public. Also the timing of meetings should vary allowing different interest groups to attend. Members agreed that moving location would attract a wider audience.

Press and Publicity

Chair felt that a closer link with the press would be beneficial in creating more publicity and develop a working relationship. Agendas and a brief summary of issues could be provided to editors of local papers prior to meetings and that formal invitations be sent inviting them to attend. Posters could be placed in libraries and on community notice boards.

Members agreed to adopt the Communication Strategy

ACTION: Chair and Secretary to organise a meeting timetable for 2008 to discuss at the next meeting.

29/07 Secretary's Report

New LAF Logo

Secretary presented the first coloured draft. Colour changes were noted, but members were happy with the design.

All agreed to adopt. Chair and Secretary to make agreed changes

30/07 Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Martin Howorth, Parks, Countryside and Rights of Way Manager, gave a report of progress made so far.

The 3-month consultation had now been completed. 16 replies had been received at this stage, many of them fairly lengthy and detailed.

As part of the guidance laid down for the publishing of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the comments received needed to be considered and decisions were required on whether these amendments to the plan be accepted.

Martin explained that the LAF had a role in this process and that he would be grateful for its advice.

He provided members with a copy of a table, which showed the consultation comments received and explained that the views of the LAF from today's discussion would be incorporated. Consultees would be written to and the table with reasoning behind either accepting or rejecting their views would be sent.

Martin explained that the report would then be presented to the Council's Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 26 September and the Executive Board on 16 October 2007. The Committee's views would then be taken on board and the strategy amended accordingly.

Publication was expected in November, ahead of Flintshire and Denbighshire.

In turn Martin went through the comments received and views noted with regards to:

1. Carriage Drivers
2. Lost Ways
3. Planning
4. Cross Border Issues
5. Priorities in ROWIP
6. Motorised Users
7. Car Parking in Rural Areas
8. Diversions of existing PROWs out of Farmyards

There was a general feeling that people did not like walking through farms and it was felt that diversions should be put in place. Members had concerns over the burden placed upon landowners and occupiers by the application of total liability and the cost of diverting paths. Edward felt that a letter sent to MP's who represented Wrexham, asking them to support the legislation currently going through parliament, would be beneficial.

Action: Chair/Secretary to write to Wrexham MP's

31/07 Report from Access Rangers

John Marchant, presented a report prepared by two Access Rangers of work currently underway:

- Sion had recently been spending time dealing with the backlog of general complaints the Council receives and liaising with contractors. 60 footpaths were currently being strimmed. Once completed, the installation of approximately 60 new signposts around Brymbo would start as part of the footpath project in the area.
- Due to bad weather, two new footbridges that were due to be installed on a footpath between Worthenbury and Shocklach this summer, have not yet been erected.
- Depending on cost, the replacement of the standard timber decking boards which the Council currently uses, for ditch crossings and board walks with decking boards that have gritty/rougher surface, is being looked at.
- Sion was due to meet with the Ramblers' Association to discuss various maintenance issues on paths throughout the County. He would be leading a guided walk in October starting from Llanarmon DC, details of which can be found in the Wrexham Parks Countryside and Public Rights of Way Service booklet.
- **Brymbo Path Project**
Alison would be meeting with volunteers from Brymbo to discuss the 'Adopt a Path' scheme. This would cover the Brymbo – Bwlchgwyn circular route, which eventually will appear on the website.
- Alison had also been working on the next project area of Coedpoeth. Maps of individual paths have been produced and the paths surveyed by volunteers from the community.
- Alison reported that dealing with paths affected by this summers crops have had a couple of successes. Unfortunately due to time constraints, she was not able to spend as much time as hoped in this area as the community projects have taken up most of her time.

- The ranger – led walks have proved to be popular so far this year and most have had a good turn out. The rangers have two walks left to do before the end of the year.

32/07 **Countryside Council for Wales**

Alun Price, CCW gave his latest report to the forum.

He reported that there had been no exclusions or restrictions reported in the North Wales area.

He explained that CCW were going through a period of reorganisation behind the scenes.

Foot and Mouth

Clive asked whether he felt happy with the way the Foot and Mouth outbreak had been dealt with. Alun stated that this recent outbreak didn't affect Wales and felt that the directions given by CCW were followed. Both Defra and the Welsh Assembly Government had stated that there was no need for people to stop visiting the countryside and, at the present time, the only impacts on visitor attractions were those which result from the restrictions on animal movements and animal gatherings.

It was felt that mixed messages were being received with regards to these procedures and that Defra inspectors visiting farm land were not allowed to set foot on grass. Karl Praker asked why a decision to close footpaths immediately hadn't been made. Alun stated that any decision to close public rights of way and access land would only be taken where it is clearly necessary to do so.

ACTION: As National Representative, Clive agreed to write to the CCW outlining LAF concerns with regards to how the outbreak had been handled.

33/07 **Definitive Map Modification Orders**

The Parks, Countryside and Rights of Way division had been given the go-ahead to employ a new officer to work on Definitive Map orders. The position would be titled "Team Leader- Definitive Map". Martin explained the new staffing structure within the Rights of Way Section.

Members were pleased with this outcome.

34/07 **Any Other Business**

- **Statutory Guidance**

Margaret simplified the new act, 'Statutory guidance under sections 147 and 147ZA of the Highways Act 1980 relating to the requirement for local authorities to have regard to the needs of people with mobility problems when authorising stiles and gates'.

She felt Wrexham was on top of the Act and that the needs of people with mobility problems when using stiles and gates was being addressed, money permitting.

Members asked whether any further funding or European grants etc were being made available to help Councils make further changes to promote easier access.

ACTION: Chair agreed to write to Minister

- **Dog Fouling**

Members had been made aware of concerns about the amount of dog litter collected in plastic bags and then is tied to bushes, bridges and trees or just dumped alongside public footpaths that run through the National Trust property grounds of Erddig. This was felt to have a negative affect on people wanting to exercise their rights and use these public rights of way. Members believed that the problem could be alleviated through the provision of dog litterbins.

ACTION: Secretary to write to National Trust

It had been brought to Mabyn's attention that a pensioner had been given an on the spot fine for letting his dog foul in a public area. The incident was unfortunate and the gentleman concerned was very apologetic and agreed to pay the fine, though he did suffer some financial hardship in doing so. Mabyn asked whether the Council could have given the pensioner a warning first. Martin stated that the Council took dog fouling very seriously, but the pensioner was within his rights to write to the Chief Environment Officer and that individual circumstances could be looked at.

- **Transportation in the Ceiriog Valley**

Karl reported a positive development within the Ceiriog Valley arising from a Northern Marches Cymru event last year. It had been highlighted that the bus service to the valley was poor. As a result of the event, reorganisation of the bus timetable to connect with trains and other buses in the area had taken place. This was a positive step in the right direction, and it was felt that it could help alleviate some problems with car parking for walkers within the valley.

- **Public Rights of Way – 5 Year Survey Update**

John gave an update of surveys completed and near completion.

He thanked members for their hard work in helping to complete this survey.

35/07 Items for the Next Agenda

- Planning Applications
- Interactive Maps

36/07 Date and Location of Next Meeting

Friday, 9 November 2007 at 1.30 pm in Committee Room 2