

WREXHAM LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

**Annual Report for the Year Ended
31 March 2006**

Chairman's Report

I farm beef, sheep, cereals and roots and my farm is in the Tir Gofal Environmental Scheme. I have served as the Chairman of the Wrexham Local Access forum from its inception, and was proud to be given the mandate to continue in this role for a further three years by the new forum.

The forum has made steady progress over the first three years, during which it made a significant contribution to the successful introduction of access land and has helped to ensure the local authority has progressed with the rights of way improvement plan.

I have been helped in this by my colleagues of the forum, to whom I would like to express my thanks for their efforts. I look forward to continuing this progress with the new forum members who will be able to add their knowledge, experience and expertise to ensuring the forum meets its statutory duty as an advisory body to Wrexham County Borough Council.

Work Plan for the Coming Year

During the coming year, the Local Access forum are expecting to explore, consider and make recommendations to Wrexham County Borough Council in the following areas:

Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIP)

Creation of Registers

Definitive Maps

Definitive Map Modification Orders

Permissive Access to Wynnstay Estate

Signage and Way Marking

Use of Motor Vehicles in the Countryside

Planning Applications

Dogs & Conservation Issues

Introduction

The Wrexham Local Access Forum was established in November 2002. Members to the forum have a three year tenure, and membership changed through application and selection procedure in 2005 with the new forum commencing operation in November 2005.

The Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 required the local authority to create the local access forum. The function of the forum is to advise the authority, the Countryside Council for Wales and others as to the improvement of public access to the land in the County of Wrexham for the purposes of open air recreation, and the enjoyment of the area. However, it must do so with regard to the needs of Land Management and the natural beauty of the area. All meetings of the forum are open to the public.

Annual Report

During 2005 the Council sought applications from members of the public for appointment to the Local Access Forum. Members of the Forum were appointed by Wrexham County Borough Council in November 2005 to create a balance of interested people who use the countryside. The new structure retains eight members of the original forum, as well as seven new members. In February 2006 the forum elected Ieuan Lewis to continue his position as chair and Clive Menzies as deputy chair. This report seeks to provide a brief summary of the work of the forum, the minutes of which are published on Wrexham County Borough Council website or can be viewed at the Guildhall during office hours.

YEAR REVIEWED

Access Land

During the year, the Local Access Forum was not required to provide specific advice on access to open land as no applications for exclusions or closures beyond the statutory prescribed limit had been received.

In general, it is felt that the introduction of Access land has gone well. The forum has sought to increase the number of signs and entrance points to access land, and appears to have a good relationship with the access rangers. It has also sought to ensure the public rights of way on access land continue to be adequately signed. (Detailed in the minutes of 08/4/05, 10/06/05 & 03/02/06)

Wynnstay Estate

The forum has attempted to engaged in correspondence with the Wynnstay Estate with a view to persuading them to review the £10 permit system it currently employs for access. (Detailed in minutes 08/4/05, 10/06/05, 02/09/05, 25/11/05)

Motor Vehicles in the Countryside

Detailed in the minutes of meeting held on 08/04/05, 10/06/05, 25/11/05 & 03/02/06).

Illegal Off Roding

The subject of illegal off road motor vehicles was discussed. The forum received a presentation from North Wales Police, who can only commit a limit resource to tackling this issue. However, the forum did receive a commitment that, where information was collected, it would be acted upon. The forum therefore encourages the public to record details such as vehicle registration and report incidents to the police.

The forum also encouraged Wrexham County Borough Council to look at creating areas where off road activities could be undertaken in a controlled and safe environment. The forum sought to ensure that the council was in receipt of the consultation paper from the Welsh Assembly Government. (25/11/05).

The forum was pleased to be updated upon the efforts of volunteers who were repairing the Wayfarers track. The forum has also pushed Wrexham County Borough Council to allow voluntary groups to assist in the maintenance of other public highways. A criterion now exists for voluntary groups to get involved as detailed in the copied correspondence presented to forum Members on 03/02/06. Tim Stevens did mention that he would be willing to act as a volunteer co-ordinator.

Definitive Map Modification Orders

The forum expressed grave concern that the list of outstanding Definitive Map Modification Orders had increased and wanted to know why nothing had been done by senior managers to increase the resources to resolve the matter. The issue was of such concern that the forum minuted that progress will be reviewed annually. (Detailed in the minutes 10/06/05)

Poor Installation Work by Groundwork

The forum noted that several gates on roads and bridle ways on the equestrian trails had not been installed properly and advised the council that Groundwork should be brought back to do the job properly. (Detailed in the minutes of 10/06/05)

Public Toilets in Llanarmon

The forum sought to ensure these public toilets remained open during the winter months. The Council eventually agreed. (Detailed in the minutes of 10/06/05)

Rights Of Way Improvement Plan

The forum was concerned at the beginning of the year about the progress of the rights of way improvement plan and urged the council to provide resources to achieve this objective. The forum has participated fully in the consultation stage of the rights of way improvement plan, and is informed at every meeting of its progress. However, the forum believes it should have had more input, and concerns were expressed at the methodology employed for carrying out the random sample as well as the matter of cross county boundary paths. The forum sought to have members sit on the Scrutiny Panel but was advised that only elected council members and the Executive Board could sit on the panel. It was a shame that as an advisory body, selected members of the forum were not invited to attend as observers. The Forum is however pleased with progress that is being made under the stewardship of Martin Howorth and eagerly awaits the draft report. (Detailed in the minutes of 08/04/05, 10/06/05, 02/09/05, 25/11/05)

Lost Ways

The forum asked about the progress of the Lost Ways project and was dismayed to hear of the lack of progress (Detailed in minutes of 08/04/05)

Budgeting

The forum is concerned that the budgets for all rights of way work are not ring fenced and could therefore be leached. The forum wrote to the Welsh Assembly Government seeking budgetary ring fence protection for the Rights of Way improvements. Further questions were asked of the CCW representative, who stated money awarded was hypothecated and that the forum need take up the matter with elected members. (Detailed in the minutes 10/06/05 & 03/02/06)