

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held
at Room P4 - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 9th November,
2023 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Irene Brooke
Jenny Cockitt,
Sheila Hampshire
Tracy Hook,
Shan Lewis,
Phil Mundell,
David Smith,
Mark Storey
Anne Underwood (Chair)
County Councillor Sara Burch,

OBSERVERS:

Richard Dickenson	Tomorrow's Tourism
Richard Garner	Public Rights of Way Officer
Paul Keeble	Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management)
Matthew Lewis (Countryside)	Interim Performance, Evaluation and Programme Development Lead for MonLife
Ruth Rourke	Countryside Access Manager
Christian Schmidt	Transport Planning and Policy Officer
Sarah Tindal	Natural Resources Wales

Plus two members of the public

1. Apologies for Absence / Introductions

Apologies were received from members: John Askew, Anthea Fairey, Sylvia Fowles, Martin Sweeney. Apologies were also given by Richard Ray MCC and Bob Campbell Natural Resources Wales. **AU** welcomed members to the meeting. Members and observers introduced themselves. It was noted that Councillor Sara Burch was now the MCC appointed member of the forum.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum meeting of 11th July 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 11 July 2023 were amended to reflect the scope of the discussion on item 5 Active Travel Update so as to read: *"With respect to Castle*

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Meadows members discussed the issues around the active travel proposals including those raised by the cattle grids and it was noted that an invited stakeholder session with Abergavenny Town Council was to be held on Monday 17th July (additions underlined). The revised minutes were accepted (proposed by **IB** and seconded by **JC**).

JC reported back on her attendance at the stakeholder meeting. Members asked about progress on the scheme and a decision on the future use or not of cattle grids. **RER** confirmed that discussions were still ongoing with Welsh Government on the scheme details. **PK** updated on progress with the active travel bridge; despite two attempts to let the contract it had not yet been possible to appoint a contractor, however work has been completed on the ramp access on the west bank sufficient to commence and therefore maintain the planning consent.

4. Lower Wye Valley Tracks and Trails (Report attached)

ML briefly summarised the background to the Lower Wye Valley Tracks and Trails project (previously referred to as the Lower Wye Valley Integrated Recreational Access Strategy) which members were familiar with as a result of previous discussions and introduced **RD** from Tomorrow's Tourism who are undertaking the work on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership.

RD gave a short presentation outlining the work to date and the principles being the approach. The aim was to develop the most practical ways of supporting the requirements of all types of users, while protecting the natural and built environment for current and future generations. The intended outputs being a new strategy and action plan. To achieve this an inclusive process was proposed bringing together all stakeholders through a professionally facilitated, inclusive consultation.

The Strategy will look at ways both to better manage the natural resources of the AONB and also those that enjoy it, responding to the opportunity to support the tracks and trails network and reduce the impact of flooding and erosion. To seek to:

- Encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discouraging any unwanted behaviours.
- Creating an environment, through resources, facilities and education that enable all user groups to harmoniously enjoy all that the Wye Valley AONB has to offer.
- Provide support to landowners and Highway Authority to maintain tracks and trails, and their environments, in a way that ensures both good access for users and protects the natural and heritage features of the area..

When developing the strategy, the focus will be on the outcomes. That is the benefits that implementing the strategy will have on the community, the landscape, biodiversity and heritage.

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RD provided details of the public consultation process that will run until early 2024 and encouraged participation and spreading the message as wide as possible.

RD outlined a request to members to help provide information on intensity and interactions of use across the network within the project area. This information would feed into the wider assessment.

SH asked about the relationship with similar routes in Gloucestershire. **RD & ML** indicated that whilst the project was funded by Welsh Government and therefore was limited to the Welsh part of the AONB liaison with Gloucestershire public rights of way team formed part of the consultations and background work. **AU** noted the heritage value of the network which reflected its historical development. **IB** asked about the role of community councils and the need to produce a practical report with realistic proposals. **RD** agreed that this was the intent and confirmed that community councils were part of the consultation process. **MS** asked if changing the status of paths was part of the project, he drew attention to paths that change their status over their length. **RER** confirmed that such consideration could be part of the process, subject to the relevant legal tests and could form part of the action plan. **RD** asked that the specific route referred to in Mitchell Troy be identified in any response

5. Countryside Access Updates

RER provided an update on Countryside Access projects. The team has been busy in the past month moving records to a new platform. This has included the installation of a new server for CAMS, the countryside access management system, and much work to link the records and ensure our mapping still works, which was still work in progress. Paper records have also been scanned and are being integrated into the new system. It was noted that this work is ongoing and there will be some disruption in next few weeks to ensure the systems all work properly and staff are trained to access the information.

RER & RG explained the proposed changes to display various legal registers and temporary closures within CAMS / the public interactive mapping system. This will significantly improve public access to information and reduce the time taken to maintain and update the information. Members were shown a completed example for Anglesey which illustrated the improved public interface. In response to members questions **RG** explained the desire to improve better base mapping within the interactive mapping as soon as practical.

RER updated members on progress on projects being funded via Wesh Government's Access Improvement Grant, including works at Black Rock Picnic Site, the Community Links project and the new SLA with Ramblers Cymru to support the Paths to

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Communities partnership. **RER** also referred to progress in assessing bridges across the network, in replacing the Treadam bridge on Offa's Dyke Path National Trail and countryside code promotion.

In respect of the access reform proposals recent discussions with Welsh Government had indicated that no primary legislation was planned and so only those proposals that could be undertaken with secondary legislation or changes to guidance were under consideration. **RER** indicated that further discussion between local authorities and Welsh Government was planned with authorities still lobbying for practical changes to reduce complexity and improve delivery, for example removing the need to advertise orders in the current format within newspapers.

Members discussed the proposed revision of the local access forum regulations which had been included in the topics at the recent LAF Chairs meeting attended by **AU** and **IB**. The suggestion that members should be limited to one 3-year term of office, had proved controversial and was opposed by the Chair's meeting. Members continue to be in favour of practical changes to the administration and holding of future meetings, including allowing hybrid meetings, electronic communication etc.

6. Draft Public Space Protection Orders on Dog Controls in Monmouthshire

Members considered the current consultation on the draft Public Space Protection Orders on Dog Controls in Monmouthshire. It was noted that in a very limited number of cases where dogs were proposed to be excluded (sports pitches and play areas) they were crossed by the definitive line of a public rights of way. In each case it was proposed there will not be any restriction on the public rights of way. Members raised questions around the proposed order including how they related to unfenced sports pitches and play areas and a concern restrictions could result in forcing more dog walking out into the surrounding countryside. **JC** asked how this issue, and that of the associated safety concerns of dogs near cattle, was addressed in the countryside code. **RER** responded that the [dog walking code](#) directly addressed this issue and that would form part of the activity identified under agenda item 5. After discussion the forum decide not to respond collectively and leave it individual members to respond as they wished.

7. Natural Resources Wales updates (Bob Campbell, Senior Officer Land Management, South East Wales Operations)

For operational reasons NRW were unable to provide the usual update of NRW's land management and forest operations:

8. Conclusion of the current forum's term of office and recruitment of new forum

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As this was the last meeting of the current forum the secretary offered his thanks for the work of the forum over the last 3 years, for their advice and the individual contributions from members and the chair.

ML outlined the proposed arrangements to recruit a new forum. The County Council meeting on 20 July 2023 had established a new members panel which would consider all applications and report back their recommendations to the County Council for a final decision. The anticipated programme was publicity seeking new appointments by end of November, with a mid-January deadline, consideration by the panel to allow a report to the 29 February 2024 Council meeting and a first meeting of the new forum before the end of March 2024, thereby within the 4 month target between LAFs.

8. Dates of future meetings.

March 2024 to be established for the new forum

AU thanked members for their attendance and support and the meeting closed at 16:30pm.

Signed as a true record of the proceedings:
(Chair)

Date:

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm