

1 WORKSHOP RESPONSES

The public workshop was attended by 27 people. Severn were MCC staff but also present were private individuals, countryside volunteers and representatives of the following organisations:

Monmouth Rambling and Hill Walking Club

Usk U3A

Caldicot U3A

Lower Wye RA

Chepstow Walkers

Monmouthshire LAF Members

The meeting started with a presentation on the processes involved and what assessments the authority was having to make. Welsh Government Guidance for producing a new ROWIP can be found here: - <http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/160711rights-of-way-improvement-plans-en.pdf>

Matthew Lewis the Countryside Manager then put this in context and talked about the Well-Being Act, Service delivery demands and resources.

1.1 THE EXTENT TO WHICH LOCAL RIGHTS OF WAY MEET THE PRESENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF THE PUBLIC

Ruth Rourke gave a presentation on the public rights of way and other types of countryside access available. There are 2,164.83km of prowl 505.78 km of which are in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Footpath 89%, 1927.306 km

Bridleway 5%, 109.31km

Restricted byway 6%, 126.8km

Byway 1.52km

Other highways a, b, c roads 1609.6km

There is still a lack of off road routes for horse riders, cyclists and motor vehicles. There is also a lack of suitable routes for those with mobility and other health issues. The first RoWIP prioritised creating and maintaining bridleways over other routes. It was believed that this should still continue.

Other identified issues were:

- Connecting people with wildlife and landscapes
- Access to woods – uncertain what is allowed. Better promotion of what is available in each woodland is required. There is a desire to make more use of woodland tracks. Maintenance in woodlands can be a problem especially for those with physical and mental health problems.
- Limited access for those with mobility issues – Stiles still remain a problem. The Health Walk sector needs to be pushed and taken more seriously.
- Development of bite sized doorstep opportunities – more circular walks
- Links to green spaces/quality access
- Farm animals were deterrent to users
- Cropping a problem

- Lack of Car parks/toilets
- What do children require? – Education of countryside code important. Wild Tots Group in The Narth is a good example of getting children outside. NRW doesn't make it easy though. Organised walks should be targeted to children/families/schools.
- Crossing points on main roads – several main roads do not have suitable crossing points dividing communities and the network
- What would make people go out? – Better promotion to targeted audiences. Information and confidence. Ambassadors are underutilised they should be the "Go to People". Chepstow Walkers Welcome provide information. There are over 2000+ visitors to their website.

1.2 ENFORCEMENT/MAINTENANCE & POLICY

From March 2012 to March 2018 the Countryside Access Service received 2800 enforcement and 9400 maintenance issues, resolving approximately 55% of enforcement cases and 66% maintenance issues per year. Resourcing was considered a major issue.

It was felt that the general policy (*"The Service must prioritise where it focuses resources and standards to accurately reflect areas of most demand. It must also be able to be adaptable to cover such things as bad weather events"*) was acceptable.

Ian Blomeley the PROW Enforcement Officer gave a presentation on Enforcement with particular regards to the approach to cropping.

1. Do you agree policies should enable rather constrict timely action? Generally this was agreed.
2. How do you want enforcement prioritised? No real consensus but some issues require a more timely approach if possible – such as cropping. It was noticed that some new crops were a problem and some things like long grass (which are a crop to farmers) are not covered by legislation so no enforcement or maintenance can be undertaken.

1.3 BRIDGES

There was a presentation regarding the maintenance of the 1326 bridges on the rights of way network in Monmouthshire. 9% of these bridges need repair or replacement.

All bridge work is currently prioritised according to the prioritisation used for all other maintenance and enforcement issues and includes risk and inconvenience and use. Recently Llangua Bridge in Grosmont was removed, as it was considered highly dangerous. The river is moving very rapidly here and a new site where the river is not ox bowing needs to be sought for replacement of the bridge. The new bridge would need to be at least 13m long, designed for the site, made to order and installed by contractors. It is estimated that the costs of this would be in the region of £27,000

This bridge and others like it will therefore will only be replaced if additional funding is found. There is a question of policy here as the Council has a duty to maintain the network, but with current resources and the number of bridges that need replacing benefits to the general public must be taken into account. The previous bridge was little used but since its removal a few local people have asked for a replacement sighting that it helped supply them with a local walk and was good for their well-being. However for the costs of replacing this bridge, many other smaller bridges on well used paths, could be replaced or fixed. **This resourcing dilemma is something which local people in Grosmont have specifically asked to be looked at.**

What are your views? Is the prioritisation still agreeable?

There was general consensus that the prioritisation for bridges was correct and a fair approach.

1.4 DIVERSIONS/CREATIONS AND EXTINGUISHMENT ORDERS

There are approximately 60 legal orders outstanding. Should these also be prioritised according to “public benefit”? What would this be?

Issues to consider:

- Routes where landowner has paid full costs
- Type of order – town and country planning act might be required for development
- Some diversions are required to resolve obstructions/enforcement

To be consistent with rowip and maintenance prioritisation public benefits could consist of

- Routes that allow more types of user – consistent with aims of rowip of increasing access to those with disabilities/health issues and who have little off road access
- Routes with positive health and safety benefits – such as providing safe off road routes as alternative to busy roads
- Links to amenities/tourism attractions

This proposed prioritisation of legal orders was generally agreed.

1.5 PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

The following comments were made regarding promotion and publicity:

- There is capacity to Link to visit Monmouthshire all types of walks
- Information Boards are required like in Talgarth
- The Tread & Trott route website is missing – this & other routes are being moved and put in one place under visitmonmouthshire.com
- There is a problem with many errors on the Ordnance Survey Maps and the length of time taken to reproduce them.
- There should be a Walking Festival for Monmouthshire?
- CAMS - The User Face is difficult and needs to be improved
- Volunteers can help with publicity and promotion. Efficient use of volunteers to Pathcare promoted routes
- Long distance cycle track/bridleway required

1.6 PRIORITIES

There is a high desire and need to continue providing schemes of improvement where it is of most benefit to the public. Underlying this there is a recognised need to improve the health of the population and provide for their physical and mental well-being. The last RoWIP had the following three priorities

1. To achieve an up-to-date and accessible Definitive Map and Statement (Chapter 6 in the RoWIP)
2. To target improvements on rights of way so greatest public benefit is obtained (Chapter 7 Maintenance and Enforcement)
3. To improve the accessibility of the rights of way network (Chapter 8)

These objectives are all still relevant, but in light of other policy and legislative changes it would be good to review these and the other priorities in the RoWIP to ensure they are still fit for purpose now and for the next ten years. Attendees thought these were still the three most important priorities.

How would you like to see countryside access in Monmouthshire improved in the next 10 years and what would be the highest priority?

Attendees said with regards to priorities there should be:

- Improved strategy for health walking
- Community links
- Connectivity

Maintenance was considered highest priority and looking for more resources.

2 OTHER ISSUES RAISED DURING THE EVENT.

- **Volunteers** – This came up in many discussions and it was clear that volunteering and enabling volunteer groups to take part in maintenance and promotion could be expanded if simple processes, tools and staffing resources were available. It was felt that volunteers were under utilised at present.
- **Library of resources** would be useful.