

Monmouthshire

Local Access Forum

AGENDA ITEM: 7

SUBJECT: COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS IMPROVEMENT GRANT PROJECTS AND UPDATE

MEETING: MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

DATE: 19 JULY 2022

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To update the Forum on changes to the Countryside Access team and related matters.
- 1.2 To bring to the attention of the Local Access Forum changes to the Welsh Government's Access Improvement Grant and to advise members on potential projects for 2022 – 25.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

- 2.1 To approve the Access Improvement Grant projects as proposed

3. BACKGROUND:

- 3.1 Interviews have now taken place and a Community Links Officer has been appointed and is expected to start on 1st August 2022. This is a new, full time post established to enable community volunteering. The post holder will lead on working with volunteers, local path care groups, friends groups, community councils and others to help facilitate volunteer and community input to resolving outstanding issues. The post will support both practical volunteer and community tasks and facilitate groups independent involvement. To support this role a community links project is proposed within the 2022-25 Access Improvement Grant.
- 3.2 The aim of the Welsh Government's Access Improvement Grant (AIG) is to support improving access to/on the Public Rights of Way network, open access land, green and blue space in Wales. It was established in 2020-2021 providing funding to local authorities (and Pembrokeshire and Brecon Beacons National Park Authorities). A further £5.6 million has been allocated in 2022-2025 to enable these improvements to continue.
- 3.3 The budget is allocated to authorities via a formula, based on length of Public Rights of Way, total access land and population. In Monmouthshire this amounts to an allocation of £65,128 in 2022-2023 and £80,775 in the years 2023-2025.
The funding can be used to support projects in the following areas:
 - PF1 Physical improvements to existing routes (e.g. surface, furniture)

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- PF2 Improvements to information and promotion (e.g. signage, way marking, leaflets, panels)
- PF3 Improvements to access/egress points to open access land and green space
- PF4 Improvements to accessing water for water related recreation (e.g. access/egress points, new signage/information, wash down facilities)
- PF5 Increasing under-represented groups' access to the outdoors (e.g. accessibility improvements, information)

3.4 Two funding conditions have come into existence from 2023-24:

- the existence of a fully functioning Local Access Forum
- authorities must have a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) in place (fully signed off/approved by respective cabinets)

3.5 Funding allocations will be reduced by 25% for each element – so if an authority is non-compliant on both then their allocation will be reduced by 50%. Any savings will be reallocated to other authorities. Monmouthshire County Council is compliant with both conditions.

3.6 The projects that Monmouthshire has currently proposed have been submitted to Welsh Government in draft form. All of the projects relate to Monmouthshire's Well-Being Plan and Monmouthshire's Countryside Access Improvement Plan, as well as other national and local policies and plans.

3.7 The projects are as outlined in the table below:-

Title	Supporting Area	2022-23 £	2023-2024 £	2024-2025 £
Bridges (to review, repair and replace a minimum of 5 bridges annually on a rolling programme)	PF1 & 5	20,000	30,000	30,000
Stile changes To reduce the number of stile issues on the prow network by purchasing gates to be used where permission is given by landowner	PF1 & 5	10,000	20,000	20,000
Community Links <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide materials for local community volunteer groups to improve public rights of way and green spaces particularly items such as signage and to help promote access opportunities. • To develop and provide training materials such as videos to assist 	PF1 & PF2	16,000	15,000	15,000

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<p>landowners and community volunteer groups understand responsibilities and enable them to be actively engaged with maintenance and promotion of their access networks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review pathcare and health routes, consider priority areas for new circular routes and development of promotional material. (Note this may be taken out and delivered in house) • To produce videos of at least 2 routes, or Countryside Sites a year, to show what users can expect from surfacing, gradients etc) 				
<p>Rogiet Countryside Park The removal of wet and uneven areas with a stone dust finished pathway building on previous works creating a pathway suitable for the national organisation 'parkrun' to participate their runs every Saturday and Sunday all year round. Proposed changing of kissing gate to a more user friendly entrance. The site will also become fully accessible for those with mobility issues, being suitable for mobility scooters, wheelchairs and also pushchairs around the site</p>	PF1 & PF5	15,000		
<p>Safer routes to school - Shirenewton A short section of path becomes very muddy during the winter, this will benefit greatly from a new tarmac surface. This would allow for a much improved off road route to school for the children of Shirenewton Primary school whilst also improving the footpath for the wider community.</p>	PF1 & PF5	9,128	0	0
<p>Three Castles (Grosmont, Skenfrith and White Castle)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022-23 To use volunteers to survey circular routes to make up 6 routes (2 per castle) to link in with the Three Castles Walk these can be 	PF2, PF1	500	20,000	20,000

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<p>walked individually or as a combination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2023-24 Implement any works identified from the surveys • 2023 -25 To appoint a consultant to provide promotional material and events to re-promote the Three Castles Walk to targeted audiences. Also to create a walking app that helps people make active travel choices or with a health element. (Note This to be confirmed as relies on availability of information from other service areas and potential on going costs) This links with Community Links officer project also • 2022-23 To purchase and waymark these circular routes. Path to be relaunched by public event in 2024/25 • 2023- 25 To set up a “Friends of Three Castles Walk” to actively promote the route, link to business opportunities locally and support maintenance of the route. 				
<p>BlackRock Car Park Links Improve access from the Car Park to link to the viewing platforms, picnic benches and the Wales Coast Path primarily for those with mobility issues. These improvements would also aid the fishermen who use the car park to gain access to the water’s edge.</p>	<p>PF1 PF3: PF4: PF5:</p>		<p>10,000</p>	
<p>Ponds at Castle Meadows Improve access to the pond on Castle Meadows. This would allow for greater access for school groups and those with mobility issues to carry out pond dipping exercises.</p>	<p>PF1: PF4: PF5:</p>	<p>£5000</p>		

3.8 In addition to AIG the Wye Valley AONB unit can make applications under Welsh Government’s Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) grant which supports, amongst other themes, sustainable tourism. This can include complementary access improvements where meeting specific needs.

3.9 The AONB unit’s bid, as with the AIG also over three years, includes Lower Wye Valley Tourism & Access Improvements:

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- Wye Valley Walk enhancements - at Wyesham & within the Piercefield estate to make the path safer and more convenient for users
- Integrated Access Strategy - Support to manage the necessary engagement and consultation, and the preparation of an integrated countryside access strategy in the Monmouthshire part of the Lower Wye Valley as discussed at previous LAF meetings.

3.10 The proposed projects are under discussion with Welsh Government and if approved will be the subject of further reports to the forum.

4. **AUTHOR:**

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