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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held
at Room P4 - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Thursday, 26th January, 2023
at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: A. Underwood (Chair)

A.Fairey, J. Cockitt, S. Fowles, S. Hampshire, T. Hook, I.Brooke,
S. Lewis, P. Mundell, D. Smith, M. Storey
County Councillor Ben Callard,

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Tom Arnold	Community Links Officer, Countryside Access
Robert Campbell	Natural Resources Wales
Matthew Lewis (Countryside)	Interim Performance, Evaluation and Programme Development Lead for MonLife
Richard Ray	Paralegal
Ruth Rourke	Countryside Access Manager
Sarah Tindal	Natural Resources Wales

1. Apologies for Absence/Introductions

Apologies were received from members: John Askew and Martin Sweeney. It was also noted that Paul Keeble, MCC had sent their apologies. **AU** welcomed members to the meeting. Members and observers introduced themselves.

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 19th July 2022

The minutes of the meeting of 19 July 2022 were accepted (proposed by **PM** and seconded by **BC**).

4. Community Links: Progress Report

TA introduced himself and gave a presentation on his work to date, in supporting community volunteering. This included supporting existing groups and volunteers as well as providing opportunities for new groups to develop.

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PM asked about training and **TA** indicated training included generic training on rights of way law, landowner consent etc. and more detailed training on identifying paths, surveying, safety etc. More in depth training would be provided for leaders, for example on risk assessment, the aim being to equip groups to be self-supported. **PM** also asked about equipment and **RER** indicated that a stock of equipment was being built up and individual conversations taking place with groups about the tools they could use. In response to further questions, re first aid training, **RER** confirmed that this was available, and regarding biosecurity **RER** confirmed this was included especially in respect to bird flu. **RC** referred to NRW's existing biosecurity guidance.

Members discussed the demographics of volunteers and **TA** advised that it was still predominately older volunteers but that conversations were underway including with Flying Start regarding a Dad's group to widen the demographics. **RER** indicated discussions with MonLife's youth and outdoor services were ongoing to increase the capacity to support wider volunteering.

PM raised the issue of the flow of information between groups and the access team, **RER** indicated that recent changes to CAMS had hopefully improved this and it was recognised that a two-way flow of information was essential to enable and record volunteer work.

AU commented that this was good progress and had the potential to attract local funding. **RER** agreed and part of this new approach was passing local survey information back to Community Councils and being more realistic about timescales and improving communications.

PM asked if an updated countryside access team structure could be circulated (subsequently sent to LAF members).

The proposed terms of reference for the improvement sub group were agreed and further suggestions for membership of the group were invited.

AU raised the linked proposal to establish a Wentwood sub group. **RC** indicated that a new Wentwood Streeting Group was in the process of being re-established with representation from the Police, Monmouthshire CC, Newport CC, Woodland Trust, NRW and Tilhill Forestry. It was intended that once the group had recommenced it would expand to include LAF / community representation.

5. Gwent Green Grid Partnership (GGGP) - Green Corridors Strategic Access Plan

The progress on the Gwent Green Grid Partnership regional access strategy was noted.

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

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RC provided an update of NRW's land management and forest operations. There had been some staff changes in the local team: Tim Jeffery is the new senior officer for the area. Ioan Williams is standing in as our Land & Asset Manager and a new biodiversity officer is in place for 2 years, Elenor Yoxall.

Other updates included investment in the Whitestone natural playground in the spring and working with key stakeholders to improve access within Wentwood. Work to address Ash dieback is continuing across the area and a large amount of Birch has been removed from the Beacon Hill area as part of a Heathland restoration project.

The relevant Forest Resource Plans can be accessed on line (written update with links subsequently circulated). **RC** is happy to tailor future updates to meet the LAF's information needs.

A discussion ensued on the continuing issues of off road motorbike use and the importance of reporting issues. **AU** suggested that the process needs further explanation / public feedback after specific operations to encourage ongoing reporting.

7. NRW Access Reform Programme Briefing Note December 2022

8. Future work programme / Date of next meeting

The secretary presented the proposed work programme for the remaining meetings of the LAF's current term, which was agreed.

The forum agreed that the Secretary will endeavour to arrange the next meeting in April, potentially at NRW's Monmouth offices

AU thanked members for their attendance and the meeting closed at 16:15pm.

The meeting ended at 4.15 pm

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