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Monmouthshire
Local Access Forum
Annual Report
22/23



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Version Control

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Chair's Foreword

This Report covers the second year of the current Forum from 26 April 2022.

I am the elected Chair, and my Deputy is Irene Brookes. Our Secretary is Matthew Lewis, Environment and Culture Manager, MonLife and meetings are attended by Ruth Rourke, Countryside Access Manager, Paul Keeble, Group Engineer Highways and Flood Management and observers from Natural Resources Wales.

Details of our workload for the year are set out in the Review below. Thankfully this year the Local Access Forum has been able to return to face to face meetings following the disruption of the Covid 19 pandemic. This a very welcome return and allows the forum to operate more effectively.

It is pleasing to see very good attendance of members at our meetings and I very much appreciate the contribution made by all the members and their wide range of knowledge and experience.

Anne Underwood, Chair

Secretary's Report

This report marks the completion of the second year of the current LAF from its meeting on 26 April 2022 to January 2023.

During the period one member resigned but the forum has continued to operate with membership above the statutory minimum. The appointing authority's representative changed as a result of the local elections in May 2022. Councillor Ben Callard replaced Cllr Ann Webb as the authority's nominated representative on the forum.

The provisions of The Countryside Access (Local Access Forum) (Wales) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020, which allowed for virtual meetings, came to an end on 31 December 2021 necessitating a return to face to face meetings.

Subsequent meetings on 26 April 2022, 19 July 2022 and 26 Jan 2023 have all been held face to face, with public agendas available on the Council's web site.

The LAF members continue to contribute to the resolution and development of countryside access issues and policy in Monmouthshire. We are very grateful for their voluntary input and for the experience and advice they provide and their commitment to the work of the forum.

The forum has been supported through the continuing commitment of officers from Natural Resource Wales, and across countryside access, highway, and legal teams with Monmouthshire County Council.

Matthew Lewis, Secretary

The Year reviewed

These are some of the issues where the LAF have advised and been consulted: -

1. Countryside Access Improvement Plan

The forum has received updates on progress in implementing the Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) including staffing changes, partnership arrangements and grant / project delivery. The LAF received an update on the work of the new Community Links Officer and how this was supporting community volunteering, working with local path care groups, community councils and others. The LAF supported the identification of resources from the Countryside Access Improvement Grant to support this work.

The LAF identified the need for an improvement sub group to help support the implementation of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan and has agreed terms of reference for this new group.

The LAF has supported and participated in regional partnership working under the Gwent Green Grid Programme to help develop a common approach to access management and identify strategic improvements to the access network across Greater Gwent.

2. Natural Resources Wales

Natural Resources Wales have provided regular updates on land management and forestry operations of interest to the forum. The forum has appreciated this approach and the information provided and questions answered.

3. Consultations

The forum members contributed to a response to Welsh Government's outline proposals for the Sustainable Farming Scheme. Members were concerned that the exclusion of maintenance of existing rights of way as a mandatory requirement would undermine the scheme objectives and that the proposals lacked clear and effective consultation arrangements with local authority rights of way teams and the local access forum.

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Work Carried Out in 2022/23

No	Item	On work programme or additional	When Done
	Membership		
1.	Future work programme and sub groups	Yes	26 April 2022 & 26 January 2023
	Terms of Reference Improvement sub group		26 January 2023
	Membership update	Additional	19 July 2022
	Countryside Access Improvement Plan		
2	Countryside Access improvement Grant projects and update	Yes	19 July 2022
	Partnership Working: Gwent Green Grid Partnership		26 April 2022, 19 July 2022 & 26 January 2023
	Community Links programme		26 January 2023
	Staffing, CAIP delivery and issues		26 April 2022
	Consultations		
3.	Sustainable Farming Scheme outline proposals (Welsh Government)	Additional	November 2022
	Other matters		
4.	Annual Report 20/21	Yes	26 April 2022
	Natural Resources Wales updates		19 July 2022 & 26 January 2023

Future Work Programme

The future work programme for the remaining meetings of the current forum (in May, July, and November 2023) was discussed and agreed at the 26 January 2023 meeting and is appended (Appendix 2).

The current forum member's period of office (3 years from the first meeting) expires on 24 November 2023 and so arrangements will be put in hand during the summer to start the recruitment of a new forum.

Role of the Forum

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities and National Parks, to establish Local Access Forums (LAFs). These forums advise Natural Resources Wales (NRW), local authorities and National Park authorities on ways in which local access can be improved.

The statutory purpose of LAFs is to advise on the improvement of public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area in which they are established. LAF's must have regard to the needs of land management, natural beauty, flora, fauna, and geological and physiographical features.

The following bodies must have regard to any relevant advice given by the LAF: National Park authority, the highway authority, Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Government and, for matters relating to defence or security, the Secretary of State.

The forums must have a balance between:

- Users of access land and local rights of way; and
- Landowners and occupiers of access land and land with rights of way.

People with other interests especially relevant to the area will also be represented.

The Regulations specify there should be between 12 and 22 members, including the Chair and the Deputy. In addition, the Chair may invite other individuals and organisations to observe and give advice.

Members are appointed by the Appointing Authority the local Highway Authority or National Park Authority. Monmouthshire County Council is the appointing authority for the Monmouthshire LAF which covers the administrative County of Monmouthshire outside the boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park. It includes the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Beauty within the county.

Within the area there are Registered Commons and 1657 Kilometres of registered Public Rights of Way. There is in addition a substantial length of County Unclassified Roads, the responsibility of the Highway Section, many of which are un-surfaced.

Monmouthshire County Council and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority have a Delegated Responsibility Agreement covering most aspects of the management of Public Rights of Way within the National Park.

Contacts

Monmouthshire LAF Secretary

Matthew Lewis
Environment and Culture Manager
MonLife
Monmouthshire County Council
County Hall, The Rhadyr
Usk NP15 1GA

Tel: 01633 644855

Email: countryside@monmouthshire.gov.uk

More details on the Monmouthshire LAF are available at [Monmouthshire Local Access Forum \(LAF\) - MonLife](#)

This includes link to the LAF agendas, reports and minutes on the Council's meetings calendar under the appropriate dates [Committee details - Local Access Forum \(monmouthshire.gov.uk\)](#) If not available please contact the Secretary.

Appendix 1: Forum Membership

a) 2020/21 Membership (to 24 November 2023)

NAME	INTERESTS
Anne Underwood – (Chair)	Walking and horse-riding
Irene Brooke – (Vice chair)	Landowner and business representative
John Askew	Vehicular and motorised users
Councillor Ben Callard	Monmouthshire County Council representative
Jenny Cockitt	Landowner, natural environment
Gordon Davies	Walking, education and young people's access
Anthea Fairey	Chair of Friends of Castle Meadows
Sylvia Fowles	Disabled Riding, conservation & history
Sheila Hampshire	Farming, wildlife and countryside access
Tracy Hook	Walking and horse-riding
Shan Lewis	Walking and healthy lifestyles
Phil Mundell	Walking user and volunteer
David Smith	Walking & climbing user, volunteer leader healthy walking group
Mark Storey	Cycling, climbing & walker
Martin Sweeney	Outdoor pursuits

Appendix 2: Future Work Programme

Item	Background	Reporting Arrangements	Progress / Plans
Standard Items:			
Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP)	Progress in implementing the approved CAIP	Regular report	See Delivery Plan – summary report April 23
Performance Measures	MonLife Delivery Plan performance measures of CAMS issues	Regular report	See Delivery Plan – summary report April 23
Funding	Progress on and opportunities for external funded & MCC capital funded countryside access projects programmes	Regular report	CAIP bid reported to LAF April 22
Consultations	Consultations to the LAF on relevant matters as required	Report to LAF	Sustainable Farming Scheme response Nov 22 As required
Natural Resource Wales (NRW) updates	Update on forestry operations and access related issues	Regular report	Standing Agenda Item
Working Groups:			
Improvement subgroup (Proposed)	To be established to support working with local communities to identify future improvements	Regular report	TOR LAF 26 Jan 23
Wentwood subgroup (Proposed)	To seek to re-establish liaison arrangements in respect of Wentwood (with forestry managers and Newport CC)	Report as required	Discussions underway with key stakeholders to re-establish a Wentwood group
Gwent Access Group	To participate in the regional access group	Report as required	Group met July 22; Consultants appointed Nov 22 and workshop planned Feb 23
Work Programme Items			
Definitive Map Modification Order (DDMO) Claims	To review the number of claims and their prioritisation	Report to future meeting	Report to Oct 23 meeting

Welsh Government Access Reform	To receive any updates on progress on the access reforms	Report as required	Updates as received
Wye Valley Unclassified County Roads (UCRs)	To consider the development of an inclusive user-strategy for all lower Wye unclassified county roads and related countryside access network	Report to future meeting	Project Plan / Brief under preparation by AONB: Planned report to LAF April 23
Forest Resource Plans	To participate in the consultation on Natural Resource Wales (NRW) Wye Valley South Forest Resource Plan	Report to future meeting	Potential consultees identified Programme tbc
