

Monmouthshire County Council Local Access Forum

Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum

Held at the Council chambers, County hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA

on Wednesday 11th February 2026 at 12.30 pm

PRESENT:

MEMBERS:

Phillip Allsopp	PA	
Irene Brooke	IB	
Anthea Fairey		AF
Anthony Easson	AE	
Barbara Heys		BH
Shan Lewis	SL	
Ian Mawdsley	IM	
Phil Mundell (chair)	PM	
Sallie Roderick	SR	
Jack Thurston	JT	
Anne Underwood	AU	
Kelvin Varney		KV

ADVISERS/OBSERVERS

Richard Garner, Local Access Forum Secretary	RG
Colette Bosley, Monmouthshire County Council	CB
Richard Ray, Monmouthshire County Council	RR
Andrew Blake, Wye Valley National Landscape (online)	AB
Celyn Davies, Wye Valley National Landscape	CD
Ruth Waycott, Wye Valley National Landscape	RW
Bob Campbell, Natural Resources Wales	BC
Sarah Tindal, Natural Resources Wales	ST
And two members of the public/observers	

Welcome

LAF meeting opened with RG going through general housekeeping, including recording of transcript of meeting for the purpose of helping with minutes, all present agreed to this.

1. Apologies for Absence/introductions

Apologies were received from members John Askew, Terence Mead, Bethany Handley, Huw Watkins, Rhys Wynne-Jones and from Monmouthshire County Council; Ruth Rourke and Carl Touhig.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received

3. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum meeting of 9th September 2025.

The minutes of the meeting of 9th September 2025 were accepted,

Proposed: BH

Seconded: KV

4. Actions arising from the previous meeting not on the agenda:

Wentwood Steering Group:

A meeting of the Steering Group had taken place, although attendance had been limited, largely due to unforeseen circumstances including the impacts of the flooding, RG reported that the meeting nonetheless identified a number of actions to take forward.

It was confirmed that a further meeting would be arranged later this year.

ACTION: Set up Wentwood steering group meeting and report back to LAF - RG

5. Management update. To consider resourcing for countryside access

(Colette Bosley, Countryside, Destination, Environment Manager)

(Countryside Access Service Update document attached to agenda)

A management and resourcing update was presented by CB, including talking to the Countryside Access Service Update document provided by Ruth Rourke, Countryside Access Manager.

Organisational changes:

CB confirmed she had assumed responsibility following the retirement of Matthew Lewis.

Countryside Access now sits within the Place and Community Wellbeing Directorate, alongside planning, regeneration, transport, leisure, culture and heritage.

Staffing updates:

As per access service update, Funding secured via Access Improvement Grant funding.

Funding and budgets:

An indicative capital allocation for Rights of Way is proposed for the forthcoming financial year, subject to Council approval.

Funding remains volatile, and officers advised that while grant funding continues, long-term guarantees cannot be made.

Weather impacts:

Ongoing recovery from recent storms, including Storm Claudia, is placing pressure on resources.

Bridge damage and closures remain a significant issue, with approximately 25 bridge projects anticipated during 2026.

Strategic context:

Work continues under the Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy, including a climate risk assessment being produced with NRW.

Community engagement:

Continued emphasis on partnership working with volunteer groups and community organisations.

Discussion highlights:

SR queried securing funding for the future -CB confirmed 2 years access improvement grant, but always on the lookout for more, but can be difficult to predict.

The LAF expressed general appreciation for the work of the community links officers with volunteer groups across Monmouthshire.

AE raised a concern regarding the prolonged closure of a public footpath adjacent to the landfill

site in Caldicot, Officers confirmed awareness and noted the complexity of enforcement and multi-agency responsibility, a fuller update can be provided outside of the LAF meeting.

6. Wheeling and PhotoTrails Chepstow Park Woods (Ruth Waycott, Wye Valley National Landscape Team/ NRW Sara Tindal)

A presentation was delivered showcasing work undertaken to improve off-road accessibility.

Key points raised:

Workshops with accessibility specialists and wheelchair users demonstrated both opportunities and challenges associated with different surfaces and terrain.

Successful initiatives included:

- Accessible bridges and routes near Ross-on-Wye.

- An “Off-road Wheeling” weekend, attended by around 100 people.

- Wheelchair rambles and accessible benches at key viewpoints.

Recent work had focused on Chepstow Park Wood, with an 8km accessible route surveyed and promoted through PhotoTrails.

Emphasis was placed on enabling access to existing routes rather than creating new ones, and on providing accurate information to help users make informed decisions.

Discussion highlights:

Members welcomed the initiative and highlighted the positive impact on inclusion and wellbeing.

The value of partnerships with NRW and volunteer groups was emphasised.

Members discussed potential for replication elsewhere, subject to funding and site suitability.

IM queried the forestry works, with tracks having v large stones used, without a top dressing. That this then makes the online content out of date and makes the route less accessible, NRW responded that they are aware of this issue and are working with their contractors on ways to address this.

ACTION: Officers to scope whether elements of the Chepstow Park Woods accessibility model could be expanded to other suitable sites within Monmouthshire, including funding implications.

7. Tracks and Trails project update (Presentation attached to agenda)

Tracks and trails steering group minutes available online here:

<https://www.wyevalley-nl.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/lowerwyetracksandtrails/>

Celyn Davies, Wye Valley National landscape, made a presentation on the current position of the Tracks and Trails project and Steering Group.

The project originated in early 2024 following public consultation and development of a Strategy and Action Plan.

A Steering Group was established in October 2024, with five meetings to date, including the December 2025 workshop.

Site visits had taken place at:

Chapel Hill Road (Tintern)

Grove Road / Horseway (Whitebrook)

A consultant's report for 2 pilot areas assessing the condition of unsealed unclassified roads (UCRs) was completed and subsequently revised.

Key recurring issues identified included: erosion, drainage, vegetation encroachment, signage gaps, heritage degradation, misuse, and ecological sensitivity.

Concerns were raised regarding Appendix E of the report, intended to clarify legal and access matters; publication has been delayed pending legal input.

The next meeting of the steering group is due to take place on the 25th February 2026

Discussion highlights:

Members emphasised the importance of recognising the impacts on residents and communities, which were believed to not be sufficiently addressed in the consultant's report.

It was agreed that decision-making should remain with the Steering Group, with progress reported to the full LAF.

ACTION: Steering Group to convene a further meeting, with attendance from a legal officer and Highways Records Manager, to resolve concerns about Appendix E.

ACTION: Steering Group to prioritise surveyed routes and bring forward recommendations for phased implementation.

8. Natural Resources Wales(NRW) update

(Bob Campbell Senior Officer Land Management & Sarah Tindal, Senior Officer People and Places, Southeast Wales)

(Operational update attached to agenda)

Ongoing tree safety works, particularly relating to ash dieback.

Drainage and culvert maintenance across the woodland road network.

Bridge repairs and reinstatement following storm damage.

Challenges in maintaining forest roads beyond forestry operational standards due to funding limitations.

Acknowledgement of concerns regarding surface materials affecting accessibility.

Open Access land review periods extended from 15 to 20 years, with the next review now due in 2034.

ACTION: NRW to report back to LAF on options for improving consistency of surface materials and accessibility on forest roads where feasible.

9. Dates and timing of next meetings and locations

Next meeting agreed as:

10am on Wednesday 13th May 2026

Venue to be confirmed