



Monmouthshire
Local Access Forum
Annual Report
25/26



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Chair's Foreword

To follow

Phil Mundell, Chair

Secretary's Report

This report marks the start of the third and final year of the current LAF, from its first meeting on 2nd May 2024.

The forum has continued to operate with membership above the statutory minimum. The appointing authority's representative changed in Autumn 2025. Councillor Anthony Easson replaced Councillor Sara Burch as the authority's nominated representative on the forum.

Meetings were held face to face in accordance with the local access forum regulations

Meetings were held on 13th May 2025, 9th September 2025 and 11th February 2026, with public agendas available on the Council's web site. The meeting planned for November 2025 was postponed to 11th February 2026 due to flooding across the county.

The 3-year period of appointment expired at the end of November and the Council started to make arrangements for the appointment of a new forum leading to the appointment of new members on 29 February 2024.

The LAF members continued 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, highways, and legal teams with Monmouthshire County Council.

Richard Garner, Secretary

The Year reviewed

These are some of the issues where the LAF have advised and been consulted (2025–2026):

1. Countryside Access Improvement Plan

The Forum has continued to receive regular updates on the implementation of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP), including service delivery, staffing changes, funding, and partnership working. Particular focus has been given to the ongoing role of community engagement and the work of community links officers and volunteers, which the LAF has recognised as a key strength in maintaining and improving access across Monmouthshire.

The Forum has also considered wider strategic and operational pressures affecting delivery, including limited and short-term grant funding, organisational change, and the impacts of severe weather events on the network. These factors have influenced priorities, particularly in relation to bridge repairs, drainage, and recovery works following storm damage.

Members have continued to support the development of the Lower Wye Valley Tracks and Trails project. Over the year, this has progressed through consultation, site visits, and the preparation and review of a consultant's report, identifying key issues such as erosion, drainage, signage, ecological sensitivity, and conflicting use. While delays in the project have been a concern, the Forum has maintained its support for the need to address these challenges and has emphasised the importance of community engagement and clear decision-making structures.

The Forum has also received updates on accessibility initiatives, including work in partnership with the Wye Valley National Landscape and Natural Resources Wales to improve off-road access. This has included schemes such as PhotoTrails and accessible route development at Chepstow Park Wood, demonstrating opportunities to enhance inclusion by improving information and usability of existing routes.

2. Natural Resources Wales

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have continued to provide regular operational updates on forestry management, access issues, and wider organisational changes. The Forum has valued this continued engagement, particularly during a period of significant change within NRW, including budget reductions, a shift in strategic priorities, and reduced capacity within access and recreation functions.

Updates have included ongoing work on tree safety (including ash dieback), drainage and culvert maintenance, wildfire response, and storm recovery works. The Forum has also discussed challenges in maintaining forest road surfaces to an accessible standard and has highlighted the importance of consistency in materials and design to support all users.

The LAF has continued to emphasise the importance of NRW's involvement, recognising its value in supporting effective communication, partnership working, and informed decision-making across the access network.

3. Consultations, Projects and Other Matters

The Forum has considered a range of projects and updates relating to countryside access and infrastructure. This has included Active Travel schemes across Monmouthshire, with presentations highlighting the development of strategic route networks, funding processes, and monitoring data demonstrating increased usage for commuting and school journeys.

The Forum has also reviewed its future work programme, reaffirming priorities such as funding, performance monitoring, community engagement, bridge infrastructure, and access to major developments. This has included continued support for subgroup working, particularly in relation to Tracks and Trails and proposed improvement projects.

In addition, the Forum has discussed matters relating to representation and engagement, including ongoing efforts to recruit members from underrepresented sectors such as landowners and equestrian users, and continued improvements to communication, including the use of digital systems and mapping tools.

Work Carried Out in 2025/26

No	Item	On work programme or additional	When Done
1.	Countryside Access Improvement Plan		
	Countryside Access improvement Grant projects and update	Yes	13 May 2025, 9 September 2025 & 11 February 2026
	Lower Wye Tracks and Trails sub group	Yes	13 May 2025, 9 September 2025 & 11 February 2026
2.	Consultations		
	Maintenance prioritisation scheme review	Yes	13 May 2025
	Local flood risk management strategy consultation (Monmouthshire County Council)	Additional	18 September 2025
	Caldicot Multi-User Route (MUR) Phase 1 (Monmouthshire County Council)	Additional	4 August 2025
	Wales Coast Path - Links and Loops Wales Coast Path - Least Restrictive Access (Burroughs on behalf of Monmouthshire county Council)	Additional	28 March 2025
3.	Other matters		

No	Item	On work programme or additional	When Done
4.	Active Travel Update	Yes	9 September 2025
	Natural Resources Wales land management, forest operations and recreational policy updates	Yes	13 May 2025, 9 September 2025 & 11 February 2026
	Community engagement and volunteering	Yes	13 May 2025, 9 September 2025 & 11 February 2026

Future Work Programme

The future work programme for the new forum was discussed and agreed at the 10 June 2026 meeting and is appended (Appendix 2).

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 National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural 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

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More details on the Monmouthshire LAF are available at [Countryside Access - 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) Membership (to May 2027)

NAME	INTERESTS
Phil Mundell – (Chair)	Steering Group member of Chepstow Walkers are Welcome, volunteer walk leader Chepstow Walking Festival, MCC Pathcare Volunteer and Chepstow Walk for Health leader. Interests active walking promotion and volunteering.
Barbara Heys– (Deputy chair)	Walker in the Wye Valley. Links with the WI, Llandogo Village Produce Association and GWT.
Anne Underwood	Former horse rider and now British Horse Society area representative. Previous chair of the LAF.
Anthea Fairey	Chair of the Friends of Castle Meadows, supporting the management of the site, volunteer and educational activity. Interest in education and supporting young people to access the countryside
Councillor Anthony Easson (from 9 September 2025)	Monmouthshire County Council representative
Bethany Handley (To June 2026)	Disability activist and wheelchair user. Experience of auditing and promoting routes for people with mobility impairments and links with disability groups and campaigns.
Huw Watkins	Experience of countryside access issues gained during former police career. Member of Trail Rider's Fellowship and the Auto Cycle Union and has links with local groups.
Ian Mawdsley	Vice chair of Wye Valley Community Council and a member of the MCC/Community Councils Wye Valley Villages Group (leading on sustainable transport). He walks and canoes. Trustee of GWT.
Irene Brooke	Farms in the Wye Valley Previous deputy chair of the LAF.
Jack Thurston	Chair of Abergavenny Cycling Group and walks cycles and swims. He has been involved in active travel mapping and promotion locally and in the Senedd.
John Askew	The local representative of GLASS (The Green Lane Association) and has previously assisted on developing a voluntary scheme. Links to the 4x4 fraternity.
Kelvin Varney	Rights of way officer for South Wales for the Trail Riders Fellowship and a member of GLASS. He also walks and cycles, and volunteers.
Phillip Allsopp	Founder of Lanvapley Walking Group and an MCC Pathcare volunteer.

Rhys Wynne-Jones	Previously project lead for the joint MCC/Ramblers "Paths for Communities Project" which is promoting voluntary involvement in rights of way in Magor and Undy, Usk and Monmouth. Interest in supporting access for disadvantaged communities.
Sallie Roderick	Llanishen Area Public Rights of Way Group. A public health background and interest in identifying and overcoming barriers to individuals gaining the health benefits of countryside access.
Councillor Sara Burch (to 13 May 2025)	Monmouthshire County Council representative
Shan Lewis	Interest in volunteering, healthy lifestyles and meeting diverse needs. Volunteering links in Abergavenny.
Terence Mead	MCC countryside volunteer, Pathcare volunteer and has links to Gwent Wildlife Trust. He has run stone walling courses.

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	Future Meetings via regular MCC operational update
Performance Measures	MonLife Delivery Plan performance measures of CAMS issues	Regular report	Future Meetings via regular MCC operational update
Funding	Progress on and opportunities for external funded & MCC capital funded countryside access projects programmes	Regular report	Future Meetings via regular MCC operational update
Consultations	Consultations to the LAF on relevant matters as required	Report to LAF	As required
Natural Resource Wales (NRW) updates	Update on forestry operations and access related issues	Regular report	Future Meetings via regular NRW operational update
Working Groups:			
Improvement subgroup (Proposed)	To be established to support working with local communities to identify future accessibility improvements, initially focussed on Chepstow Park Wood (photo trails) and then Wentwood Forest for example.	Regular report	Model TOR and agreement to establish LAF 11 June 2024; Reconfirmed May 2025. Proposed to start 10 June 2026
Lower Wye Valley Tracks and Trails subgroup	Sub group established to act as part of the Tracks and Trails project steering group	Regular report	Update future meetings
Gwent Access Group	To participate in the regional access group as required (currently dormant)	Report as required	As required
Work Programme Items			
Review of the existing prioritisation system for public	To review the operation of the prioritisation system	Report to future meeting	Update future meeting

path orders legal orders			
Bridges	To consider the asset management plan & capital programme	Regular report	Appended list to MCC operational update.
Community Engagement and Volunteering	To consider the volunteering and community engagement programme	Report to future meeting	As needed
Welsh Government Access Reform	To receive any updates on progress on the access reforms	Report as required	Updates as received
Communication to wider audience	Communicating LAF achievements/work to wider audiences	Reports by members for the LAF	As needed
Active travel	Update by Active travel on the work programme, including consultations	Report as required	As required
Large development access	To update on large developments, such as those in the Local development Plan (LDP)	Report as required	As required
LAF contributions	To receive written contributions from LAF members	Report as required	Future Meetings via written contributions