

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Thursday, 22nd July, 2021 at 2.30 pm**

PRESENT: Irene Brooke (Deputy Chair)
Jenny Cockitt
David Farnsworth
Sheila Hampshire
Tracy Hook
Shan Lewis
Phil Mundell
Martin Sweeney
Anne Underwood (Chair)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Joanne Chase	Solicitor
Susan Hughes	Active Travel Officer
Matthew Lewis (Countryside)	Interim Performance, Evaluation and Programme Development Lead for MonLife
Ruth Rourke	Principal Officer - Countryside Access
Sarah Tindal	Natural Resources Wales
Robert Campbell	Natural Resources Wales

1. Apologies for Absence / Introductions

Apologies were received from members: Gordon Davies, Anthea Fairey, David Smith, Mark Storey, Ann Webb and from Paul Keeble (MCC)

AU welcomed members to the meeting which was being held virtually in accordance with the provisions of The Countryside Access (Local Access Forum) (Wales) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020.

It was noted that Joanne Chase Head of Commercial Law MCC was attending the meeting for the first time.

2. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum meeting of 9 March 2021

The minutes of the meeting of 9 March 2021 were approved as a correct record.

3. Active Travel Consultation

SHu provided the forum with a presentation on the background to the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, including the definition of active travel and the settlements covered by the requirement. The presentation also covered a summary of the public engagement to date and the current, and final, consultation on the draft network maps. The importance of the process was stressed and in particular that future investment will be based on whether a route has been identified on the maps. It was recognised that many of the routes identified in the settlements were public

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rights of way and that many also provided important links to the wider countryside access network. A summary of current active travel schemes linking to the wider network and managed countryside sites was also provided.

Members asked a number of questions including how the proposed “primary routes” had been identified and the data behind them; the importance of the continuity of routes; how delivery would be phased and assessed; and the strategic approach to putting forward bids for Welsh Government funding across the county. In response to the latter SHu indicated that to date only 3 strategic bids each year were invited by Welsh Government and that currently they were for Abergavenny, Caldicot and Monmouth schemes.

It was agreed that members would further consider the interactive maps (<https://mccactivetravelconsultation.commonplace.is/>) as they wished. If appropriate submit individual responses, and if there were issues they felt the forum should respond to collectively these should be provided to the Secretary so a coordinated response could be approved by the Chair and Deputy Chair prior to the close of the consultation period at the end of August.

SHu was thanked for her informative presentation.

4. Countryside Access Improvement Plan Delivery Plan (report to follow)

RR introduced the item and summarised for members the requirement that the Council publishes an annual delivery plan of its proposed actions to deliver the approved Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP). The delivery plan was structured to reflect the objectives and actions of the CAIP to allow cross referencing.

Members asked a number of questions including the relationship between the actions in the delivery plan and agreed priorities and how those priorities related to particular routes. In the following discussion it was explained that the Council’s approved prioritisation scheme was task and “benefit” based rather than route based, as reflected in the original consultation around its development, however the importance of national, regional and local promoted routes and their quality standards was reflected in the system. It was noted that a fuller explanation of this can be found in the Monmouthshire’s Countryside Access Policy, Protocol and Operational Management Guide which accompanied the Countryside Access Improvement Plan. RR undertook to provide members with links to those documents (Secretary’s note: also provided above).

Members were invited to review the delivery plan and offer any further input to RR as the plan is a “live” document that can be updated as projects develop.

5. Future Work Programme

AU introduced the item. ML summarised the items already identified from the last meeting: Access during an emergency / promotion of the Countryside Code; Definitive Map Modification Order prioritisation; the Ramblers Association Lost Ways project / Slow Ways. Welsh Government’s Access Reform Proposals were also identified as a future work item. RC indicated that NRW would wish to update members on current operations and cover their draft forestry operations plan for 2022- 25.

A short discussion followed and members asked about the response to incidents of cropping and enforcement. RR explained the general approach and ML updated members on the internal appointment of a new Enforcement Officer. ML also promised to follow up the request to re-establish member’s access to the iPROW magazine if possible.

AU reminded the LAF that the forum has the ability to appoint working groups if members see fit for specific tasks

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6. Dates of future meetings

The forum agreed it would continue to meet on an afternoon, and ML will consult on dates for a Sept/Oct and Jan/Feb 2022 meeting. A decision would be taken closer to the time as to whether the forum could return to face to face meetings or need to continue to meet virtually as long as the Regulations allow (Secretary's note: the Regulations allowing virtual meetings currently expire on 31 December 2021).

AU thanked members for their continued perseverance with virtual access.

The meeting ended at 3.38 pm