

Public Document Pack



County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

1st November 2023

Notice of meeting Local Access Forum

Thursday, 9th November, 2023 at 2.00 pm,
Room P4 - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA

AGENDA

Item No	Item	Pages
1.	Apologies for Absence / Introductions	
2.	Declarations of Interest	
3.	To confirm and sign the minutes of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum meeting of 11th July 2023	1 - 6
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5.	Countryside Access Updates	13 - 18
6.	Natural Resources Wales updates (Bob Campbell, Senior Officer Land Management, South East Wales Operations)	
7.	Conclusion of the current forum's term of office and recruitment of new forum	

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

County Councillor Sara Burch

Anne Underwood (Chair)
Irene Brooke (Vice Chair)
Anthea Fairey
Shan Lewis
David Farnsworth
David Smith
Tracy Hook
Gordon Davies
Jenny Cockitt
John Askew
Mark Storey
Martin Sweeney
Phil Mundell
Sheila Hampshire
Sylvia Fowles

Public Information

Access to paper copies of agendas and reports

A copy of this agenda and relevant reports can be made available to members of the public attending a meeting by requesting a copy from Democratic Services on 01633 644219. Please note that we must receive 24 hours notice prior to the meeting in order to provide you with a hard copy of this agenda.

Welsh Language

The Council welcomes contributions from members of the public through the medium of Welsh or English. We respectfully ask that you provide us with adequate notice to accommodate your needs.

Aims and Values of Monmouthshire County Council

Our purpose

Building Sustainable and Resilient Communities

Objectives we are working towards

- Giving people the best possible start in life
- A thriving and connected county
- Maximise the Potential of the natural and built environment
- Lifelong well-being
- A future focused council

Our Values

Openness. We are open and honest. People have the chance to get involved in decisions that affect them, tell us what matters and do things for themselves/their communities. If we cannot do something to help, we'll say so; if it will take a while to get the answer we'll explain why; if we can't answer immediately we'll try to connect you to the people who can help – building trust and engagement is a key foundation.

Fairness. We provide fair chances, to help people and communities thrive. If something does not seem fair, we will listen and help explain why. We will always try to treat everyone fairly and consistently. We cannot always make everyone happy, but will commit to listening and explaining why we did what we did.

Flexibility. We will continue to change and be flexible to enable delivery of the most effective and efficient services. This means a genuine commitment to working with everyone to embrace new ways of working.

Teamwork. We will work with you and our partners to support and inspire everyone to get involved so we can achieve great things together. We don't see ourselves as the 'fixers' or problem-solvers, but we will make the best of the ideas, assets and resources available to make sure we do the things that most positively impact our people and places.

Kindness: We will show kindness to all those we work with putting the importance of relationships and the connections we have with one another at the heart of all interactions.

Nodau a Gwerthoedd Cyngor Sir Fynwy

Cymunedau Cynaliadwy a Chryf

Canlyniadau y gweithiwn i'w cyflawni

Neb yn cael ei adael ar ôl

- Gall pobl hŷn fyw bywyd da
- Pobl â mynediad i dai addas a fforddiadwy
- Pobl â mynediad a symudedd da

Pobl yn hyderus, galluog ac yn cymryd rhan

- Camddefnyddio alcohol a chyffuriau ddim yn effeithio ar fywydau pobl
- Teuluoedd yn cael eu cefnogi
- Pobl yn teimlo'n ddiogel

Ein sir yn ffynnu

- Busnes a menter
- Pobl â mynediad i ddysgu ymarferol a hyblyg
- Pobl yn diogelu ac yn cyfoethogi'r amgylchedd

Ein blaenoriaethau

- Ysgolion
- Diogelu pobl agored i niwed
- Cefnogi busnes a chreu swyddi
- Cynnal gwasanaethau sy'n hygyrch yn lleol

Ein gwerthoedd

- **Bod yn agored:** anelwn fod yn agored ac onest i ddatblygu perthnasoedd ymddiriedus
- **Tegwch:** anelwn ddarparu dewis teg, cyfleoedd a phrofiadau a dod yn sefydliad a adeiladwyd ar barch un at y llall.
- **Hyblygrwydd:** anelwn fod yn hyblyg yn ein syniadau a'n gweithredoedd i ddod yn sefydliad effeithlon ac effeithiol.
- **Gwaith tîm:** anelwn gydweithio i rannu ein llwyddiannau a'n methiannau drwy adeiladu ar ein cryfderau a chefnogi ein gilydd i gyflawni ein nodau.

Terms of Reference

Monmouthshire Local Access Forum is the statutory Local Access Forum for Monmouthshire (excluding that part of the county that falls into the Brecon Beacons National Park), as required under the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000.

The function of the Forum is to advise the local authority, Natural Resources Wales and others, as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area, and to advise and assist with the implementation of the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Membership

Members of the forum are appointed by the “Appointing Authority” (Monmouthshire County Council in accordance with the relevant regulations. The current membership of the forum is as follows:

Anne Underwood (Chair)

Irene Brooke (Vice Chair)

Anthea Fairey

Shan Lewis

David Farnsworth

David Smith

Tracy Hook

Gordon Davies

Jenny Cockitt

John Askew

Mark Storey

Martin Sweeney

Phil Mundell

Sheila Hampshire

Sylvia Fowles

County Councillor Sara Burch (the “Appointing Authority” representative)

Observers;

Representatives from Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales

Public Document Pack Agenda Item 3

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held
at Room P4 - County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA on Tuesday, 11th July, 2023 at
2.00 pm

PRESENT: Anthea Fairey
Jenny Cockitt
Sheila Hampshire
Tracey Hook
Irene Brooke (Deputy Chair)
Shan Lewis
Phil Mundell
David Smith
Anne Underwood (Chair)

Also present: County Councillor Peter Strong

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Matthew Lewis (Countryside)	Interim Performance, Evaluation and Programme Development Lead for MonLife
Richard Ray	Paralegal
Ruth Rourke	Countryside Access Manager
Nickie Moore	Wye Valley projects Officer, Wye Valley AONB
Bob Campbell	Natural Resources Wales

1. Apologies for Absence / Introductions.

Apologies were received from members: John Askew, Cllr Ben Callard, Sylvia Fowles, Mark Storey, Martin Sweeney. Apologies were also given by Paul Keeble, MCC and Sarah Tindal Natural Resources Wales. 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 3 May 2023 (Attached).

The minutes of the meeting of 3 May 2023 were accepted (proposed by PM and seconded by SL).

In response to questions RER updated members on progress with the Paths to Communities project with Ramblers Cymru. A Service Level Agreement had now been signed between Ramblers Cymru and the County Council and a call for action and expressions of interest from communities has been circulated.

RER confirmed that the project represented additional resources, via the Access Improvement Grant, over and above the existing support for community and volunteer action, through the Community Links officer and the wider team. This would add to, and

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complement, the support already in place by providing additional support in three communities up to March 2025 (the end of the current 3-year Access Improvement Grant commitment from Welsh Government).

4. Lower Wye Valley Integrated Recreational Access Strategy (Nickie Moore, Wye Valley AONB)

NM gave an update on progress on the Lower Wye Valley Integrated Recreational Access Strategy. Members had previously considered the issues regarding the use and condition of the countryside access network with the AONB. In particular, the unclassified county road (UCR) network remains a cause of concern. These issues are complex and relate both to the condition of these routes (generally in very poor condition from water erosion/run off from surrounding land) and their use.

Conversations between the AONB Unit and MCC Highways and Countryside Access and have reaffirmed that a strategic approach is desirable, rather than cherry-picking routes that could prove difficult to justify versus other routes, and/or not actually be what the local communities and users want or need.

The LAF resolved in December 2021 to support in principle the proposed approach to develop an inclusive user-strategy for all lower Wye UCRs and linked public rights of way, subject to receiving further details.

The AONB Unit, with its strong multi-sector stakeholder connections, is leading this having secured funding from the Welsh Government (WG) Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places (SLSP) up to March 2025.

The strategy will incorporate MCC's statutory requirements as Highway Authority, but also consider the effects of climate change, nature recovery, heritage, tourism and active travel agendas, and the context of the AONB Management Plan.

Working with Herefordshire Council's Procurement team (HC is the AONB Unit's treasurer), the Invitation to Tender process has been successful. The contract has been awarded to the consultancy Tomorrow's Tourism to lead on the development of the Integrated Recreation Access Strategy and Action Plan.

Tomorrow's Tourism (TT) brings in depth knowledge of tourism, recreation and effective consultation and the specialist tools to help explain and present the issues in a compelling way and they are teaming up with:

- XV Insight, a specialist firm experienced in consultation and research
- Landsmith Associates, landscape architects with green infrastructure expertise
- an IPROW member company will also be on the team to deal with all technical issues relating to rights of way
- experts in flood risk and hydrology will be drawn on when necessary.

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The programme will include detailed consultation with all stakeholders and a detailed stakeholder mapping exercise is currently underway. LAF members were asked for their recommendations as to who needs to be included in the consultation and members made a number of suggestions

5. Active Travel Schemes update

The Secretary gave a brief update on progress on key active travel proposals at Caldicot Castle Country Park / the connecting disused railway line and at Castle Meadows, Abergavenny.

With respect to Castle Meadows it was noted that an invited stakeholder session with Abergavenny Town Council was to be held on Monday 17th July. After discussion the forum nominated Jenny Cockitt to attend on its behalf. A public open session at Abergavenny Town Council offices was also to be held on Tuesday 18th July, 10:00-1:00pm. The secretary undertook to circulate these details and links to a questions and answers web page relating to Castle Meadows and the individual active travel scheme pages.

Members enquired about progress on the Undy to Rogiet shared route and any progress from Welsh Government on the promised Llanellen bridge pedestrian footbridge study. The Secretary undertook to follow these enquiries up.

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

RC provided an update of NRW's land management and forest operations:

NRW has a new Corporate Plan to direct our work until 2023 which has recently been launched.

James Harris has joined Tim Jeffery looking after woodlands in the area. Recent wildfires in the area have distracted the team however the normal work program is still under way, major ash works are ending however minor operations will be ongoing, PROW work etc continuing. Contact has been made with a multi-cultural community group in Gloucester; The Friendship Café who use the Wye Valley woodland for many of their activities and who have a horse-riding facility in the town, we are looking to see how we can make our woodlands more inclusive and open them to a wider array of both religious and cultural groups going forwards.

A new 'natural' focused 'exploration' zone in Whitestone in the Wye Valley will open to the public at the start of the school holidays.

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The heathland grazing project at Beacon Hill is going well and if successful this will potential allow us to remove about 4 km of fencing, 5 gates and a cattle grid in the future on the site while still reviving the heathland.

Wentwood steering group meeting yet to happen however we are keen to engage with the wider landowner stakeholders and the AONB to look at the future of the site in respect to recreation and access. We hope to approach the LAF for some formal advice shortly once the stakeholder group has met.

We hope to bid for some National Forest funding from WG 24-25 to improve access and recreation in our area.

The forest operations program is focused on managing tree diseases Larch & Ash die back, planned operations that will now start in September due to bird nesting and other protection restrictions are:

- Nine Wells (thinning)
- Chepstow Park (Larch removal)
- Trelleck New Mills (clear felling)
- Fedw Wood (clear felling)
- Brias Grove (thinning)
- Wentwood East (thinning)

There have been several complaints regarding stone that has been used to prepare forest roads for future forestry operations in the area, mainly at Wet Meadow and at Beacon Hill and this has started an internal process to evaluate the potential to have two specifications of road surface in the SE with a better grade of material being used on high use recreation sites.

7. Recruitment of New Forum (Report attached)

The secretary presented the proposed arrangements for the recruitment of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum for the next 3-year period of appointment as the current term of appointment ends on 24 November 2023 and arrangements are now required to recruit a new forum to ensure continuity.

The County Council meeting on 20 July 2023 was due consider a report, which recommends a, hopefully streamlined, process both for this recruitment process and future appointments.

**8. Dates of next meeting -
2.00pm on Thursday 9th November 2023 (the final meeting of the current forum)
Venue to be confirmed**

2.00pm on Thursday 9th November 2023 at County Hall, Usk

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held
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2.00 pm**

AU thanked members for their attendance.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm

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Monmouthshire Local Access Forum

AGENDA ITEM: 4

SUBJECT: Lower Wye Valley Tracks and Trails

MEETING: MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

DATE: 09 November 2023

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To introduce the update to be provided by Richard Dickinson from Tomorrow's Tourism

2. RECOMMENDATION:

- 2.1 For information.

3. BACKGROUND:

- 3.1 As members are aware the Wye Valley AONB Unit along with the County Council, NRW and other stakeholders are working together to develop an Integrated Recreational Access Strategy and action plan for the Lower Wye Valley in Monmouthshire (now titled Lower Wye Valley Tracks and Trails).
- 3.2 A public consultation is about to commence enabling local communities, users, landowners, and interest groups to help shape the strategy.
- 3.3 Richard Dickinson from Tomorrow's Tourism who are leading on the project's delivery will provide members with an update at the meeting.
- 3.4 A Frequently Asked Questions sheet is appended, and further information will shortly be available on the AONB website. The strategy and consultation is funded through the Welsh Government Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme.

4. AUTHOR:

Matthew Lewis

LAF Secretary matthewlewis@monmouthshire.gov.uk

01633 644855

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Lower Wye Tracks & Trails

Working Together to create an Action Plan for Recreational Access in Monmouthshire's Wye Valley

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who is involved?
2. What area does will the strategy cover?
3. Is this a wise use of funding?
4. Why is this voluntary consultation being carried out?
5. What will be included in the scope of the strategy?
6. Why do we need to take a strategic view?
7. Why is this consultation happening at this stage in the process?
8. Who is helping us with the consultation?
9. What happens next?

1. Who is involved in the strategy?

The project is being led by the Wye Valley AONB Unit and is supported by Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales.

2. What area will the Strategy cover?

The Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)¹, being the area that is in Wales and **not** the part that is in England, in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. This is due to the work being funded by Welsh Government through the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places programme. However, the track and trail links into England will be recognised and partners, communities and visitors from across the border are also invited to engage and respond.

3. Is this a wise use of funding? Why don't you spend the money on sorting out one of the routes?

The Welsh Government funding could be used to cherry-pick one track or trail and spend the money on sorting out a part of that - it might cover the cost of a footbridge, a low-key natural drainage scheme and re-surfacing a few metres of trail - but that would only resolve one issue amongst a wide range of issues across the network. So, we are taking a step back, looking at the network as a whole and listening to our local communities, partners and visitors as to what they think are the priorities. Also, crucially, the strategy and action plan



Map 1: The project area
(Monmouthshire's Wye Valley AONB)

¹ Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) are Protected by law because of their special landscape qualities, wildlife, geology and geography, AONBs have more protection than other areas under the planning process. In terms of landscape and scenery, they are equal to National Parks. Going forward AONBs will be known as National Landscapes. For further information visit:

will strengthen our case when applying for future large grants from funders such as the Heritage Lottery and others.

4. Why is this voluntary consultation being carried out?

A few reasons:

- There is known to be community concern and the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan identified a range of recreational activities, pressures and impacts. The 2022 public consultation for the 'Wye Valley Villages Study' further documented the value the public places on these routes and concerns over maintenance and access for people of all ages and abilities²
- Over the last 4 years some progress has been made to better understand the issues and explore potential solutions for some routes. Also, the 2021 pilot scheme for Tintern's Chapel Hill Road is providing valuable information about low-cost, nature-based solutions to managing run-off³.
- There is some acknowledged user conflict, that may increase if no positive action is taken.

It is therefore essential that the views of the local community and user groups are sought and taken into consideration as the strategy is developed.

5. What will be included within the scope of the Strategy?

The Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB is home to an extensive recreational access network: which includes Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and forestry tracks, unpaved Unclassified County Roads (UCRs), permissive paths and the popular regional trail, the Wye Valley Walk. The strategy will look at current use in order to create a vision for the future. It will not review claims around historic routes, cover the river (navigation) nor the paved road network.

6. Why do we need to take a strategic view?

There are three aspects to consider, that do not always complement each other:

- Public Access for diverse purposes** - These tracks and trails provide unrivalled public access in and around the AONB. The network provides vital off-main road links between farms, hamlets, villages, towns and other sites and features. It provides exceptional recreation opportunities for a diversity of users, including both local residents and visitors and it is used by a wide range of people including walkers, runners, cyclists, horse riders and motor vehicles.
- A unique landscape** -The Wye Valley AONB is one of the most naturally beautiful and historically rich landscapes in the UK. Both the network and the individual routes themselves are irreplaceable heritage features, including their miles of drystone walls, nearby heritage structures, lines of veteran trees and hedges that form wildlife corridors for rare, protected and declining species.
- A threatened environment** -The future of a number of these historic routes is threatened by high rates of erosion, to a point where:
 - They are funnelling high levels of water runoff from the surrounding ground, leading to further erosion and increasing localised flood risk, with associated socio-economic costs. A threat that is being exacerbated by climate change and the increase in the number and ferocity of storms.

[Natural Resources Wales / Types of protected areas of land and sea](#)

[Home at the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty \(landscapesforlife.org.uk\)](#)

² [The Wye Valley Villages Project - Monmouthshire](#)

³ [Green Infrastructure Improvements – Wye Valley AONB](#)

- They are sometimes difficult to use safely by those who have the legal right to use them.
- The cost of desired repairs to routes is a challenge, with reduced local authority budgets and many different calls being made on those resources.
- Treasured landscape and heritage features alongside routes may be lost or pose a risk to health, safety and future access, if not restored or protected.

By taking a strategic view we can consider these different aspects together to bring the greatest benefits.

7. Why is the consultation happening at this stage in the process?

There are many different ways the challenges facing the Wye Valley AONB's tracks and trails could be addressed. Before any decisions are made, and funding sought, the public are being asked to help shape the strategy. We'd like you to tell us what the issues are locally and around the Public Rights of Way and Unclassified County Road network, and how they could potentially be resolved, taking into account the needs of all the different users of the tracks and trails.

8. Who is helping us with the consultation?

An Invitation to Tender was developed by the Wye Valley AONB, working with Herefordshire Council Procurement team, for the development of the Integrated Recreation Access Strategy for the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB. As a result of that tender process, [Tomorrow's Tourism](#) have been appointed. The Tomorrow's Tourism team, supported by [XV Insight](#) bring experience of tourism, recreation and effective consultation.

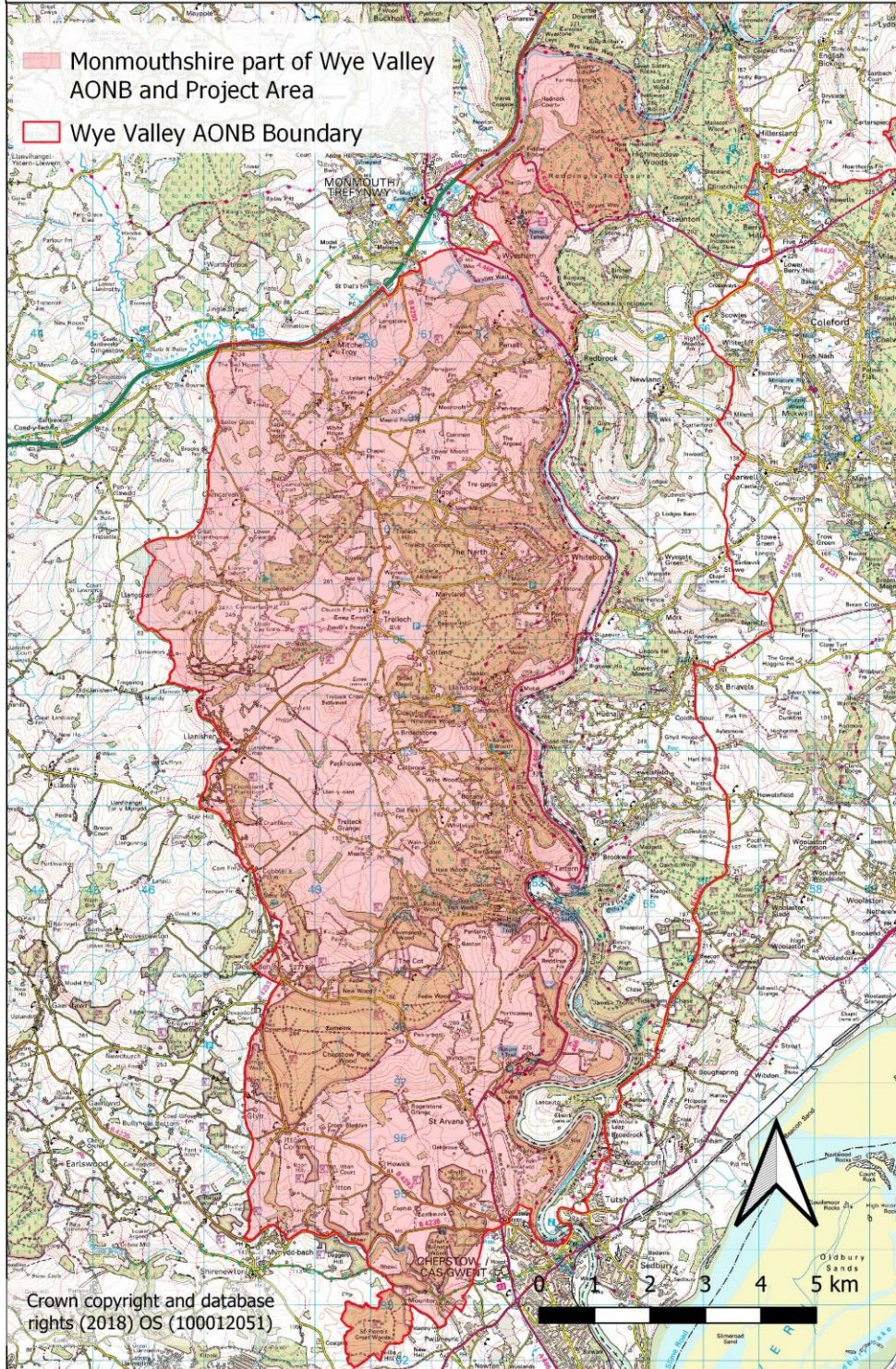
9. What happens next?

Once the consultation is completed all the feedback will be reviewed and taken into consideration in the development of the strategy. All responses will be considered, whether submitted online, in writing or in person.

Not everything suggested through the consultation can be accommodated or implemented. It is very likely that compromises will need to be made, particularly where wishes conflict between different user and/or interest groups. Other limiting factors may include legislative requirements and budget limitations.

A strategy, and action plan to deliver that strategy, will be developed and published. The resulting action plan will not include solutions or improvements in England, but views of everyone are welcome and some solutions may be transferrable.

Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Project Area



Monmouthshire Local Access Forum

AGENDA ITEM: 5

SUBJECT: Countryside Access Update

MEETING: MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

DATE: 09 November 2023

1. PURPOSE:

1.1 To update the Forum on Countryside Access projects.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

2.1 For Information and monitoring of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan.

3. BACKGROUND:

3.1 **Records Management** – The team have been busy in the past month moving records to a new Sharepoint drive. This has included the installation of a new server for CAMS and much work to link the records and ensure our mapping still works. There is over 30 years of records held digitally which have had to be moved and also the traditional paper folders of records have also had to be scanned and integrated into the new Sharepoint folders. There may well be some disruption in next few weeks to ensure the systems all work properly and staff are trained to access the information.

3.2 **Registers-** Section 53B of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Public Rights of Way (Registers) (Wales) Regulations 2006 requires authorities to keep a [register of applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders](#), which can be found on the authority's website.

3.3 There is no requirement in Wales for a register of Section 31 Declarations or Legal Orders. However, the current register for DMMO's is hard to find and extremely difficult to update. Information on legal orders is also important. Therefore, we have been working on new registers, which will fulfil the requirements in the CROW Act 2000 should it be fully enacted in Wales and to ensure that these records are more easily accessible to all. These will link to our CAMS system and be available from our public mapping site. There will be three new registers, section 31, DMMOs and Legal Orders. A fourth is also in development for Temporary Closures. Currently we are working on what the public interface will look like and ensuring all the records behind the scenes are linked appropriately, so when the registers go live, they can be viewed directly from our online mapping platform.

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- 3.4 **Access Improvement Grant** - This a three-year grant relating to the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025. The funding for 2023/24 was £80,775. The grant is reduced by 50% should an authority not have a Rights of way Improvement Plan in place or a Local Access Forum.
- 3.5 The projects that are underway support physical improvements to existing routes, improvements to information and signage, improvements to access points to green space, improve access to water related recreation and increase under-represented groups access to the outdoors.
- 3.6 **Black Rock Picnic Site** – This project improves access from the car park into the site, enabling better access for the disabled and fishermen. It involves surfacing of 20m of path, segregation of the new pathway from the car park and replacing the old wooden kissing gate with an accessible k barrier. Currently we are waiting for bollards to arrive. It is expected that the whole project will be completed by end November (or early December) dependant on the weather. A video has partially been made to record before, after and during the works.
- 3.7 **Community Links** – A questionnaire was produced and sent to the volunteers to see what training requirements they might have, or what would enable them or others to become more actively engaged. Links have been made with the Regional Landscape and Countryside Green Skills Co-ordinator (employed under the Gwent Green Grid Partnership) in order to maximise training courses moving forward and to look at re-connecting to GP Referral scheme.
- 3.8 The following has been achieved since April 2023: -
- 3 bridges and H frames, stakes, bridge decking, finger post blades ordered.
 - 5 training events held for 19 volunteers.
 - 31 practical maintenance days, resolving 87 issues. 81 volunteers installed 26 waymark post, waymarkers, 2158m clearance, vegetation removed from things like stiles 71, surveying, 15 fingerposts, 12 gates. Fixed 16 steps, 10 stiles and 2 bridges.
 - 1254 (more yet to be counted) Volunteer hours
- 3.9 A new “3 villages route” has been identified and surveyed in Llanvapley area and a programme of works has been identified that will need to be carried out prior to promoting the walk.

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- 3.10 Two videos showing accessibility of the sites have been created with the Access Improvement Grant funding and will be promoted and available to view on our website shortly. In addition, there will be a project page for the grant which will have information on the project and other projects being delivered. This will also include a video of the Community Links Officer, Tom Arnold, introducing himself and opportunities for volunteering and another one about how to use our on-line mapping.
- 3.11 Materials that were identified for maintenance improvements by volunteers have been ordered including stakes, bridge decking, fingerpost blades and three bridges with H frames. Some of these materials have been installed by volunteers in the practical maintenance days.
- 3.12 Pre-April 2022 there were 5 groups contributing to maintenance, involving 19 people. There are now 10 active groups (93 people) involved with maintenance. Grosmont and Pontypool Ramblers existed as groups although weren't working directly with us on paths and now have regular days doing a range of jobs both with Tom Arnold and self-supervised on their own. Chepstow WAW have revived their path work subgroup with new volunteers and have their first training session end of November. New groups this year are
- Langybi Community groups (4 smaller village groups with separate leaders)
 - Llanishen village group.
 - Tintern Village Group is looking to start in spring.
- 3.13 To help expand the Community Links project to other communities an SLA agreement was agreed with Ramblers Cymru. The project was re-named Paths to Communities. They are working in Monmouth, Usk and Magor & Undy
- 3.14 53 organisations and individuals were contacted to appraise initial interest in the project. These consisted of local council members, and key stakeholders within the access and environmental community within Monmouthshire. The project officer has engaged with local communities through qualitative data capture via questionnaires, with the aim of better understanding of local issues and barriers to access in the community.
- 3.15 Consultations have been held with local stakeholders including the Living Levels and SEWRIG's regarding input and closer working to promote the

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project as well as engage with volunteers on educational and geological points of interest in the area. Three Community Consultations took place, 1 for each community with the final one also used as a launch event taking place at Magor and Undy Community Hub. These involved engaging with more community members through [questionnaires](#) to ensure they have enough data to analyse and guide the delivery stage of the project.

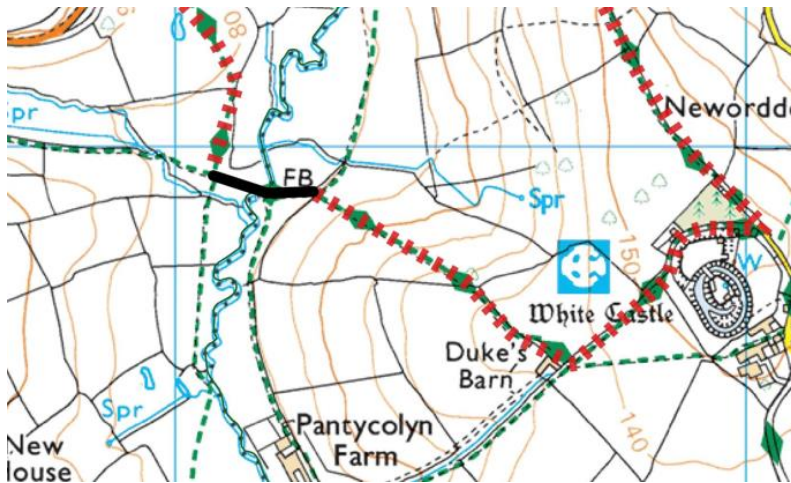
- 3.16 Pollution monitoring equipment has been acquired to allow volunteers to engage with citizen science as way to create interest in walking in the local area and facilitate further walking activities. This data will inform future debate around environmental sustainability and can be used by a variety of different stakeholders in the community.
- 3.17 22km of footpaths has already been surveyed in the three communities. Potential new family friendly walking routes have been identified in Monmouth and Usk. 8 walks are to be promoted through Living Levels and section 106 funding. The project officer for this has shared her findings of improvements required so that we can use the volunteers to help with physical improvements required and to ensure the routes are kept sustainable with long term care.
- 3.18 The Regional Health and Well-being Officer has also been approached re training for health walk leaders and making links to the local surgeries.
- 3.19 Contact with the University of Surrey has been established to support their trip to South Wales to educate students on the value of Access, issues around engagement and their participation in project activities secured for the duration of their trip in April. Students will assist in pollution monitoring and data analysis as well as assist with footpath maintenance and training events.
- 3.20 Currently we are drafting a programme of events for each community which will be published widely. All consultations and publicity have been delivered in both English and Welsh. They have been shared and delivered across social media platforms and press by both the Ramblers Cymru and MonLife. Initial analysis shows we are reaching a greater audience than before and there is wide interest in the project. There were 1800 + views of the latest press release. Our SLA has also been shared with other authorities, one of which is starting a similar project.
- 3.21 **Bridges** – There are over 1360 bridges on the public rights of way network (18% sleeper bridges and 41% other bridges). 500 bridges are being surveyed to ascertain risk. Things such as timber products, stone and increase in fuel prices for contractors means on average an increase across

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the board closer to 25% in costs for bridges and other structures. 22 communities and towns within Monmouthshire are affected by outstanding bridge issues. Mitchel Troy, Llangattock Vibon Avel, Llantillio Crossenny, Devauden and Grosmont are the worst affected. There are 56 missing bridges, and 31 bridges are currently closed by order, or other means. An asset management plan is currently being drafted and a presentation will be given to the next LAF regarding this issue.

3.22 **Offa's Dyke** –In March 2023 the Treadam bridge (Pant y Colyn Farm



359/239/1) was removed due to dangerous piers. The removal enabled examination and reports on what consents and design would be required to replace the bridge safely. A competitive grant

from Natural Resources Wales has enabled the banks and works required to be assessed by an engineer. We are now waiting for the works to be approved and consents to be granted by NRW. Once this has been received a new bridge will be purchased ready for installation next year. A diversion is in place and well signed.

3.23 **Countryside Code Promotion** - We are working with Alison Roberts, Specialist Advisor Responsible Recreation for NRW on the Countryside Code who has a new strategy and action plan for Wales. MonLife is in a unique place to share the new code across its sites, buildings and services reaching children youth and other targeted audiences. NRW have branding guidelines and have a variety of media which we can share to the public, such as [responsible walking with dogs](#) and [preparing ahead](#).

- There is a [New Countryside Code website](#) –this includes information about code champions who promote and share the code more widely.
- [Shaun the Sheep Countryside Code Campaign](#): was launched at the end May. This is being led by NE with input and support from NRW. The campaign is aimed at raising awareness with children, young people and families. Teaching resources are also being developed.

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- 3.24 This is something which the next Forum may want to consider as this opportunity develops.
- 3.25 **Legislative Update** - The Sustainable Farming Scheme and Agricultural Wales Bill was introduced to the Senedd in September. The next consultation stage is expected to take place towards the end of this year. Following this the final scheme details are expected to be published in 2024 and then for Farmers to be able to join the scheme in 2025. In terms of priority for public access, public access proposals are listed in the 10 Sustainable Land Management outcomes – enhanced access and engagement is one of the things that it wanted to achieve and is explicitly listed on the Bill itself – the challenge is turning this into action.
- 3.26 **Access Reform update** – Monmouthshire are hosting a meeting with other Welsh mangers and Welsh Government to consider small changes in regulations, guidance or legislation that would reduce burdens for local landowners and local authorities such as removing the need to advertise orders in newspapers.
- 3.27 With regards to updating LAF Regulations the draft is expected in Spring 2024 and following final consultation will come into force late spring/summer 2024.

4. **AUTHOR:**

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