

Public Document Pack



County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
NP15 1GA

15th July 2024

Notice of meeting Local Access Forum

Tuesday, 23rd July, 2024 at 2.00 pm,
Old Council Chamber, Shire Hall - Monmouth

AGENDA

Item No	Item	Pages
1.	Apologies for Absence	
2.	Election of Deputy Chair	
3.	Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th June 2024.	1 - 4
4.	Presentation on the Tracks and Trails Consultation and Strategy by Richard Dickinson (Tomorrow's Tourism) and Helen Roberts (XV Insight) - Tracks and Trails Strategy and Consultation Report attached	5 - 94
5.	Operational updates (NRW and MCC)	95 - 100
6.	Dates and times of future meetings - 2.00pm 7th November 2024 and 2.00pm 19th February 2025	

Paul Matthews

Chief Executive

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CYNGOR SIR FYNWY

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:

Anne Underwood
Irene Brooke
Anthea Fairey
Shan Lewis
Phil Mundell
Phillip Allsopp
Bethany Handley
Barbara Heys
Ian Mawdsley
Terence Mead
Sallie Roderick
Jack Thurston
Kelvin Varney
Huw Watkins
Rhys Wynne-Jones
John Askew
County Councillors: Sara Burch

Public Information

Access to paper copies of agendas and reports

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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

□ to become a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life.

Objectives we are working towards

- Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced;
- Green place to live and work with reduced carbon emissions and making a positive contribution to addressing the climate and nature emergency;
- Thriving and ambitious place, where there are vibrant town centres and where businesses can grow and develop
- Safe place to live where people have a home where they feel secure in;
- Connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued;
- Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential

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.

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

Irene Brooke

Anthea Fairey

Shan Lewis

Phil Mundell

Phillip Allsopp

Bethany Handley

Barbara Heys

Ian Mawdsley

Terence Mead

Sallie Roderick

Jack Thurston

Kelvin Varney

Huw Watkins

Rhys Wynne-Jones

John Askew

County Councillors: Sara Burch (the “Appointing Authority” representative)

Observers;

Representatives from Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 3

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held
at Magor and Undy Community Hub, Main Road , Undy NP26 3GD on Tuesday, 11th
June, 2024 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: Phillip Allsopp,
Irene Brooke,
County Councillor Sara Burch,
Barbara Heys,
Phil Mundell (Chair),
Sallie Roderick,
Jack Thurston,
Anne Underwood,
Kelvin Varney
Huw Watkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Garner	Public Right of Way Officer
Matthew Lewis (Countryside)	Interim Performance, Evaluation and Programme Development Lead for MonLife
Richard Ray	Paralegal
Ruth Rourke	Countryside Access Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from members John Askew, Anthea Fairey, Bethany Handley, Shan Lewis, Ian Mawdsley, Terence Mead and Rhys Wynne-Jones and from Paul Keeble, Lead Engineer Highways and Flooding, and Bob Campbell Natural Resources Wales.

2. Election of Chair and Deputy Chair

ML welcomed members to the second meeting of the new local access forum and outlined the procedure for election of a Chair and Deputy Chair. Two nominations had been received for Chair and following a secret ballot of those members in attendance Phil Mundell was elected as Chair.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held at Magor and Undy Community Hub, Main Road , Undy NP26 3GD on Tuesday, 11th June, 2024 at 2.00 pm

PM took the Chair. No nominations were received at the meeting for the role of Deputy Chair and in light of that the previous Deputy Chair, Irene Brooke, agreed to take the role on an interim basis pending a further request for nominations and consideration at the next meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest

None received

4. Minutes of the meetings of 9 November 2023 and 2 May 2024

The minutes of the meeting of 9 November 2023, the last meeting of the previous LAF, and the minutes of the meeting of 2 May 2023 were approved.

5. Agreement of Terms of Reference and consideration of subgroups

ML indicated that in accordance with the regulations terms of reference, including the establishment of any sub groups needed consideration. The terms of reference, including model terms of reference for subgroups, as last amended in January 2023 were considered and agreed.

A discussion ensued on sub groups. ML outlined progress on the Tracks and Trails project and the desirability of establishing a sub group of the forum to act as the steering group for the project. It was proposed that the sub group would comprise of LAF members, the public bodies involved (NRW, Wye Valley National Landscape & MCC etc.) and other relevant interest. The principle of establishing a sub group was agreed and ML agreed to circulate the finalised strategy in due course to allow members to make an informed decision as to their involvement in the sub group.

Discussion then turned to the potential to establish a further improvement sub group, as previously agreed but not established by the former forum, initially to work with NRW and the Council to look at access issues within Chepstow Park Woods, including seeking resolution of a number of Definitive Map Modification Order claims. The history of these claims and a previous permitting system for horse-riding was discussed and it was agreed that a sub group could usefully be formed to assist resolve outstanding issues. ML agreed to circulate details asking for nominations to the sub group.

6. Discussion regarding additional members and observers (verbal)

ML explained the forum needs to agree any observers and advisors who can attend in addition to the Secretary and the statutory observer from Natural Resources Wales. The forum agreed that appropriate officers from the Council's countryside access, legal and highways teams and from Natural Resource Wales South East Wales Operations team can attend as observers / advisors.

ML outlined that the regulations allow for the forum to examine its own membership and consider the balance of interests represented, and if felt appropriate to ask the appointing authority to seek to appoint further members to address any deficiencies. The statutory maximum size of the forum is 22 members (20 members and Chair and Deputy). There are currently 17 members appointed giving a headroom of a maximum of 5 further appointments.

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held at Magor and Undy Community Hub, Main Road , Undy NP26 3GD on Tuesday, 11th June, 2024 at 2.00 pm

After a discussion members identified that additional representation of equestrian interests and of landowners / land managers would be desirable. ML indicated that the appointing authority would therefore seek to identify suitable persons who could bring expertise in those areas.

7. Future work programme

Members discussed the draft future work programme. It was noted that progress was underway to re-establish liaison arrangements at Wentwood with NRW, forest managers and Newport CC. AU indicated that in the meantime she was working on several Definitive Map Modification Order claims for historic routes within the woodland. Members enquired about consultation and availability of information on Definitive Map Modification Orders and claims. RR agreed to circulate links to new registers in due course and noted individual members could ask to be included in consultations on orders. Members also enquired about consultation on any future Road Traffic Orders. ML undertook to ask PK to respond.

It was agreed to add bridges and a review of the prioritisation system to the future work programme, together with an update on volunteering and community engagement, including a future discussion on how the LAF can help support community councils in addressing rights of way issues.

ML will review the work plan as agreed and this will allow completion of the annual report for 2023.

Members asked about continuing receipt of the IPROW (The Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management) Magazine. RR will follow up.

8. Dates and Times of Future meetings

Members present confirmed that afternoon meetings, which had been the general favoured response across all members, would be most appropriate. It was agreed to try to avoid Tuesdays, although unfortunately because of availability that could not be avoided for the next meeting which was agreed as 2.00pm on Tuesday 23 July 2024 to receive a presentation on the outcomes of the Tracks and Trails project, venue to be advised.

Further meeting dates for the 24/25 year to be agreed and circulated.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm

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Lower Wye Tracks & Trails

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

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**Public Consultation Report
April 2024**



Agenda Item 4

Contents:

- The consultation process
- Who took part

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- The **voluntary public consultation** ran from **8th November 2023 to 12th January 2024**
- It was promoted via social media channels and on the Wye Valley website*. Personal invitations were sent to a broad stakeholder network (100+ contacts) where were encouraged to share details across their networks.
- All materials were provided in English and Welsh
- Multiple methods were available for responses:
 - An **Online survey form** (see appendix) generated 350 responses
 - A **dedicated email address** to which 6 responses were received, 4 of which were connected to an online response
 - A **dedicated postal address (free-post)** was offered, though no responses were received via this option
- **Two community drop-in sessions** took place **27th and 28th February 2024** in **St Arvans** and **Penallt** respectively.
 - Each session displayed 7 boards outlining the background to the project, a review of the area and a summary of the feedback gathered through the voluntary public consultation. These can be viewed/downloaded via the Wye Valley National Landscape website [Lower Wye Tracks & Trails - Wye Valley AONB \(wyevalley-nl.org.uk\)](https://www.wyevalley-nl.org.uk)
 - Representatives of the Wye Valley National Landscape, Monmouthshire Council, Natural Resources Wales and Tomorrow's Tourism were in attendance to answer questions and to listen to the views of those attending
 - c.35 members of the public and local community attended the session in St Arvans and c.50 in Penallt
 - A feedback form was provided with 30 attendees across the two session providing comments in this way
 - The vast majority of attendees were local residents, along with several local councillors. Among those attending there was coverage of a wide range of usage of the tracks and trails, as well as residents living alongside various of the tracks and Trails.
- All responses were taken into consideration and this report provides a summary

* Note: During the consultation the Wye Valley AONB rebranded to Wye Valley National Landscape. All consultation information was available via channels using both names.

Who took part in the consultation

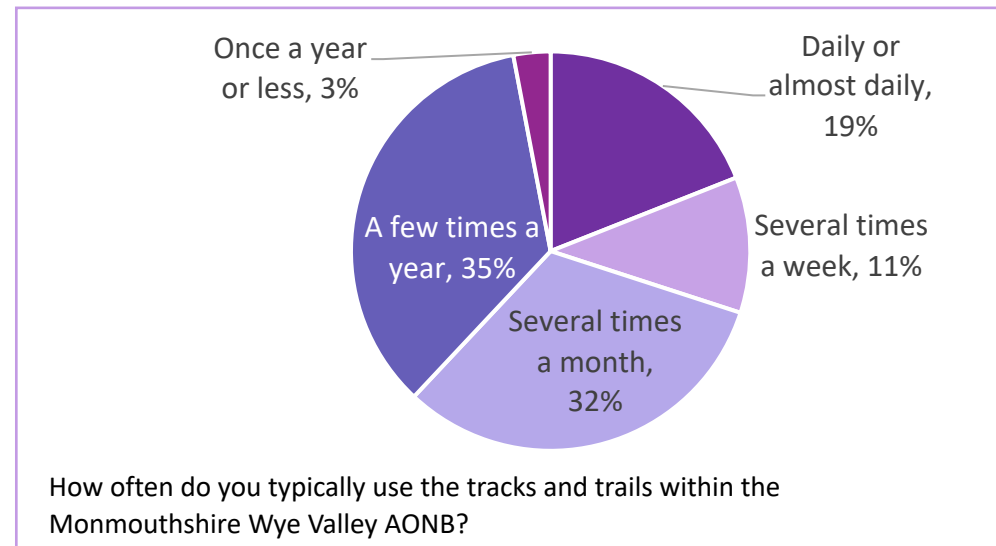
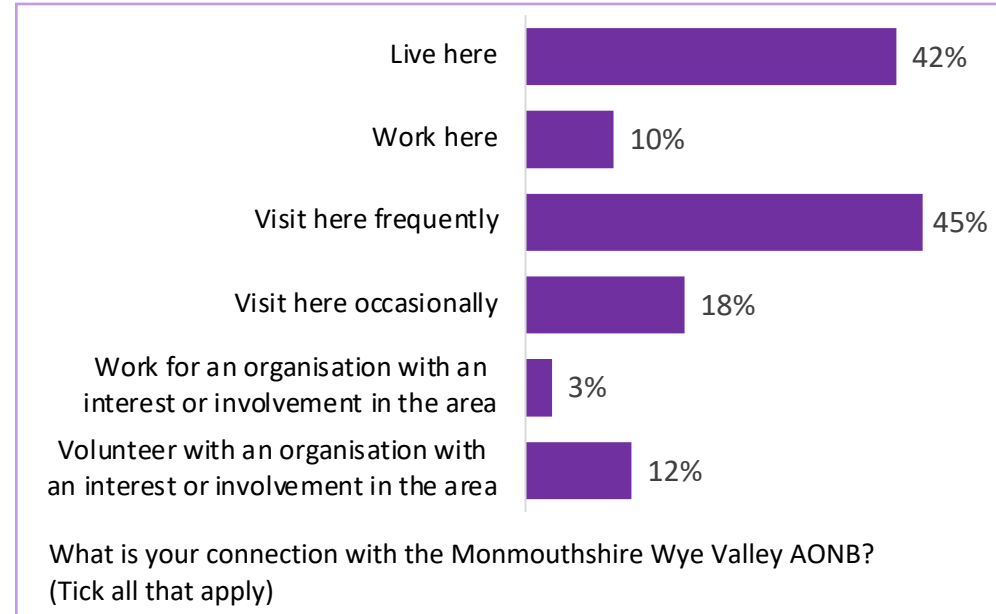
- The consultation attracted responses from both local residents and visitors.
- As well as individual people, 50 organisations were represented across the responses covering a wide range of interests:
 - Community groups
 - Environmental groups
 - 4x4 vehicles
 - Trail bikes
 - Cyclists/Mountain Bikers
 - Walkers/ramblers
 - Horse riders/drivers

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- 96% of those taking part are users of the tracks and trails within the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB (NL)
 - A little under a third use the tracks and trails at least weekly
 - Just under a third use them several times a month
 - Over a third use them just a few times a year or less often
- Usage is predominantly for leisure (96%)
 - 4% use the tracks and trails to 'commute to work, school, college etc. on foot/cycle etc.'
 - 10% use them for work/volunteering (restoration, maintenance etc.)
 - Other reasons for use include access to property, commercial use (running courses, tours etc.)

Note: This is the profile of people taking part in the consultation and is NOT necessarily reflective of the pattern of usage of the tracks and Trails overall.

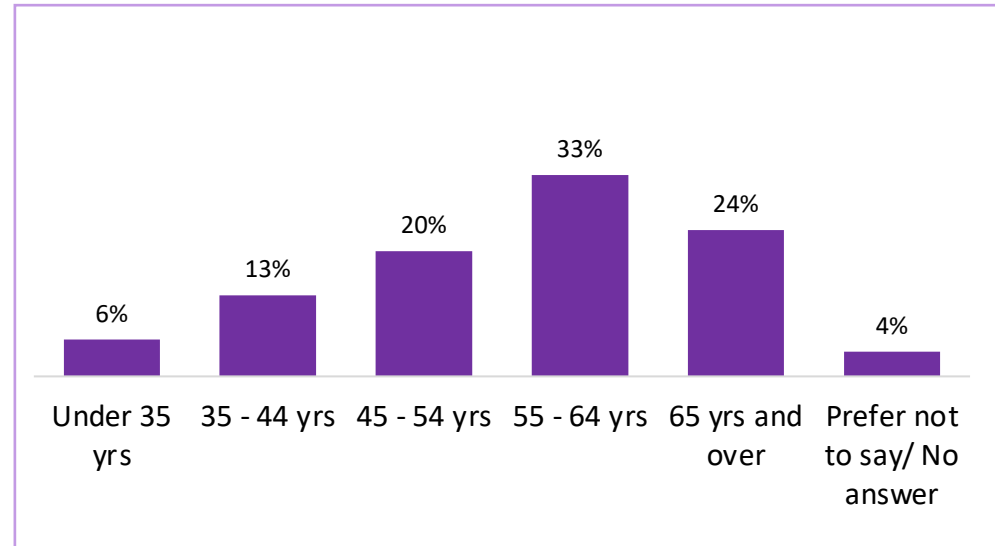
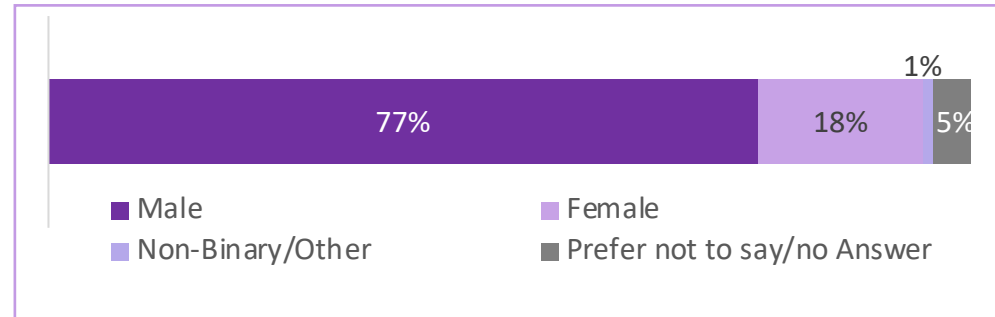
Base: 350 online responses



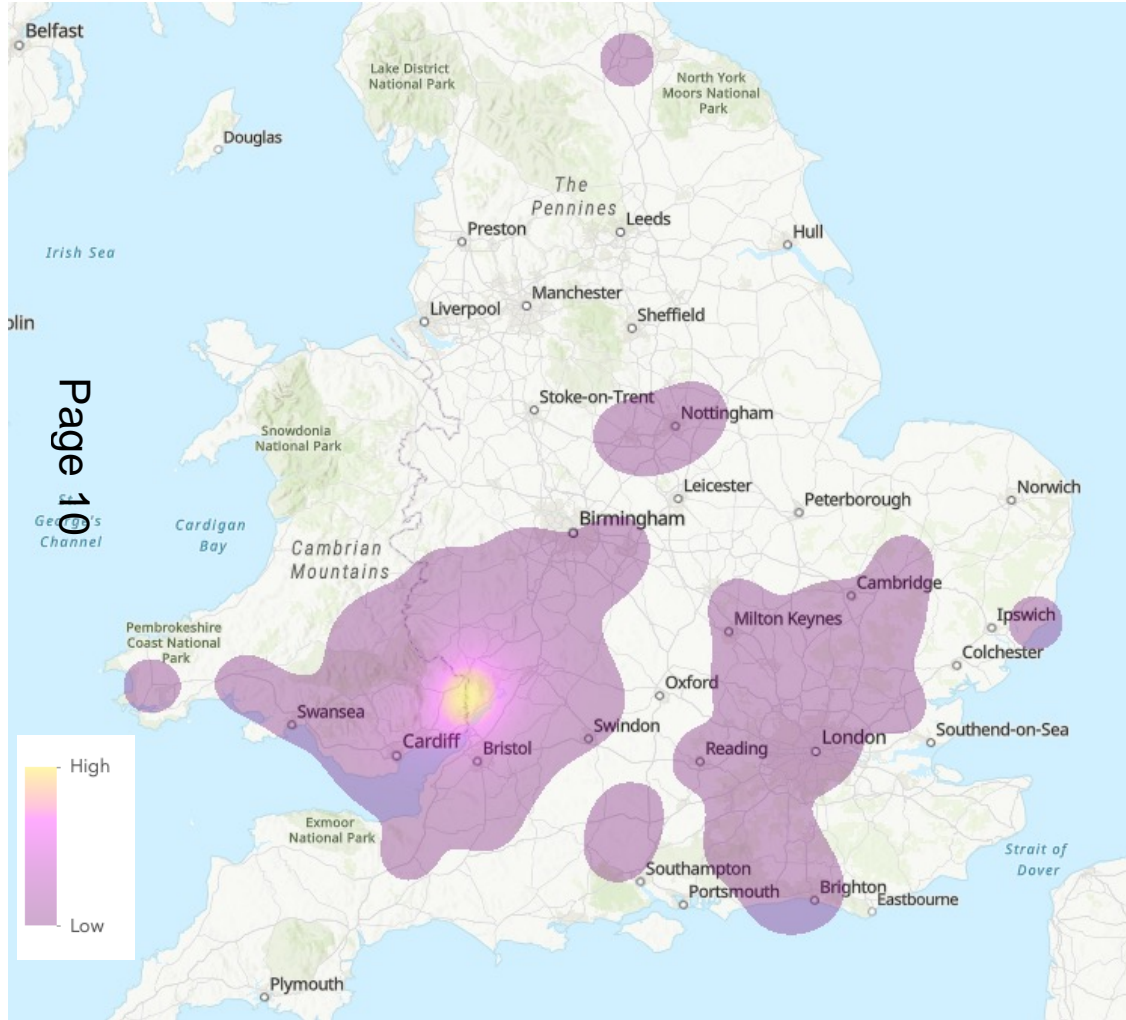
Demographic profile of consultation participants

- The profile of people taking part in the consultation is provided for reference
 - Over three-quarters of those taking part are male
 - There is good representation across age ranges, though the majority are 55 years and over
- The consultation has good representation of those with disabilities or health conditions. While 5% chose not to give an answer to the question, of those that did respond 28% reported health conditions
 - Health conditions reported include a range of physical and mental impairments
 - To protect anonymity of individuals, further details of health conditions are not included within this report
- The vast majority of responses are from people who describe their ethnic group or background as 'white' (85% of those that answered the question). 12% chose not to answer the question.
 - *To protect anonymity of individuals, further details of ethnic group or background are not included within this report*

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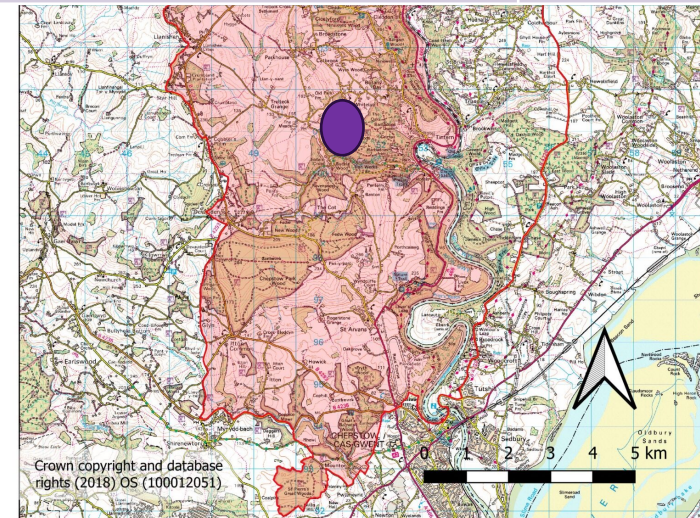


Location of consultation participants



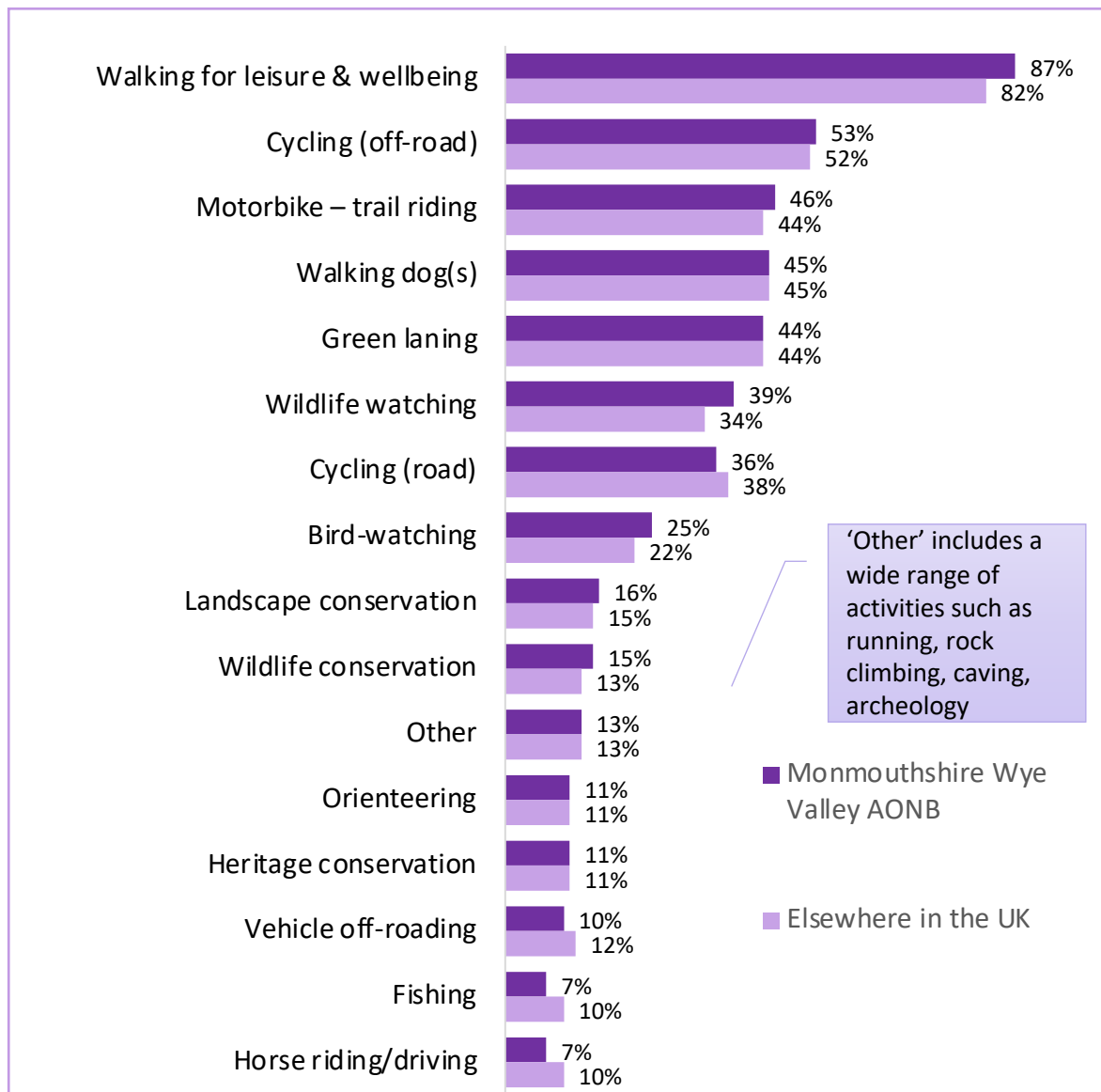
Lower Wye Tracks & Trails Project Area

Distance from area (central point marked on map for distance calculation)	Percentage of responses
Less than 3 miles	12%
3 – <5 miles	12%
5 - <10 miles	13%
10 - <15 miles	9%
15 - <20 miles	10%
20 - <30 miles	16%
30 - <50 miles	9%
50 - <100 miles	8%
100 miles or more	10%



Activities participated in by consultation participants

- Among the activities taken part in the Lower Wye Valley, walking is the most prevalent (87%)
- 53% off those taking part are cyclists
- The consultation attracted a large response from those involved in motorbike –trail riding (46%) and green-laners (44%)
- Other activities well-represented in the responses are wildlife/bird watching and landscape/wildlife/heritage conservation
- Only 7% of those taking part in the consultation ride or drive horses on the tracks and trails of the Wye Valley



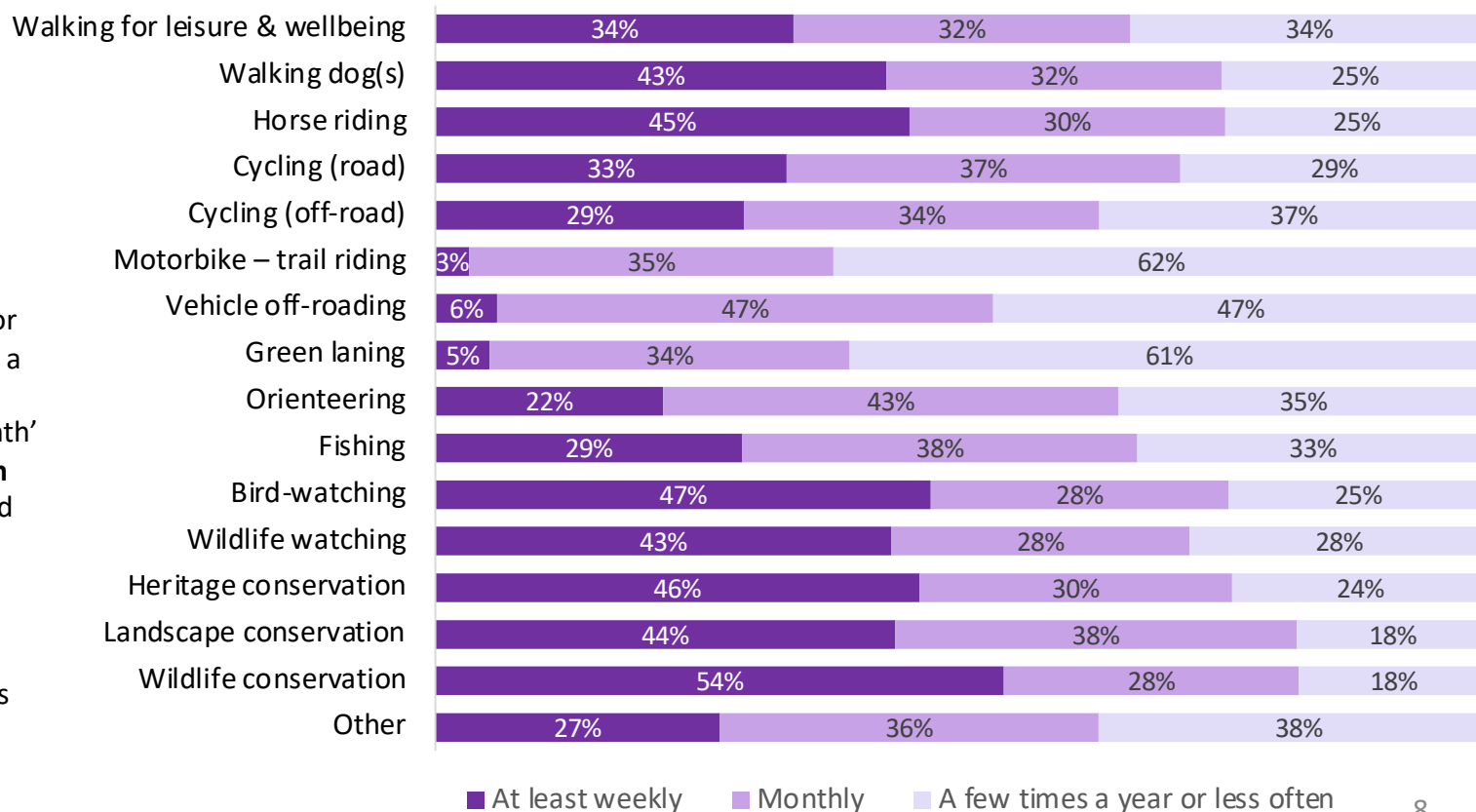
Frequency of use varies by proximity and activity

	Live here	Work here	Visit here frequently	Visit here occasionally	Work for an organisation with interest/ involvement in area	Volunteer with an organisation with interest/involvement in the area
At least weekly	68%	51%	9%	0%	18%	37%
Monthly	28%	43%	48%	5%	45%	39%
A few times a year or less often	3%	6%	43%	95%	36%	24%

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At least weekly includes 'daily or almost daily' and 'several times a week'
Monthly = 'several times a month'
A few times a year or less often includes 'a few times a year' and 'once a year or less often'

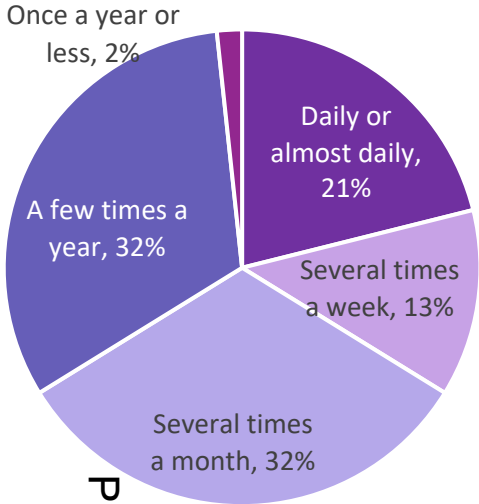
Note: Individual people may be counted multiple times in the activity data as many individuals participate in more than one activity in the area



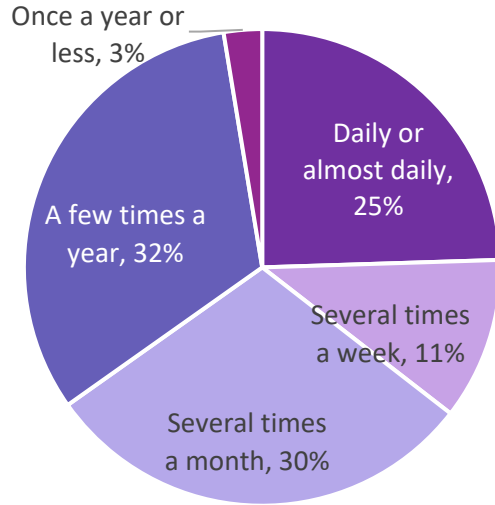
Profile by activities and frequency

Around a third of people undertake their activities at least weekly in the area, except those using motorised vehicles, who typically only do so at most a few times a month, but often less frequently

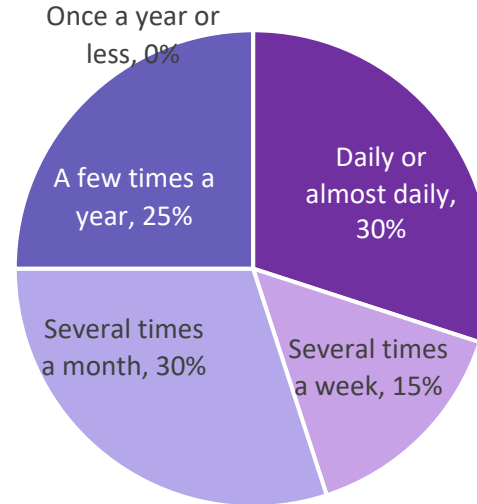
Walking for leisure



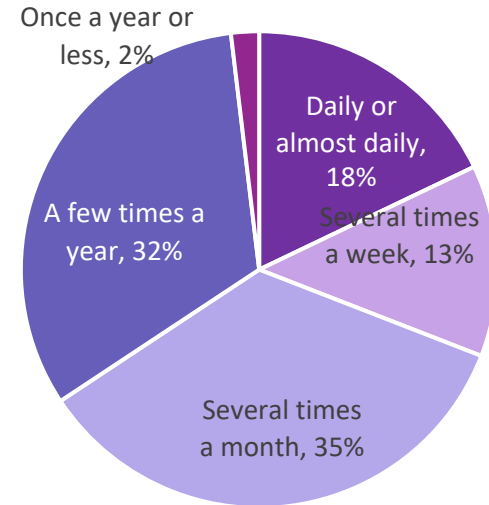
Walking the dog



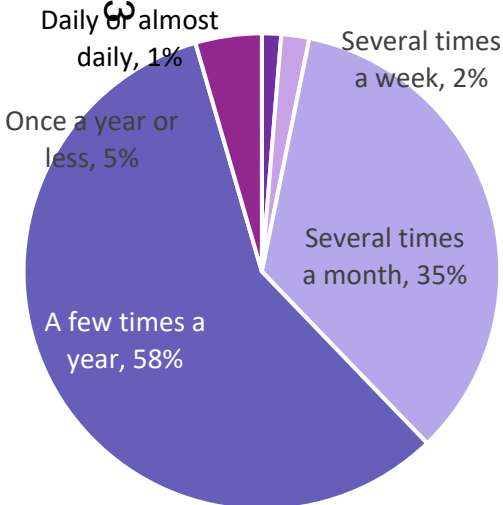
Horse riding/driving*



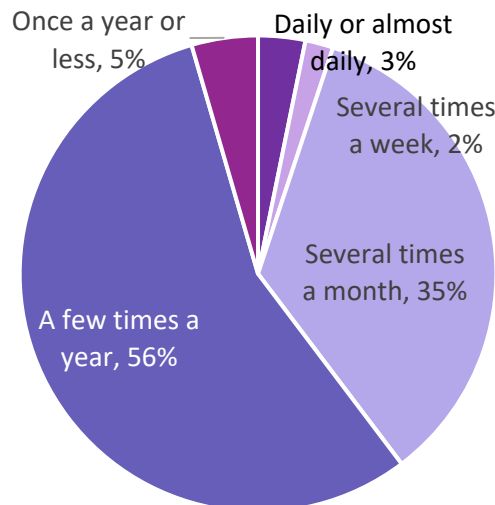
Cycling/Mountain biking



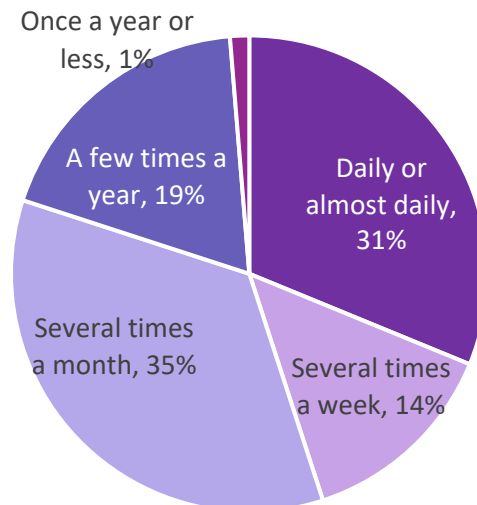
Trail Bikes/Motorcycling



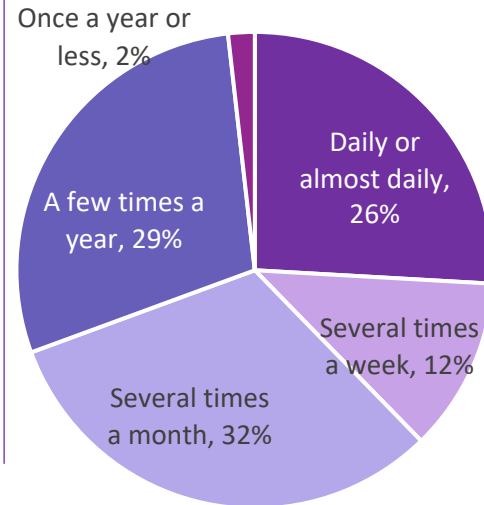
4x4/Greenlaning



Conservation activities



Other outdoor interests



What makes the area special

What Improvements are needed

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Two introductory questions asked prior to sharing any ideas or information around strategic priorities and action areas



The appeal of the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails (1)

Theme	Individual quotations are illustrative of the typical sentiment within each theme	
Breath-taking, beautiful scenery	Such a beautiful area with a rich history and a network of tracks and trails that enables the public to access, explore, learn and appreciate the area.	The scenery is outstanding
Tracks, trails, paths, green lanes	The unspoilt and ancient nature of the trails, styles, byways and paths.	The extensive network that rapidly take you into a diverse and beautiful natural environment.
Natural environment	Amazing environment, great mix of streams, hills, trees, etc.	The abundance of natural beauty.
Heritage, historic area	Their heritage of human, animal and vehicular use going back over passed centuries.	The scenery is wonderful and I like to see all the industrial heritage which can be discovered on these Byways and UCR's
Accessible	Beautiful scenery in an accessible area	Accessible, often flat and easy to cycle, walk, drive
Flora & fauna, plants and wildlife	The different trees, fungus, moss and rocks. It has so many different species	Each trail or track is different, lined by different woodlands - many ancient - as well as rocks and mosses and lichens and wildflowers
Outstanding, wonderful views	Breathtaking views that change with the seasons.	Stunning views and scenery.
Peaceful, quiet	Peace and quiet. Low numbers of other people	Beautiful scenery, tranquillity, very good for my mental health
Forest, woodland, trees	The tracks that pass through Woodlands are spectacular	Access to beautiful deciduous ancient woodland, views of the valley and other natural features e.g. waterfalls, dells

The appeal of the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails (2)

Theme	Individual quotations are illustrative of the typical sentiment within each theme
Varied landscape	<p>The vast number and variety of tracks is amazing, and there are so many different types of landscape, vegetation, and outlook across all of them. The fact that the tracks join in so many ways to create an almost never-ending network is wonderful.</p>
Location	<p>Their proximity to my home and to regional cities.</p> <p>Their locality to where I live means there is minimal travel time when using for leisure.</p>
Hills	<p>Their steep and rocky surfaces.</p> <p>There are many ancient bridleways and paths descending hillsides which have absolutely unique surface characteristics due to erosion.</p>
River	<p>The views of the river and the forested sides of the valley.</p> <p>Outstanding area of watercourses hills woodland..</p>
Unique	<p>Unique beautiful environment, also with great trails for recreation especially mountain biking</p> <p>They are as varied as they are unique.</p>
Technical, challenging	<p>The unique & challenging terrain for motorcycles coupled with the friendliness of locals.</p> <p>It has to be said that the rugged and "technical" nature of the trails is one of the most appealing aspects</p>
Signage, navigation	<p>Signage is also used to provide access for horses and carriage drivers.</p> <p>Easy to navigate</p>

In your view what makes the Monmouthshire Wye Valley's tracks and trails so special?

Improvements for the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails (1)

Theme	Individual quotations are illustrative of the typical sentiment within each theme	
Signage, navigation	Signage, an app to allow people to plan and track journey?	Improved signposting would be very useful. Clear signposting indicating, footpath, bridleway, Byway or unclassified county road with multi-user access
Better access	Gates and suitable paths that are accessible for horses and riders.	Ensure marked footpaths are accessible. There are many points around the area where nearby residents have discouraged access by letting growth block paths, or even blocking stiles.
Maintenance, repairs	Make maintenance more consistent: one area may have work carried out and be left beautiful, clean and natural, like no one has been there. Another might be left almost unusable through branches, scattered trees, and chasmic tracks left in the earth	Maintenance of tracks and trails - particularly footbridges
More tracks and routes	Connecting together existing routes in a more strategic manner	Derestrict more byways so a larger number of routes can be enjoyed by trail riders. Many footpaths could be opened up to be bridleways & allow access to more areas for horse riders or cyclists. MX riders are damaging many trails & making them dangerous to access
Restrict access/use	4wd and motorbikes should not be allowed to continue to destroy these historic routes and prevent and deter other users	Motorbikes are ruining the byways physically and environmentally plus (some) abuse usage of the trails i.e. they are blatantly using public footpaths !! Very upsetting and extremely dangerous.....Motorbikes must be dealt with.....
Drainage, landscape actions	Water erosion could also be avoided by adding better drainage to some ROW in the area as we are often blamed for water erosion damage as motorcycle users.	Water erosion is a major problem and I'm sure volunteer groups could be arranged for some maintenance. Most people enjoy a day out in the countryside.

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Improvements for the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails (2)

Theme	Individual quotations are illustrative of the typical sentiment within each theme		
Leave unmaintained	<p>They should be left to rewind naturally. All improvements will damage the natural ecology</p>	<p>I don't think there is any need for improvement, they are great as they are. I don't think they need to be 'managed' more than they are currently.</p>	
Information	<p>I would love to see maps of walks where more information is given of the plants, lichens and misses and bird life for example.</p>	<p>Informing new visitors to the area, and new residents that BOATs and Bridleways are there to be used as Rights of Way.</p>	<p>Informing leisure visitors of being responsible when undertaking their recreation.</p>
Parking	<p>Better access, parking facilities, hostels, over-night parking and camping.</p>		<p>Clear signage and enforcement to stop groups of camper vans parking in car parks at the entrances to tracks and trails overnight</p>
Keep all routes open/ access for all	<p>Keeping the lanes open for all to use from walkers, horses and trail riders etc.</p>		<p>Making sure the lanes remain open to all and resisting the noise from those who want to take it away from others.</p>
User collaboration	<p>The only thing I feel could be improved is collaboration and co-operation between all user groups to foster a tolerant and mutually beneficial relationship</p>		<p>Education of dog owners about their responsibilities when out with their dogs.</p>

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Priorities

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“The Tracks & Trails strategy and action plan will be developed around a number of priorities. These will be developed based on what has already been learnt from existing work and community feedback and, essentially, through this consultation process.”



- Across all those taking part in the consultation, the need to encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discourage any undesirable behaviours is seen as the highest priority, with 68% saying this is ‘very important’. This is supported by 62% saying it is ‘very important’ that an environment is created, through resources, facilities and education that enable all user groups to harmoniously enjoy the Wye Valley AONB’s tracks and trails.
- There is also high recognition of the need to support landowners in maintenance of the tracks and trails
- Less than half (48%) of those taking part in the consultation believe it is ‘very important’ to respond to the opportunity to support the improvement of the tracks and trails and reduce the impact of flooding and erosion. Whilst only 6% say it is not important, 16% give a neutral response

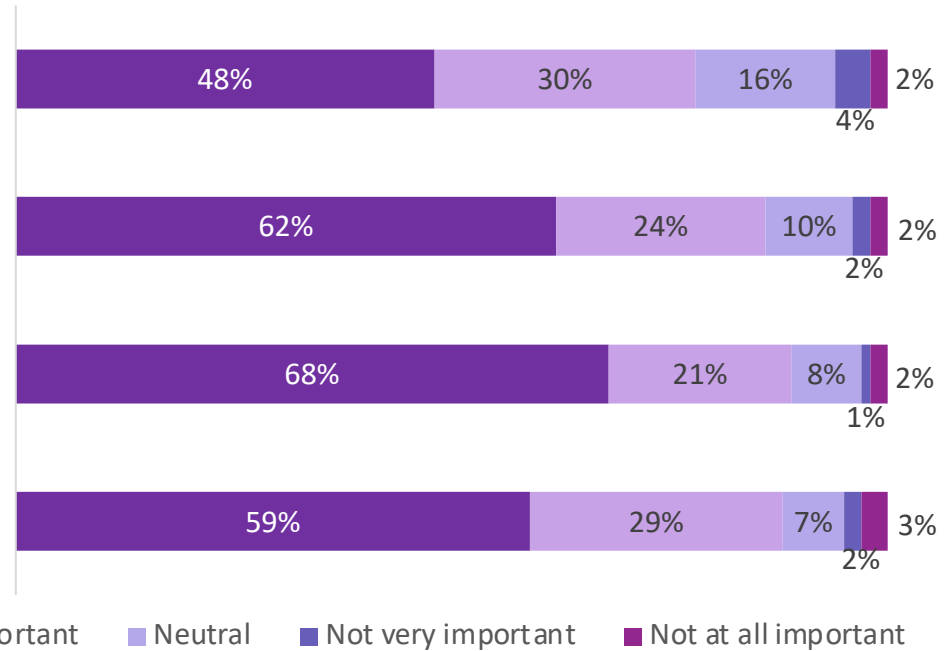
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Responding to the opportunity to support the improvement of the tracks and trails and reduce the impact of flooding and erosion

Creating an environment, through resources, facilities and education that enable all user groups to harmoniously enjoy the Wye Valley AONB’s tracks and trails

Encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discourage any undesirable behaviours

Provide support to landowners in the area to maintain tracks and trails in a way that ensures both good access for users and protects the environment and heritage of the area



The Tracks & Trails strategy and action plan will be developed around a number of priorities. These will be developed based on what has already been learnt from existing work and community feedback and, essentially, through this consultation process. How important do you feel each of these priorities are?

Activity Priorities

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- Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails to support their use and sustainability
- Improve the durability of the landscape
- Managing use
- Provide information



- The survey explored some potential action areas. The descriptions below were provided within the survey and are summarised to the short description (shown in bold) within the question asked

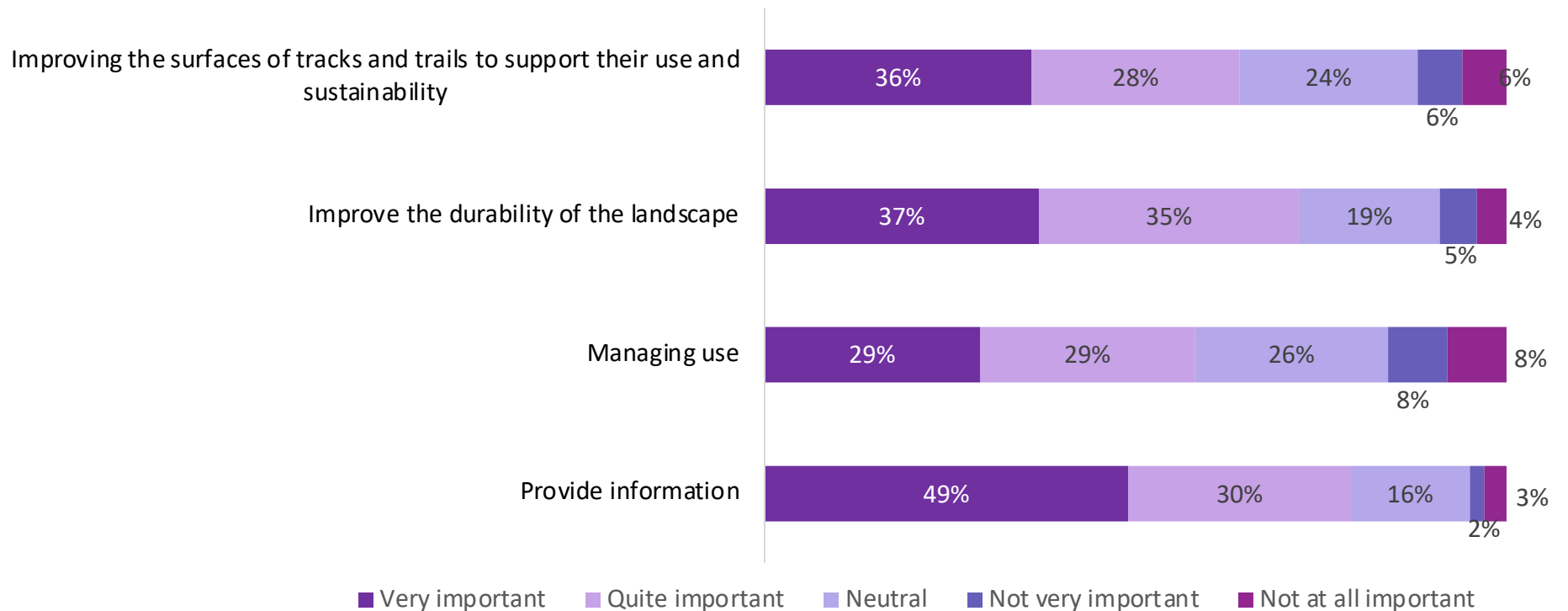
There are many different ways in which actions can be targeted to reduce the impact human users have on the AONB environment. Some of the ways being considered are:

- Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails** to reduce the impact of use on them. This might include covering existing surfaces with new materials, installing raised paths over existing ones or replacing existing surfaces with new, more durable ones
- Limiting use**, for example by restricting use to the times of year/weather conditions when the least damage is done or restricting the types of use. In this scenario it is easy to think simply of restricting access to motorised vehicles, but consideration must also be given to the impact that large groups of walkers can have, or cyclists following the same wheel track, or horses cutting in to soft ground. Another option may be to operate a permit system in some areas, where access is managed such that for example local residents have 24-7 access, but visitors to the area are limited in when they can use the most vulnerable areas
- Improve the durability and resilience of the landscape around the tracks and trails**, for example through new natural flood management schemes including better drainage, changes to management of the surrounding land to slow down water run-off and reduce its erosive force, all designed to help the tracks and trails cope with increasing rainfall and cope with increasing human use
- Provide information** to help users understand the challenges, understand what rights and needs other users have and encourage the right behaviours.

Activity priorities

- Consultation respondents were provided with 4 possible action areas (see following for details)
- Almost half (49%) believe the provision of information is ‘very important’
- Improving surfaces is ‘very important’ for 36% of those taking part, while 12% say it is not important. Similarly, 37% say it is ‘very important’ to improve the durability of the landscape, while 9% say it is not important
- Only 29% say managing use is ‘very important’ and 16% say it is not important

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How important do you think each of these are?

Strategy Outcomes

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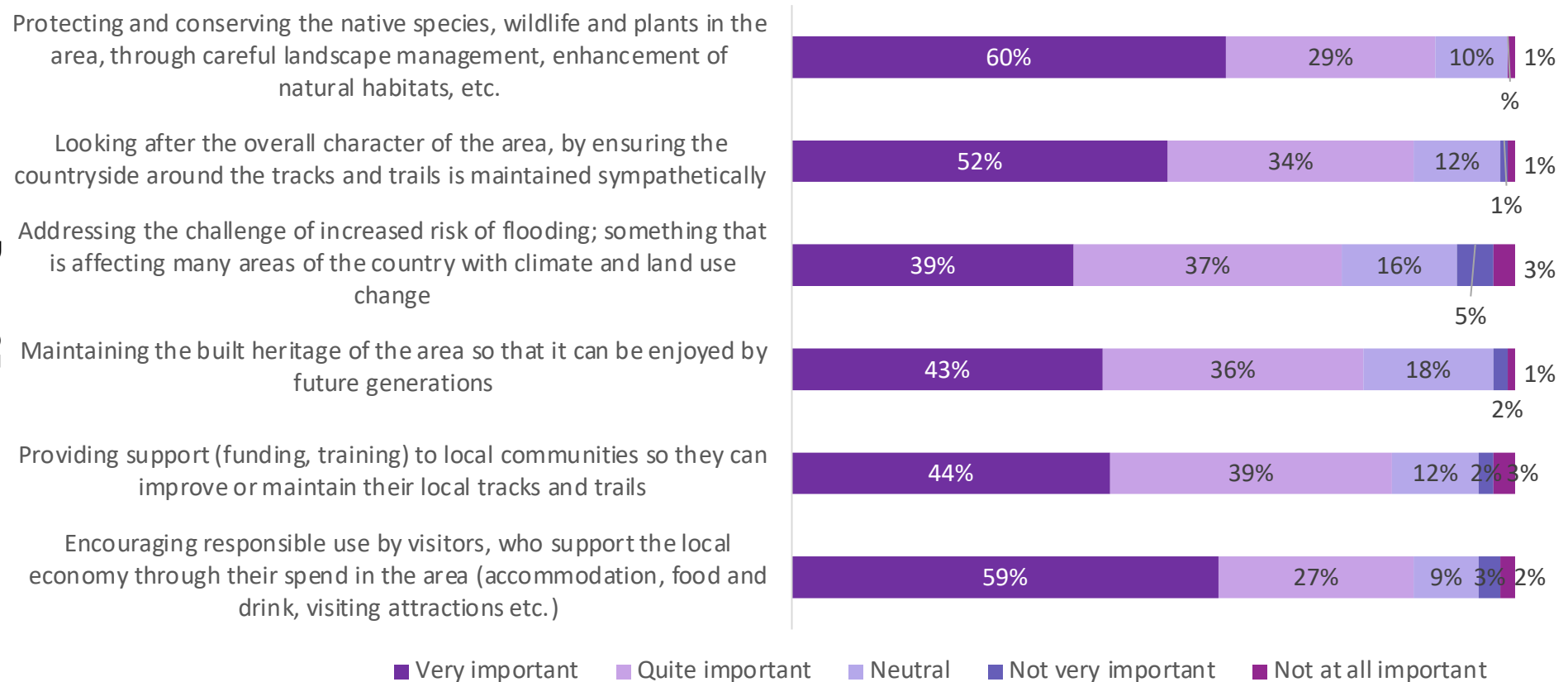
The strategy can be developed to achieve a range of outcomes. By outcomes we mean the benefits that implementing the strategy will have on the community, the landscape, the biodiversity and the heritage.



Strategy Outcomes

- Both ‘protection and conservation of native species wildlife and plants’ and ‘encouraging responsible use’ are the two most important outcomes among those taking part in the consultation.
- Only 39% think that ‘addressing the challenge of increased flooding’ is very important

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The strategy can be developed to achieve a range of outcomes. By outcomes we mean the benefits that implementing the strategy will have on the community, the landscape, the biodiversity and the heritage. How important do you think it is for each of these to be included in the strategy?

Topics and Themes

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Feedback from consultation participants



- This section of the report includes a summary of the topics and themes raised by people taking part in the consultation.
- Not every comment and perspective is included in this document, but has been reviewed and considered in its compilation.
- The focus of analysis has been to represent, as fully as possible, the range of opinions shared and to highlight where there is consistency and where there are conflicting views
- Each overarching theme includes details of the perspectives shared by consultees, along with some examples of actual comments made by individuals. These comments have been selected purely as illustrative and their inclusion does not imply any greater weight has been given to these over comments not included

- There is recognition that conservation is the primary statutory purpose of the AONB (National Landscape), acknowledgement of the collaborative efforts with DEFRA for wildlife conservation, along with the importance of maintaining green spaces.
- There is strong support for protecting the landscape:
 - Advocacy for greater protection of AONBs (National Landscapes), closer to the standards of National Parks.
 - Emphasis on understanding the importance of AONBs (National Landscapes) beyond recreation, as vital for protecting the environment.
 - Appreciation of the increased risks from weather extremes
 - Emphasis on preserving natural areas for wildlife, fungi, and native plants, with support for protecting animals and trees
 - Balancing environmental biodiversity and protection against climate change and human habitation.
 - Opposition to over-management, such as excessive signposting and unnecessary land interventions
 - Protecting natural environments, habitats, and historical features including waterways is a priority.
 - Careful improvement of trails and regular clearance of fallen trees and maintaining trails without over-sanitization.

Example Comments

“The statutory purpose of the AONB is the conservation and enhancement of nature, leisure does not feature, unlike National Parks.”

“Flooding and extremes of weather are only going to increase, and using green infrastructure at an early point will go some way to mitigating the risks to the land. If local communities, including cycling, walking and trail riding/trekking clubs, are given support and the option to work with the AONB in maintaining routes, then all will benefit.”

“Acceptance that the singular purpose of the AONB is to conserve and enhance nature, not leisure.”

“Not to treat the AONB as if it were a theme park with its success measured only in footfall. Preservation without degradation is vital for future generations”

“Leaving large areas natural and for wildlife, so not over-managing and 'humanising' the area with signposts and unnecessary land management - it spoils the environment visually and undermines the natural environment.”

“We should prioritise the protection of natural environments and habitats above all else. The Wye Valley is not a playground for people, it is a vitally important habitat for many, many birds, animals and insects. If providing greater access means increasing the footfall of people into sensitive areas then it absolutely must be avoided.”

‘Built heritage’ is not always understood as a descriptor and the structures of tracks and walls are not always recognised

- There is some recognition of the cultural and historical significance of tracks and trails and a desire to increase that understanding
- Calls for sensitivity to heritage features, including burial grounds, ancient ponds, and forgotten places of worship.
- For some, built heritage is not as important as the natural environment
- When commented on, historic buildings are generally felt to be outside of the remit of this strategy/the AONB (National Landscape)

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Those who recognise the heritage of the walls:

- Lay blame for their destruction in various places (natural erosion, large machinery, trail bikes etc.)
- Hope for their restoration, though recognise the natural and practical challenges in doing this
- The tracks themselves are noted for their historic significance and the role they played in supporting the landscape and industry in the area
 - Some then link this to the materials used on the tracks and the need to not change
 - The need to maintain the tracks so that they can continue to support the landscape is noted

Example Comments

“The tracks were built hundreds of years ago and incorporated many structural elements to help with drainage. These have been long neglected but could be easily and cheaply reinstated without damaging the character of the area. This would go a long way to ensure the sustainability of the paths, provided ongoing work was done on a timely basis.”

“Built heritage just not quite as important to me as natural features and wildlife.”

“Highways seems to support the damaging effect and support destroying historical features in our area. They refuse to tackle nonce and environmental pollution created by the trail bikes and 4x4s.”

“Maintaining / improving ecology and the built environment is very important as that is what the area so special and attract the visitors / users”

“I will often spend time when in the area cleaning out ancient drains to help keep water off the tracks. I would be happy to do volunteer days to repair fallen dry stone walls.”

“It has been said that this track was believed to be a medieval pilgrimage trail to St Davids the track clearly has historic old walls either side so cannot be widened for vehicle access. The track near Whitelye has clearly been laid with stones/cobbles in areas but this has now been disrupted, by motorbikes.”

“Monmouthshire’s ancient tracks which are lined with stone walls and zig- zag up the hillsides, (for example several paths up both sides of Whitebrook) have been destroyed by mechanised vehicles”

While there is widespread support for interventions to protect the environment, there are also those who support a less active approach:

- Allow natural evolution to suit current usage and recognise the evolving nature of tracks and trails and their use over time
- Some resistance to human intervention with a preference to leave tracks and trails as they are, sometimes expressed from a conservation perspective and sometimes for user enjoyment (particularly wheeled vehicle users)

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Some awareness that the area's features result from generations of industrial activities

Advocates for allowing natural habitats to evolve without extensive human intervention, emphasising the inevitability of erosion and the conservation of the natural character.

- Emphasis on respecting the area's beauty and leaving no trace.
- The need for a balance between maintaining access to trails and conserving the natural environment, addressing concerns about erosion and water damage.
- Some resistance to improving paths and signage.
- Opposition to unnecessary human intervention with preference for a light-touch approach.

Example Comments

“The character and make-up of the lanes in their worn and rugged state which evolves over the years with usual usage”

“Tracks need to be left natural and to evolve but blockages and fallen trees need to be removed. Trying to divert watercourse off the trail is important”

“Tracks have survived/developed over 100s of years - they will continue to naturally evolve. Leave them alone

“The natural nature of the lanes is their attraction, human intervention would change the experience.”

“I believe that it is important to maintain environmental biodiversity and protect the area from the effects of climate change and human habitation as well as balancing the needs of local people who use the area and ensuring responsible behaviour”

“The areas features are the result of generations of industrial activities, very little is natural landscape. Conservation of the current status should be taken with a pinch of salt.”

- Concerns are raised around the current maintenance of tracks and trails. These are often linked to suitability for different types of usage rather than the environmental or heritage sustainability. Themes mentioned include:
 - The importance of regular maintenance for safety and usability
 - General calls for consistent and/or improved maintenance, especially in areas of high use
 - Overgrown tracks, fallen logs, dead trees etc. hindering access
 - Issues with slippery surface
 - Poorly maintained, damaged stiles and gates
 - A perception, particularly among trail bike riders/4x4 users of poor maintenance by relevant authorities. This leads to concerns that the lack of maintenance may make tracks impassable and potentially then leads to a loss of the right of way
 - There are some references to erosion of tracks and the need to take action to prevent further erosion
 - Importance of reflecting the significance of routes through appropriate maintenance.
- For trail bike riders in particular the difficult terrain is part of the appeal. Lesser emphasis among this group on improving surfaces, with water damage and flooding seen as less problematic for most trail riders.
- Whilst some wheeled-users enjoy the challenge of unsurfaced routes, there is recognition that this means they may not be fully accessible for all users
- Solutions vary often depending on the type of use:
 - Some users are looking for variation in surfaces to cater for all use cases
 - Some wish to avoid use of hard surfaces
 - Trail bike riders/4x4 users call for better maintenance, in particular around preservation of Greenways
 - Stress on responsible use and maintenance for open access to all users.
 - Calls for regular inspections, monitoring, and timely removal of obstructions to ensure track and trail usability.

Example Comments

“Access to tracks and trails should be maintained. Low level maintenance to keep accessible and prevent deteriorating but current variety of types and condition of tracks and trails is what make the area so special.”

“Maintenance that reflects importance of routes i.e. Offa’s Dyke is an important route that looks abandoned in areas (especially where it passes residential areas). This must make a poor impression on visitors.”

“Some of the increased risk of flooding is due to lack of maintenance currently, and will get worse with climate change, but not the whole story.”

“Make maintenance more consistent: one area may have work carried out and be left beautiful, clean and natural, like no one has been there. Another might be left almost unusable through branches, scattered trees, and chasmic tracks left in the earth.”

“I’m familiar with a lot of the paths and the main issues are maintenance, in particular where there are safety issues such as very wet paths close to the river, slippery paths on ascent and descent - poor maintenance of steps.”

The role of landowners is raised by consultees in a variety of ways:

- Landowners are sometimes blamed for blocking tracks either intentionally, or through lack of maintenance, for example through broken gates or stiles, fallen trees etc.
- Comments include suggestion that it is landowners who cause damage to the tracks and trails through their use of farm machinery

There is support for responsible management of public rights of way by landowners, especially farmers.

Some consultees are unsure of landowner involvement in track & trail maintenance, with comments that it is a sole or shared responsibility either for landowners and/or other authorities (local or national)

Where there is an assumption of landowner accountability, it is suggested that

- The potential benefits for both locals and visitors, is communicated
- Landowners may require (additional) financial support to deliver on their responsibilities
- There is a need to support landowners to address conflicts and protect the environment.

Example Comments

“Most surface damage is caused by landowners using Tractors and / or heavy machinery for wood cutting and should be regulated by permit.”

“Landowners play an important role but they need the respect of the general public.”

“A lot of landowners can be quite difficult when it comes to rights of way across their land, so any support during these hard financial times will go a long way to helping them accept the public has a right to be there”

“In the area I live there are a lot of enforcement issues with many paths inaccessible as they have been blocked by landowners”

“I think landowners need support to understand their responsibilities regarding PRow as well as some oversight to ensure that they are meeting those responsibilities - locally we have examples of paths blocked by hedges, tied up gates, electric fences across footpaths, broken stiles and bridges”

“Concerns of landowners about increased use of footpaths on their land”

“Landowners need to be kept informed of the value of tracks and trails and the benefits of keeping them in good order so the public can safely cross their land with minimal impact”

There are fundamentally different perspectives within the consultation responses:

- Those who wish to restrict access to some or all routes. This opinion may be motivated by
 - A desire to protect the environment
 - To reduce/eliminate what is perceived to be unacceptable behaviour
 - A belief that some current usage is illegal
 - Concerns about attracting more visitors than the area can support.
 - A wish to balance the needs of locals and visitors.
- Emphasis on responsible and sustainable use, encouraging walking and cycling over excessive car use.
- Some want to, at a minimum maintain, and ideally increase, access rights to more routes. This view is often linked to:
 - A perceived lack of access generally (not just within the Lower Wye Valley)
 - A wish to be away from roads
 - A way for those with accessibility requirements to be able to enjoy the area
- A permits system is suggested for regulating access on sensitive lanes, balancing policing to prevent minority actions affecting the majority.
- Calls for designated areas for motorbike trails to prevent damage to other tracks
 - Support for more tracks and trails with a focus on suitable areas for different users.
 - Calls for proper planning to avoid creating paths leading to inaccessible sections, highlighting the importance of strategic development.
 - Prioritisation of the importance of tracks for motorcycle riders.

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Example Comments

“Limiting horses and 4x4s in the wetter months of the year would protect the tracks”

“Careful limits put on any new tourism/ commercial ventures in or near presently natural environments.”

“Limit the access of dogs, ensure they are on leads so that wildlife is not harassed.”

“There should be no restrictions to motorcycle access to current legal routes - these have already been reduced significantly by the council and are considered precious by responsible trail riders.”

“Seasonal restrictions are applicable to individual trails with less sustainable surfaces to prevent deterioration.

“Access to woodland by trail bikers/ cyclists / any vehicles needs to be prevented.”

“People shouldn't be allowed access if they can't behave respectfully/responsibly”

“Trying to stop scramblers who make some of the paths so muddy they become inaccessible and dangerous to walkers or horse riders”

“Importantly, some of these routes allow vehicular access which enables participation of those who are unable to enjoy the area on foot, horse or bicycle.”

Some of the comments relate to reclassifying routes and changes to route designations.

- Advocacy for legal restrictions on motorized vehicle use in areas causing damage, including suggestions that...
 - Council and government bodies could re-designate tracks that cause difficulty for other users or during certain times
 - Unclassified county roads could be reclassified to footpaths or bridleways to deter off-roaders and reduce pollution e.g. Proposal to change the track from Tintern to Whitelye to prohibit motorized vehicles due to narrow paths and negative impact.

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Community councils should be actively involved in raising awareness, hosting meetings, and working with residents

- Collaboration with NRW, MCC, and National Landscapes to tackle issues collectively
- Importance of communication between authorities and the public regarding trail conditions
- Opening up new and linking existing trails to make the best use of what's already there before further development

Example Comments

"More access for legal motorcycle trail riding to help us all appreciate and enjoy the health benefits of this beautiful part of our world."

"Opening up forestry tracks to legal off road vehicle use"

"Reclassify all Unclassified County Roads to footpaths or bridleways aiming to stop off-roaders, especially motorcycles, which cause huge amounts of damage, pollution both from oil spills and run-off from badly eroded tracks."

"Reclassification of certain tracks and trails to improve access provision for equestrian and cycle users."

"More continuous paths for cycling - especially along the route of the old railway line upstream of Tintern"

Restrictions have often been shown to simply put pressure in other areas. By restricting one track more people will use a neighbouring track or worse will form an unofficial track."

Asking for voluntary restraint on use of some tracks at certain times of the year. If there are perceived issues with certain trail use then highlight this with clear well-placed signage. People are always more reasonable and willing to compromise their behaviour in response to well-reasoned information that they can understand how it might apply to them and their actions."

There is widespread recognition that different user groups have different needs and wishes for the tracks and trails.

- In some instances this leads to user groups feeling aggrieved and unsupported.
- Various user groups apportion blame on others
- Often there appears a lack of empathy or understanding of other user groups' perspectives

There is also a willingness to work together and for the various user groups to find solutions that work for all

- There is recognition that this require compromise and may not lead to perfect outcomes for all

Example Comments

"All the separate groups need to come together around the table - perhaps the local councillors could reach out to organise this."

"The only thing I feel could be improved is collaboration and co-operation between all user groups to foster a tolerant and mutually beneficial relationship"

"Collaboration and respect for each other through you. You are to conduit through which we can gather and educate, enforce and respect and support each other"

"The goal is shared, if compromise is needed this can only be established by asking each of the various groups/stakeholders"

"I would suggest that ALL interested parties must be prepared to compromise, for it would be impractical if not impossible, to expect anything less. But inclusive consultations, with effective communications and strong leadership, should see a workable and sustainable solution(s)."

"By respecting the fact these are ancient access areas where many benefit and enjoy, so work together"

"People need to work together and understand one another, ramblers, horse riders, motorcyclists, cyclists, be kind and understanding and understand the rights of way so no untoward confrontation, just respect"

Emphasis often on educating users about rights of way and the belief that early communication will avoid conflicts

- Calls for an online page for information about access rights
- Highlights the importance of educating users on rights of way, proposing user events and improved education of local councillors
- Suggestions advocating for education and awareness campaigns
- Calls for regular face-to-face meetings, unbiased user group meetings, and open dialogues.

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Example Comments

“Education of dog owners about their responsibilities when out with their dogs.

Education of mountain bikers about the difference between public footpaths and bridleways. “

“There should be education around the damage that dogs off leads can do to the natural environment to make owners realise this”

“Awareness of who can use them. The benefits they bring to the local community “

“Education is important in order for people to understand the changes that need to happen in order for the environment to thrive and be healthy.”

“Education, through considerate signs and information boards would be helpful to all groups.”

“It’s important that the environment is protected and that people who are using it are able to get enough information about what they have to do in order to protect the tracks and trails they intend on using”

“The outcomes should include the benefits to users of the trails not just the local community.”

“The need for sharing information and knowledge is the key factor behind this new approach and it should help to improve understanding in the future”

Routes that are open to a wide range of users, raise some concerns around safety and how best to enable multi-usage

- There are concerns about the danger of allowing both pedestrian access and motorized sports riding on narrow tracks.
- There are also concerns about off-road motorbikes causing damage to tracks and disturbing residents.

Many suggestions are made around actions (those linked to managing use are covered earlier in this report), but other ideas include:

- Limits to the speed users can go on
- Establishing/promoting a 'Code of Conduct'.

Signage is a frequently mentioned topic, though from differing perspectives and with different views on the 'right' action to take

- Right to use – often voiced by trail bike riders or 4x4 drivers who wish other users to be more aware that vehicle users have a right to use tracks and trails. There are concerns that others believe their use is illegal and they would like signage to address that
- User Etiquette – signs and information that give advice on 'desirable behaviours' and how to interact with other user groups
- Wayfinding - to help visitors navigate the area

Whilst more signage is often requested, there is also feedback that the area should not be overburdened with signs. Reasons for this are typically environmental or aesthetic.

Example Comments

"Inform and educate both agencies and users as well as working closely together to help ensure safety and protection of the environment and the public"

"Responsible behaviours is important for health and safety of all users. On a recent visit I had misfortune to fall but group of cyclists stopped to offer support, how kind and makes one feel safe"

"Trail bicycles are also becoming a problem as they travel in groups at speed on small tracks and are unable to brake for a pedestrian in their way. I don't know the law, but there should be a speed limit (enforced) for everyone of 5mph and education for cyclists that for safety pedestrians have right of way"

"Speed ,dismounting, classification of routes , changing routes , route safety, some give and take"

"An etiquette standard so everyone understand the expected behaviours and necessary respect for other users. "

"Adequate signage and public awareness that some of the rough tracks in the Wye valley are in fact public roads with a long history of such status."

"Proper signage so all groups of users know it legal use."

"I am always disappointed to see unnecessary signage being put up in natural areas such as woodlands, and landscapes being managed in a way that spoils the area. The local area is used a lot by visiting Duke of Edinburgh students - they enjoy map reading in a natural setting and the opportunity to be in the wild."

"Educational signs to inform users of other users' rights of ways"

"Large plastic signs do not enhance the environment. They spoil it and turn rural into urban. Just stop!"

"Users with wheels can be encouraged via signs to stop, give way and speak thereby helping to allay the fear of horses meeting them."

Various suggestions are made around the involvement of volunteers and/or the local community to maintain the area:

- Suggested that local involvement is needed for maintenance of unsurfaced tracks & trails that may erode naturally
- Proposal to involve local people in activities like coppicing and maintenance, offering them wood from cleared areas.
- Calls for engagement with local groups and recognition of individual contributions to conservation.
- Encourage local communities to form groups for track maintenance.
- Proposals for awards and grants to acknowledge and support those contributing to conservation efforts.
- Community councils and maintenance groups working on public rights of way.
- Support for local volunteer path care groups
- Some user groups (including trail riders and 4x4 users) suggest voluntary resources can be used to support those with an existing responsibility for maintenance (land owners, local authorities etc.)
- Various expressions of willingness to volunteer for trail maintenance, advocating for better advertisements to promote awareness.
- Suggestion of more encouragement for more volunteer opportunities, emphasising the importance of involving local communities, schools, and youth.

Example Comments

“As a TRF member I am happy to volunteer for maintenance work through them.”

“The groups causing the most impact should be encouraged to help more with volunteering to maintain the tracks and trails.”

“I would volunteer to help”

“Water erosion is a major problem and I'm sure volunteer groups could be arranged for some maintenance. Most people enjoy a day out in the countryside.”

“Continue to support local groups of volunteers who maintain footpaths with funding through Trellech United Community Council.”

“Both the above organisations [TRF & GLASS] have volunteers who have and will assist in conserving and maintaining the legal network or tracks and trails working with local authorities.”

“Volunteers are out there if those in need knew who to ask.”

“Establish working groups that promote the ideas, maintain the tracks & trails & encourage visiting parties to respect the efforts /contributions that local volunteers are willing to provide”

Various suggestions are made around the financial aspects of the area, both as a contributor to the local economy and the need to fund necessary work in the area:

- Recommendation that fundraising be done to fund signage, including contributions from organisations like TRF.
- Advocates for clear communication of issues, emphasizes maintaining trail interest for visitors and supporting local businesses.
- Suggests working with organizations like GLASS and similar groups, acknowledges the positive impact of diverse usage on the local economy.
- Calls for adequate funding and support from local councils.
- *Tourism and Economic Contribution:* Highlights the economic benefits of tourism, proposes tolls or taxes on users for trail maintenance, and suggests collaboration among user groups.
- *Local Business and Community Support:* Encourages users to support local businesses, advocates for the local council and community to maintain trails sympathetically.
- Assess community assets and resilience before development of any plans/ new infrastructure.

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Example Comments

“Inclusion of the community to take responsibility is absolutely key to success”

“Responsible tourism should benefit the local community and businesses, particularly when many are struggling at the moment.”

“Awareness of who can use them. The benefits they bring to the local community”

“When we visit we spend a lot of money in the local community. I think it is the responsibility of the local council & to some degree the community to maintain the lanes in a sympathetic manner”

“Without careful management an important resource could be lost, impoverishing the local community and deterring visitors”

“Provide support and if possible, grants or funding for local community groups to help their efforts to repair and maintain the paths”

“The outcomes should include the benefits to users of the trails not just the local community.”

“Through education and involvement of the wider community...”

“My personal action is that I visit the area ,I always visit the cafes, shops and pubs. I have no problem with paying parking charges.”

There is some discussion around facilities for visitors including:

- Calls for better parking facilities for horseboxes and trailers.
- Suggestions for designated areas for motorbike trails.
- Comments on the need for bins and responsible litter disposal.
- Prioritisation of some routes to encourage visitors to stick to just a few routes

Example Comments

“Clear signage and enforcement to stop groups of camper vans parking in carparks at the entrances to tracks and trails overnight (Whitestone, Ninewells, Beacon View), which prevent other users from parking and can be intimidating for other users accessing the tracks and trails on foot.”

“Most arrive by car so parking- perhaps small but frequent and safe off-road parking would help”

“A few well defined "honeypot" zones where some easy access, well sign-posted circular trails lead from good parking facilities with toilets and picnic areas, whilst leaving the bulk of the area unmanaged other than a bare minimum to prevent complete degradation.”

“From my experience there appears to be an a huge network of tracks and trails going through the woodland etc... They can be accessed easily through car parks and the road network due to the nature of the villages and hamlets, makes it easy to access areas by road.”

“More parking at woodland entrance”

“Better parking facilities for Horsebox’s and trailers. Having corals in the area would benefit horse and riders who have travelled far and who are making a weekend stay in the area.”

There is some feedback around the level of involvement of various private and public organisations:

- Calls for involvement of local government bodies, emphasises a joined-up approach involving highways departments.
- Suggests collaboration with national organisations for broader support and strategy development.
- Recognition of the need for compromises between user groups and emphasises inclusive consultations for sustainable solutions.

Example Comments

“The root of issues on Green Roads is that the Highways Authority has NEVER 'asserted and protected [the rights of the users]’ as is their DUTY. So, no Roads have ever been properly signed, and virtually no-one knows that they are Roads - all portrayed wrongly as 'paths’.”

“Legally responsible parties actively engage with maintenance responsibilities”

“These tracks and trails have existed for hundreds of years but successive council's and other bodies have failed, through ignorance it deliberate act, to fulfil their duties to maintain them.£

“As a member of the TRF (Trail Riders Fellowship), we actively maintain the trails , removing fallen trees , slides etc with the co-operation of local councils.”

“Better liaison with County, Town and Community Councils - and NRW, who look after paths, tracks and rights of way through their land.”

“Am involved in our newly formed rights of way group in Llanishen and we are in discussion with Monmouthshire council to set up a plan of works to maintain our local path network”

Community Drop-in Sessions Themes and Topics

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Feedback from those who attended the community drop-in sessions



The main themes raised by those attending the drop-in sessions were:

- Concerns around **trail bike riders**.
 - **Antisocial behaviours:** Concerns around aggressive, intimidating behaviour from some trail bike riders.
 - **Illegal use:** Belief that some of the trail bikes are on some tracks illegally and concerns around trail bike riders straying from paths and riding through wooded areas.
 - **Increasing volume:** Those who have lived locally for a long time, report an increasing number of trail bikes, both more frequent usage and bigger groups of trail bike riders
 - **Pollution** in terms of both **Noise** and **Fumes**,
 - **Erosion and environmental damage** perceived to be being done to the tracks themselves and the wildlife
- **Dogs** not under control and/or not being kept on leads on paths crossing private land (despite signs)
- **Litter, BBQs** etc. and **wild campers** in the area
- Lack of **signs** and in some instances damage to/removal of signs
- **Deer:** an increasing number of deer in the area is problematic and it is not clear to attendees who to report to, or whose responsibility a cull would be
- **Blocked paths**, fly-tipping, fallen trees etc. Again, lack of understanding of who to report to and concerns around the length of time for issues to be resolved

Other topics raised via completed **feedback forms** from the drop-in sessions

- Some concern over the response volume to the consultation, a perceived lack of communication within the local community of the consultation and the drop-in's and a desire for the sessions to have been more 'formal'
- Several offers to provide support/resources as needed
- A plea for more public toilets and litter bins
- Acknowledgement that the discussion around the strategy is a good thing and pleased that it is happening, but some scepticism around where actions will/can be taken to resolve local concerns
- Some concerns around the friction that exists between user groups and local residents and the challenge that presents for finding resolution
- A wish for integration of the Highways Department in the initiative to cover UCRs
- An expectation of more focus on agriculture and forestry in the strategy
- A request for greater consideration of wheelchair users and those with limited mobility

Appendix – Online Consultation

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Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails

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

The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Unit are working on a new strategy and action plan, to help provide the best experience for all those that enjoy the tracks and trails in the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB. The aim of the work is to develop the most practical ways of supporting the requirements of all types of users, while protecting the natural and built environment for current and future generations.

As part of the initiative we are carrying out a public consultation to ensure the views of stakeholders, local residents, users of and visitors to the tracks and trails of the Wye Valley AONB in Monmouthshire are taken into consideration when developing the strategy and action plan. The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) commissioned Tomorrow's Tourism to help us with the development of the action plan for recreational access in Monmouthshire's Wye Valley. XV Insight are working as part of the Tomorrow's Tourism team to assist with the consultation process.

[Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) relating to the consultation can be seen here.](#)

An overview of the [scope and topic areas covered by the consultation can be seen here.](#)

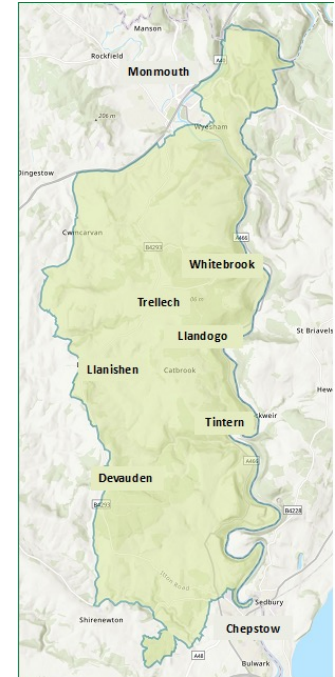
Your responses are anonymous unless you choose to share your personal details with us.

- Our privacy notice can be read [here](#)
- All questions are optional, they are provided to help the consultation gather your views on all the relevant topics. If you require assistance with this form please email lowerwyevalley@tomorrowstourism.com
- Throughout this questionnaire "tracks and trails" mean the suite of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and forestry tracks, permissive paths, as well as unpaved Unclassified County Roads (UCRs)

1. What is your connection with the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB? (Tick all that apply)

- Live here
- Work here
- Visit here frequently
- Visit here occasionally
- Work for an organisation with an interest or involvement in the area*
- Volunteer with an organisation with an interest or involvement in the area*

* Which organisation(s) are you involved with?



The Online Survey

Do you currently use the tracks and trails within the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

How often do you typically use the tracks and trails within the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB?

- Daily or almost daily
- Several times a week
- Several times a month
- A few times a year
- Once a year or less

What are the main reasons you currently use the tracks and trails?

- 'Commuting' to work, school, college etc. on foot/cycle etc.
- For leisure
- For work/volunteering (restoration, maintenance etc.)
- Other (please specify)

In your view what makes the Monmouthshire Wye Valley's tracks and trails so special?

And what do you think could be improved around the Monmouthshire Wye Valley's tracks and trails?

The Tracks & Trails strategy and action plan will be developed around a number of priorities. These will be developed based on what has already been learnt from existing work and community feedback and importantly, through the consultation process. How important do you feel each of these priorities are?

You can read more about the [scope and topic areas here](#)

	Very important	Quite important	Neutral	Not very important	Not at all important
Responding to the opportunity to support the improvement of the tracks and trails and reduce the impact of flooding and erosion					
Creating an environment, through resources, facilities and education that enable all user groups to harmoniously enjoy the Wye Valley AONB's tracks and trails					
Encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discourage any undesirable behaviours					
Provide support to landowners in the area to maintain tracks and trails in a way that ensures both good access for users and protects the environment and heritage of the area					

Why do you say that?

Are there other things that you think should be prioritised?

The Online Survey

There are many different ways in which actions can be targeted to reduce the impact human users have on the AONB environment. Some of the ways being considered are:

- a. **Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails** to support their use and sustainability. This might include repairing existing surfaces, considering new options for resurfacing, managing the flow of water along and across the routes or other improvements so that they can be used more safely by people and to sustain the routes for future use
- b. **Improve the durability of the landscape**, for example through new natural flood management schemes, changes to management of the surrounding land to hold back water and control flows, new or reinstated walls and hedges and tree planting, designed to mitigate the impact of use of the tracks and trails
- c. **Managing use**, for example by restricting/encouraging use to the times of year/weather conditions when the least damage is done or restricting the types of use. In this scenario it is easy to think simply of restricting access to motorised vehicles, but consideration must also be given to the impact of large events or groups of walkers or runners can have, or cyclists following the same wheel track, or horses cutting into soft ground. There may be opportunities to manage use through voluntary agreements
- d. **Provide information** to help users understand the challenges and encourage the right behaviours. This maybe through more signage on tracks and trails including both way-finding and environment/heritage information, access to online resources, encouraging community involvement and volunteering opportunities etc.

How important do you think each of these are?

	Very important	Quite important	Neutral	Not very important	Not at all important
Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails to support their use and sustainability					
Improve the durability of the landscape					
Managing use					
Provide information					

Why do you think that?

Are there other actions that you think could be taken?

The Online Survey

The strategy can be developed to achieve a range of outcomes. By outcomes we mean the benefits that implementing the strategy will have on the community, the landscape, the biodiversity and the heritage. How important do you think each of these that might be included in the strategy?

	Very important	Quite important	Neutral	Not very important	Not at all important
Protecting and conserving the native species, wildlife and plants in the area, through careful landscape management, enhancement of natural habitats, etc.					
Looking after the overall character of the area, by ensuring the countryside around the tracks and trails is maintained sympathetically					
Addressing the challenge of increased risk of flooding; something that is affecting many areas of the country with climate and land use change					
Maintaining the built heritage of the area so that it can be enjoyed by future generations					
Providing support (funding, training) to local communities so they can improve or maintain their local tracks and trails					
Encouraging responsible use by visitors, who support the local economy through their spend in the area (accommodation, food and drink, visiting attractions etc.)					

Why do you think that?

Are there other outcomes you would like the strategy to be focused on?

What can you do to help develop and deliver the strategy, whether that is through your personal actions, those of organisations you work or volunteer for or any groups you are a member of that use the Monmouthshire Wye Valley tracks and trails?

What do you think others need to do to help develop and deliver the strategy? Again, this may be individuals' behaviours, local organisations or membership groups that use the area?

The AONB Management Plan recognises that we all have a collective responsibility, including all who enjoy the Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB, to conserve and enhance the environment for the future. (The AONB Management Plan can be [seen here](#))
How can all user groups best work together to ensure this?

What compromises might be needed?

Are there additional actions that the Wye Valley AONB Unit and partner organisations need to take to make the area accessible, while conserving and enhancing the environment for the future?

The Online Survey

How can the Wye Valley AONB Partnership best promote responsible behaviours among those who use the tracks and trails in the Monmouthshire area?

How can the Wye Valley AONB Partnership best discourage unwanted behaviours among those who use the tracks and trails in the Monmouthshire area?

It would be very helpful if you would answer the following questions in order to check we have spoken to a broad range of people. These questions are optional and your views will still be considered equally if you choose not to answer some or all of them.

Which if any of the following activities do you take part in in the countryside either in Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB and/or elsewhere in UK? (Please tick all that apply)

	Monmouthshire Wye Valley AONB	Elsewhere in the UK
Walking for leisure & wellbeing		
Walking dog(s)		
Horse riding		
Horse driving (carriage)		
Cycling (road)		
Cycling (off-road)		
Motorbike – trail riding		
Vehicle off-roading		
Orienteering		
Fishing		
Bird-watching		
Wildlife watching		
Heritage conservation		
Landscape conservation		
Wildlife conservation		
Green laning		
Other (write in)		

Are you?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other (write in)
- Prefer not to say

What age are you?

- Under 25 yrs
- 25 – 34 yrs
- 35 – 44 yrs
- 45 – 54 yrs
- 55 – 64 yrs
- 65 – 74 yrs
- 75 yrs and over
- Prefer not to say

Do you have any of the following disabilities or conditions? (tick all that apply)

- No, I don't have any of these disabilities or conditions
- Hearing
- Visual
- Physical
- Learning (e.g. autism, ADHD, dyslexia)
- A mental health condition
- A long term health condition (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, fatigue etc.)
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

The Online Survey

Which one of the following best describes your ethnic group or background?

- Asian or British Asian
- Black or Black British
- Mixed ethnic background
- White British
- White - Gypsy / Romany / Traveller
- White - any other background
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

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Your response will be anonymous unless you choose to provide your contact details. This will be used for the purposes of the Lower Wye Tracks & Trails consultation only. We will not store or use this data for any other purpose without seeking further consent. Please refer to our privacy policy for more information. You can withdraw this consent at any time.

Name

Email

Phone Number

Address (including Postcode)



THE TRACKS & TRAILS OF THE LOWER WYE VALLEY

INTEGRATED ACCESS STRATEGY



Dyffryn Gwy
Tirwedd Cenedlaethol
Wye Valley
National Landscape



monmouthshire
Page 51
SIR FYNWY

MonLife
AWYR AGORED OUTDOOR

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Executive Summary

The Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley is home to an extensive network of tracks and trails that allow wide-ranging access to one of Britain's finest lowland landscapes.

This recreation Strategy and Action Plan was commissioned by the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership. It sets out how these routes will be looked after, improved, enjoyed, enhanced for a wider audience and conserved for the longer term. It responds to Terms of Reference that set out to:

- better understand the benefits, pressures and issues relating to the network;
- provide a means for people to have their say on key issues and opportunities;
- strengthen working relationships between partners;
- design solutions to resolve current conflicts and help the network to thrive; and,
- provide a clear plan of action to address the key issues identified.

The methodology included extensive research on the nature and type of tracks and trails and the landscape in which they are placed; the extent and importance of the visitor economy; together with a widespread consultation with both public and professional audiences. These findings are reported in a detailed appendix to this document.

Our vision is for the Lower Wye Valley's Tracks & Trails to be a resilient, well-managed and welcoming place for all responsible users.

The Strategy identifies a range of key themes and actions which need to be delivered in close collaboration with a wide range of groups including residents, volunteers and visitors alongside professional stakeholders and other interested organisations. A high level of partnership is envisaged to support delivery.

The Welsh Government's current policies on well-being inclusion, landscape, heritage and tourism provide a highly relevant context within which this Strategy closely aligns and can be supported. Key objectives include encouraging much greater awareness of what the area has to offer as well as inspiring many different types of people to visit and supporting these audiences to do so responsibly. The Strategy also identifies the need for the development of specific management measures that can effectively respond to current concerns between different user groups and, in some cases, between specific user groups and residential communities.

This Strategy is to be endorsed by the Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and overseen by the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum (LAF). Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales, along with many others, will play an important role in helping take the recommendations forward.

We would like to thank all those who offered insight and participated in the development of this work. The core partners welcome the continued support and involvement of many interests to ensure that this framework can now make a real difference, improving the tracks and trails for the benefit of existing users and for those yet to come.

Wye Valley National Landscape Team
June 2024

About this Strategy

1. This Strategy and the related Action Plan sets out the way in which the Tracks & Trails of the Wye Valley National Landscape will be enjoyed, maintained and managed over the next six years to 2030. The work has been enabled by the Welsh Government's *Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places* fund.
2. The valley of the River Wye between Hereford and Chepstow is one of the most significant landscapes in lowland Britain. A rich combination of breath-taking views, impressive geology, historic legacies and diverse wildlife led to its designation as the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1971. It has recently been rebranded as a National Landscape.
3. The Lower Wye Valley covers 117 km² of the lower reaches of the River Wye, all of which is in Monmouthshire, Wales. This represents 36% of the total area of the National Landscape, the rest is in England which also makes it unique. The study area represents 13% of Monmouthshire and has a population of 16,394. Part of the area is within the Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales (Cadw 1998).
4. The aim of this project was to produce a widely supported Integrated Strategy for the Tracks & Trails of the Lower Wye Valley. This has been facilitated by bringing together stakeholders through an inclusive consultation that prioritised recreation access issues and sought ideas and solutions to include in the Action Plan.
5. This Strategy has been supported and informed by an asset audit along with the consultation exercise. The former examined the Tracks & Trails as well as the assets that support their use, including accommodation, visitor attractions, pubs and restaurants, and festivals and events. The audit also assessed the policy framework and examined the type and origin of visitors. The consultation process took place from 8 November 2023 to 12 January 2024 with a total of 350 responses, many from individuals but also 50 from organisations with an interest in the subject matter.
6. This document first describes the policy context and the evidence base before setting out the key objectives to boost information and awareness; encourage greater participation and inclusion; provide robust management measures and deliver better data. The last section identifies the principal actions agreed, which are also contained in a more detailed Action Plan that should be read in association with the Strategy.

The Policy Context

7. Alongside the Wye Valley's designation as a National Landscape (an area of outstanding natural beauty), a comprehensive set of Wales-based legislation has guided this work. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 both embed the principle of the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR) to maximise the contribution to well-being goals, emphasising long-term thinking, collaboration and integration. This overarching legislation sets the tone for this Strategy, supporting a holistic approach to the management of the place.
8. 8. The Welsh Government's Priorities for the country's designated landscapes published in 2018 ¹ set out four goals:
 - *Valued Places* - reach out beyond traditional audiences and engage a more diverse cross section of Welsh society to feel they have a stake in these national landscapes.
 - *Resilient Environments* - action to halt the decline in biodiversity to ensure the value of nature is enhanced.
 - *Resilient Communities* - develop understanding of local economic resilience and opportunities, create employment and provide fit for purpose places and facilities for outdoor recreation.
 - *Resilient Ways of Working* - champion collaborative approaches to maximise the benefits and tackle the challenges faced in these landscapes.
9. 9. The strategy reflects these headings and also adheres to the principle of *Least Restrictive Access* which aims to facilitate public access for as many people as possible. This principle requires that all work undertaken to improve access and create recreational opportunities also meets the highest access standards, while also aiding wider conservation and land management objectives.
10. UK-wide legislation also affects the policy context. Of particular note is the Equality Act 2010 and the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW). The Equality Act brought together previous legislation to legally protect people from discrimination in employment and wider society. It protects individuals from unfair treatment in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. These are referred to as 'protected characteristics'. This impacts this Strategy, for example, where road improvements are planned, highway authorities need to consider the requirements of the Equality Act to make any improvements as accessible as possible.

¹ Welsh Government (2018) Valued and Resilient: The Welsh Government's Priorities for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks available [here](#)

11. The CRoW Act grants the public greater access to the countryside including open access land and requires local authorities to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan every ten years. This strategy is aligned to Monmouthshire County Council's current Countryside Access (Rights of Way) Improvement Plan² and also to the related Public Rights of Way Biodiversity Action Plan.³
12. Broader reviews on nationally designated landscapes, namely National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) have also been undertaken in both Wales and England, with the Marsden and Glover Reviews (2015 and 2019 respectively) making a range of recommendations in relation to statutory purposes, protecting nationally important landscapes and making connections between protected landscapes of different types. The rebranding of AONBs to National Landscapes in 2023 was part of the response to these Reviews.
13. This strategy is also developed within the context of Monmouthshire County Council's Local Development Plan which has policies on promoting tourism as part of encouraging a sustainable economy and ensuring the environment is valued, particularly in relation to high quality landscapes:
 - *To protect, enhance and manage Monmouthshire's natural heritage, including the Wye Valley AONB, the County's other high quality and distinctive landscapes, protected sites, protected species and other biodiversity interests and the ecological connectivity between them, for their own sake, and to maximise benefits for the economy, tourism and social well-being.*
14. The Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership is dedicated to conserving and enhancing the nationally designated national landscape, guided by the statutory Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026. The National Landscape Partnership is led by a Joint Advisory Committee established under agreement by the Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council.
15. The current AONB Management Plan, prepared as a requirement of the CRoW Act, runs from 2021–2026. A summary of the Management Plan objectives relating to Recreation & Access and Sustainable Tourism are given below and form another important underpinning for this Strategy.

² Monmouthshire County Council (2020) Countryside Access Improvement Plan 2020-2030 available at this [link](#)

³ Monmouthshire County Council (2011) Monmouthshire Public Rights of Way Biodiversity Action Plan available at this [link](#)

16. Recreation & Access

- *Encourage and promote recreational pursuits and responsible access compatible with the AONB purposes, particularly linking sustainable transport and town and village facilities; (R1)*
- *Assist the resolving of conflicts, real and perceived, between recreation, conservation and local interests... in relation to the purposes of the AONB designation; (R2)*
- *Support appropriate levels of sustainable design, repair, signage and maintenance on public rights of way, recreational trails and sites; (R3)*
- *Assist in identifying gaps in access and recreational provision, including for under-represented and minority groups, and... support and promote access enhancements and improved access for all, where this does not conflict with the Special Qualities of the AONB and the SACs. (R4)*

17. Sustainable Tourism

- *Encourage and promote the AONB as a sustainable tourism destination; (S1)*
- *Promote the improvement of the visitor experience... and facilitate the opportunity for visitors to explore and discover other... less used locations; (S2)*
- *Ensure adequate provision of co-ordinated tourism data and visitor engagement... enhancing the Special Qualities of the AONB; (S3)*
- *Encourage the mitigation and/or reduction of the adverse impacts of existing tourism activity and attractions... (S4)*

The Evidence Base

The Lower Wye Valley's Tracks & Trails

18. This document uses 'Tracks & Trails' as a collective term for all the routes in the study area. There are a number of different types of routes including public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic); highways (unclassified county roads and unsealed roads) as well as other tracks that may have been agreed as permissive paths (such as the section of the Wye Valley Walk through Piercefield Woods) or be access land by virtue of public or benevolent 3rd Sector ownership.
19. The different types of routes, and the users that are permitted to enjoy them, are not always understood either by users or the general population. Routes on the ground can occasionally differ from the historical record, and signage depicting route type can be inaccurate, particularly if it is many years old.
20. The legal differences are important from a management perspective and also for users and residents to appreciate and follow as permitted activities differ on the different types of routes.
21. A map of the Tracks & Trails is shown at Annex I. Over half of the network in terms of length is defined as footpaths, with a further 13% suitable for cycling and riding as well as walking. Unclassified county roads, normally minor roads with a tarmac surface, make up 31% of the network with only 4% of the network being unsealed roads, or Green Lanes as they are often known. These lanes can be used by appropriately licenced motor vehicles.
22. Table 1 overleaf shows the Public Rights of Way network (PROW) in the study area with over 90% of the network in five Community Council areas.⁴ Some 80% of the PROW is made up of footpaths, 9% are Bridleways and 10% Restricted Byways. Total length is 360 km.

⁴ It should be noted that there are many public rights of way in the other Community Council areas but they are not within the boundary of the National Landscape

Table 1				
Public Rights of Way in the Lower Wye Valley - By Type and Community Council				
Community Council	Footpath Sections	Bridleway Sections	Restricted Byway	Byway open to all traffic
Trellech United	285	49	35	1
Devauden	116	14	14	0
Wye Valley	100	15	18	1
Mitchel Troy	104	4	8	0
Monmouth	112	4	23	0
St. Arvans	59	1	5	0
Mathern	12	0	0	0
Shirenewton	4	0	1	0
Chepstow	1	0	0	0
	793	87	104	2

23. Some 190 miles of the PROW network is promoted but this also includes permissive paths / permissive bridleways. Table 2 below shows the Unclassified County Roads network with a similar proportion of routes across five main Community Councils, but with this route type St. Arvans switches places with Monmouth. Total length is 192 km. Unsealed Roads number just 15 with a total length of 21.1 km. All are concentrated in the five Community Councils with the most in Trellech United and other clusters in Wye Valley and St. Arvans.

Table 2				
Unclassified County Roads & Unsealed Roads				
Community Council	UCR # Sections	UCR Length (km)	Unsealed Roads # Sec.	Unsealed Roads (km)
Trellech United	17	84.5	6	12.9
Devauden	12	24.7	2	0.7
Mitchel Troy	6	23.6	3	1.5
Wye Valley	6	16.5	3	2.8
St. Arvans	4	8.0	1	3.1
Monmouth	8	7.6	0	0.0
Mathern	1	4.8	0	0.0
Shirenewton	1	1.1	0	0.0
Chepstow	3	0.4	0	0.0
Total	58	171.1	15	21.1

24. The Highways and Rights of Way network is an evolution of historic transport infrastructure. Many of the Tracks & Trails are bounded by drystone walls; some walls are in a derelict state, others, though visible, support extensive plant coverage. The Lower Wye Valley is an area with its own distinctive style of drystone walls. There are several extensive networks of drystone walls concentrated around Penallt, Whitebrook, The Narth and Catbrook and above Llandogo. Their physical nature, extent and history have not undergone detailed investigation and their existence is rarely noted in published accounts of drystone walls in Britain. The age of the walls ranges from a very few, perhaps being prehistoric, through to occasional medieval structures, probably linked to Tintern Abbey, and as infrastructure to the industrialisation of the lower Wye Valley, followed by more systematic enclosure walls of the 18th & 19th century.

Visitor Economy Assets

25. The Lower Wye Valley has an important visitor economy that is generating income, supporting jobs, 2,700 FTE in total⁵ and encouraging a local supply chain. An estimated 550 jobs in the area are created by the accommodation sector alone. Table 3 below shows the extent of the supply side within the project area (noting this excludes most of Monmouth and Chepstow towns); there are over 500 assets in total, i.e.:

- Up to 400 places to stay;
- 47 visitor attractions (including promoted routes, nature reserves, churches, parks and gardens);
- 24 food and beverage businesses;
- 24 annual events.

Community	Accommodation		Visitor Attractions		Restaurants, Café's, Pubs & Clubs		Festivals & Events	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
Trellech United	160	39%	13	28%	8	33%	11	46%
Wye Valley	93	23%	13	28%	11	46%	11	46%
Mitchel Troy	61	15%	6	13%	1	4%	0	0%
Monmouth	46	11%	7	15%	0	0%	1	4%
St. Arvans	19	5%	5	11%	1	4%	0	0%
Devauden	16	4%	2	4%	0	0%	1	4%
Chepstow	9	2%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Shirenewton	2	0%	0	0%	3	13%	0	0%
Mathern	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total - (Project Area only)	407		47		24		24	

⁵ Derived from Global Tourism Solutions 'STEAM' model (2015) included in Monmouthshire Destination Management Plan 2017-20

26. A good understanding of the assets that visitors and residents enjoy provides important context for the Strategy. The vast majority of accommodation is non-serviced, with Airbnb properties making up 50% of the total. Some of these will open irregularly. There are just 16 B&Bs, inns and hotels making up the serviced offer which is relatively low when compared to similar destinations. However, it is important to note that there are numerous accommodation options nearby in the towns of Monmouth and Chepstow, just outside the project area.
27. As a broad overall estimate, at least 20% of spending in restaurants and cafés is likely to be related to visitor spending, but some cafés and pubs will be much more reliant on visitor income, subject to their location. The food and drink offer is well distributed between pubs and restaurants with some pubs with rooms helping to underpin the serviced accommodation offer. Restaurants and cafés in general are of high quality with 84% in the top quartile in terms of quality.⁶
28. Festivals and events are almost entirely concentrated in Trellech United and Wye Valley areas, though again significantly more events take place in Monmouth and Chepstow, just outside the project area. There are likely to be opportunities to develop an events programme based on the natural assets in the area, potentially complementing or in support of the Wye Valley River Festival.
29. As can be expected, experiences based around walking and nature are popular, although equally important is the area's heritage. The Wye Valley has a rich heritage that has been host to many activities that have been instrumental in laying the foundations to the cultural identity of Britain. Its historic properties and industrial past are nationally important assets. It is clear that much of what attracts both residents and visitors are these natural and cultural assets.
30. From a management perspective any negative impact is likely to be increased in places that attract high quantities of visitors, that see numerous different user types, or have a topography that makes it prone to being affected by natural phenomena, such as flooding. These circumstances are particularly prevalent in the Lower Wye valley.

⁶ Quality scores derived from Trip Advisor and calculated by adding 'Excellent' and 'Very Good' together and dividing by the total number of reviews received. These are then sorted into four Quartiles.

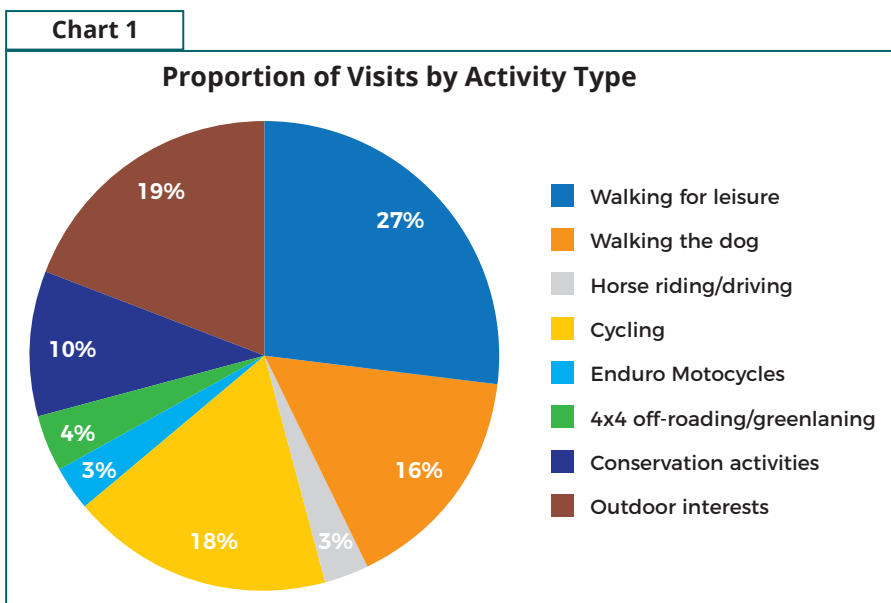
The Users of the Tracks & Trails

31. This strategy was underpinned by independent consultation that ran from 8 November 2023 to 12 January 2024, generating 356 responses.
32. Table 4 shows the frequency of use by type and whether users are local or not:
- Two thirds of respondents who live locally use the paths and tracks at least weekly;
 - Those who volunteer are a broad spread from very frequent users through to infrequent users;
 - Among frequent visitors to the area, many are actually relatively infrequent. Occasional visitors typically only use the Tracks & Trails a few times a year at most.

	Live here	Work here	Visit here frequently	Visit here occasionally	Work for organisation with an interest in the area	Volunteer with an organisation with interest/involvement in the area
At least weekly	68%	51%	9%	0%	18%	37%
Monthly	28%	43%	48%	5%	45%	39%
A few times a year	3%	6%	43%	95%	36%	24%

At least weekly includes 'daily or almost daily' and 'several times a week'
 Monthly = 'several times a month'
 A few times a year includes 'a few times a year' and 'once a year or less often'
 Base: 350 online responses

33. Considering all the people taking part in the consultation, circa 92,600 individual visits are represented. Chart 1 breaks these down into the types of activity showing relative proportions. Those who walk, cycle and horse ride in the Lower Wye Valley, do so with much greater frequency than those who visit with vehicles (enduro motorcycles and 4x4's). Those who engage with the environment (wildlife/bird watching and conservation) also do so with greater frequency than those that use vehicles.

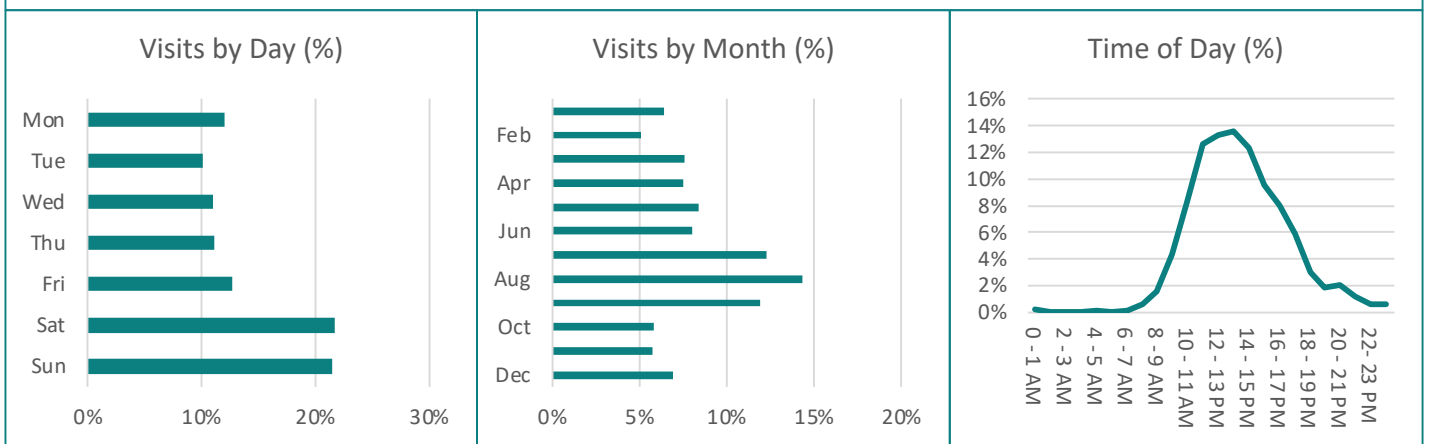


This analysis is indicative only. Some people may do more than one activity so there is some double counting. Pie chart does not account for multiple responses from membership organisations which may increase the proportion.

34. Annex II shows this breakdown in more detail. Among the activities taken part in the Lower Wye Valley, as would be expected, walking is the most prevalent.
35. Respondents confirmed that the appeal of the Tracks & Trails is the natural beauty and the access to it that they provide, together with the wider landscape, scenery and wildlife and the uniqueness of the environment. In terms of improvements, access to the area was mentioned by many, along with the need for regular maintenance and good signage.
36. When asked to comment on future priorities, 89% agreed that it was important *to encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discourage any undesirable behaviours, with 68% of this group identifying this as very important. In relation to this point, 86% of respondents noted the importance of the authorities creating an environment, through resources, facilities and education that enables all user groups to harmoniously enjoy the Tracks & Trails.* This sentiment is felt particularly strongly by motorised users with more than 9 out of 10 thinking this is important.
37. To augment the consultation results, a sample of visitors to six different Tracks & Trails together with Tintern Abbey were reviewed using mobile data, reporting aspects of their visit as well as home location.
38. Among the seven study areas, the largest sample (44% of the total), and by inference the most visited site, is Tintern Abbey. The least visited sites are Peckett Stone Car Park by Trellech Common and Upper Wyndcliff Car Park. Considering all seven destinations together some 54% of visitors live within 20 miles and most trips are day visits with relatively few staying overnight.

Chart 2

Typical Distribution of Visitors to the Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails



39. Chart 2 indicates, as expected, a leisure-oriented visitor profile that enjoys the Lower Wye Valley in the summer, at weekends and across a relatively narrow time band from 10:00 to 15:00. This may cause traffic and visitor management issues at some of the more visited sites. There is variation between the sites. Whitestone Car Park for example, having a very clear spike in visitors on Saturdays, while Tintern Abbey and Lower Wyndcliff are somewhat more evenly spread throughout the week. Trellech Common sees more of a year-round spread and receives the highest proportion of residents and local visitors at 94% of the total.
40. Of the visitors coming from further afield, the majority come from larger population centres, as is to be expected. The Tracks & Trails have wide appeal and draw from a wide catchment including South East England and the West Midlands as well as significant numbers of regional visitors from Wales. Some 15% of all visitors travel from more than 100 miles away; often these visitors will stay either with friends & relatives or in commercial accommodation. See Annex III for a related map.

Case Study – Responsible Tourism

The Picos de Europa National Park, located in northern Spain, is renowned for its breath-taking landscapes, diverse flora and fauna and rich cultural heritage. The park has embraced various Responsible Tourism schemes to better balance environmental conservation with visitor enjoyment.

Five streams of activity included:

1. **Visitor Education and Awareness:** The Park, working with local authorities and NGOs, developed educational programmes and informational materials to raise awareness among visitors about the park's fragile ecosystems.
2. **Waste Management:** To tackle the issue of litter and waste, the Park has introduced recycling facilities and initiatives encouraging visitors to dispose of their waste responsibly.
3. **Local Community Involvement:** The Park engages with local communities, promoting their involvement in tourism-related activities, ensuring that economic benefits are distributed locally where possible.
4. **Infrastructure Development:** investment in sustainable infrastructure, including eco-friendly accommodation and well-marked trails, helps minimise the impact of tourism on the natural environment.
5. **Carrying Capacity:** visitor management system to monitor and control the number of visitors in specific areas, is in place. This helps prevent overcrowding and minimises environmental impact.

Impacts of this programme have included a reduction in environmental degradation and damage, greater economic opportunities for local businesses and more positive visitor feedback. Striking the right balance between conservation efforts and tourism development remains an ongoing challenge, requiring regular monitoring of impacts and adapting strategies based on feedback and dynamic conditions.

The Strategy

41. This Strategy aims to contribute to the primary purpose of the National Landscape, that is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. It will help reverse the depletion of nature and biodiversity, an imperative now regrettably all too common across protected landscapes, and the wider countryside, in both Wales and England.⁷
42. The Strategy also aims to provide the framework and impetus to protect the renowned natural and cultural heritage of the Wye Valley and make it accessible in the least restrictive way possible. Some visitors will become loyal ambassadors for a well-managed and sought-after destination. A supplementary aim is to contribute to renewing the area, making it more resilient in social, economic and ecological terms.
43. The Strategy is ambitious in its aims and will be innovative in its delivery so that its beneficial impact will be felt well beyond the immediate area. It also demands that current users may need to accept some change in the way they currently enjoy the Tracks & Trails. As referenced earlier, it draws on other policy threads that will shape our common future and builds these into a plan that takes account of the views of a widespread sample of users, aiming to join the dots so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This is designed to make the Wye Valley National Landscape team and its partners:
- Experts on broadening participation to recreation and making the area more accessible to benefit many types of people;
 - A motivator and convener to help both local communities and visitors get involved, helping to ensure the area remains one of the finest lowland landscapes;
 - A leader in delivering regenerative recreation and responsible tourism;
 - A pathfinder for the rest of the Wye Valley National Landscape and a route that potentially others can also follow.
44. Concerns from respondents to the survey about the network include conflicts between different users and/or residents; the behaviour of some users; impacts on the landscape / ecology; repairs and maintenance issues; flooding; a lack of information; and worries about the actions of some landowners. However, on the positive side, there are relatively few places where major problems are reported and likewise relatively few places which are seeing very high numbers of visitors, unlike some other national landscapes.

⁷ The 2020 State of Natural Resources Report shows that currently no ecosystems in Wales are showing all the attributes of resilience. Overall, biological diversity is declining.

45. Generally for the vast majority of the Tracks & Trails the appropriate response is to maintain the status quo on how they are managed, whilst recognising that certain routes need more intensive management and new solutions putting in place. The Strategy is designed to support the whole network, with additional action relating specifically to identified 'problem' areas.

Vision

46. Our vision is for the Wye Valley's Tracks & Trails to be a resilient, well managed and welcoming place for all responsible users. The principal aim is to open up recreational opportunities for all types of people to enjoy many different activities. Closely reflecting wider Welsh government policy on equality and inclusion, this Strategy seeks a *"Just Nature Transition"* which will benefit all diverse communities who may not think to currently visit the area but could benefit from doing so.
47. While a central aim is to open up recreational opportunities for all, the plan also reflects other policy pillars including improving health and well-being, expanding biodiversity, action on net zero and the encouragement of active travel. The Tracks & Trails of the Lower Wye Valley can contribute solutions to these policy areas. By doing so the Strategy becomes more relevant and important as a framework for action, offering a way to progress a range of important and interlinked policy priorities. So, this plan is not just about the users or the routes they enjoy, but encompasses a wider canvas.
48. The impact of climate change, habitat change and unequal access to landscapes and nature affects marginalised communities to a greater extent than most current visitors. These cohorts find it hard to visit for many different reasons. The Strategy builds the evidence base to better understand how to reach, connect and encourage different types of visitors to come and enjoy the landscape. Action will require the development of a number of new partnerships, with for example health, housing and probation services, to help facilitate and widen access. However, while this strategy points the way to action, implementation will need funding and support from other public authorities.
49. There is an expectation that all those that visit the area will respect its nature, the landscape and the people that live here. In general terms, this Strategy demands a level of responsibility from all those that use the Tracks & Trails wherever they live and whatever they come to do. It also sets out a way of regenerating the area, turning users into curators and visitors into explorers. The Vision reflects the fact that to successfully restore the landscape more needs to be put back in than is taken out.

50. The framework guiding this strategy recognises there are four principal responses to managing and improving the network.⁸ In summary these are:
- Increasing the durability of the Tracks & Trails and surrounding landscape;
 - Increasing the supply of the Tracks & Trails or providing similar alternative leisure resources;
 - Reducing the impacts of use / users on the Tracks & Trails;
 - Limiting the use of the Tracks & Trails by, for example, season or user type.
51. There are various management measures that can be employed in relation to these responses including improving and hardening routes, seeking voluntary restraints from particular types of users, placing legal restrictions on routes, limiting numbers over time or in certain locations. These and other measures are all appropriate for certain circumstances and this Strategy gives some direction on how these issues can be considered further.
52. A fundamental principle of this plan is to work collaboratively with all interested parties, user associations and others to develop solutions that can work well for the majority while also ensuring due regard is paid to the need to reverse the decline in biodiversity, reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions and meet other core criteria, notably encouraging least restrictive access. We note also the importance of the local community in terms of the contribution from residents to the upkeep of the Tracks & Trails and this Strategy sets out ways in which current issues raised by residents can be resolved.
53. The Wye Valley already welcomes significant numbers of visitors and this plan supports and develops a more regenerative form of tourism that can ensure visitors have the opportunity to discover new opportunities and give something back, rather than simply arriving, enjoying and departing. Allied to this notion of a new form of tourism is the theme of responsibility, another important aspect applicable to all users, the surrounding businesses, residents and agencies involved in delivery. To take forward these foundations the plan needs robust partnerships, built on mutual trust, not to mention adequate resources to deliver the priorities in a timely manner.
54. In general terms this plan sees a significant change and innovation in the way the Tracks & Trails are looked after. This does not mean that current policy or management activity has been wrong, but rather that the plan offers the opportunity for a major reset rather than just an update – reflecting contemporary and foreseeable policy, taking into account the needs and views of users and the people that live locally, driving innovation through technology, and drawing on and developing contemporary management practices.

⁸ Adapted from Robert Manning (2017) Managing Outdoor Recreation 2nd Edition CABI

Case Study – Managing User Conflict

Cannock Chase National Landscape in Staffordshire, is a popular recreation area attracting many different types of visitors. The forest, heathland and lakes provide a picturesque setting for various outdoor activities, including walking, cycling, horse riding and wildlife observation. However, increasing number of visitors led to a rise in user conflicts, pitting different interest groups against each other. The area experienced a 15% surge in visitors over 4 years, drawn by its natural beauty, diverse ecosystems, and recreational opportunities. (This was prior to the COVID pandemic). The rise resulted in heightened competition for space and resources among different user groups.

User Groups include Mountain Bikers, Walkers, Horse Riders and Conservationists and conflicts manifested in various incidents included near misses between mountain bikers and pedestrians, disputes over trail usage and damage to sensitive habitats caused by off-trail activities. Local authorities recorded a rise in complaints related to noise, trail erosion and perceived territorial disputes among user groups.

The following measures were agreed by local authorities to resolve these issues:

1. **Trail Management Plans:** The AONB Partnership collaborated with local councils and user groups to develop Trail Management Plans. These aimed to designate specific trails for different activities, minimising overlap and reducing user conflicts.
2. **Education and Outreach Programmes:** Initiatives were launched to educate visitors about responsible recreation and the importance of respecting designated areas. This included investment in signage, information campaigns and workshops.
3. **Community Engagement:** Stakeholder meetings involving representatives from different user groups were organised to foster dialogue and find common ground. This approach aimed to include diverse perspectives in decision-making processes.

55. All the evidence gathered is pointing to the inescapable conclusion that in the context of the nature and climate emergency there needs to be greater efforts made in the way this extraordinary landscape is valued, looked after and enjoyed in the future. The primary purpose of the National Landscape, to conserve and enhance natural beauty, is embedded in this Strategy which will harness the resources and efforts of volunteers, visitors and stakeholders to improve biodiversity, reduce invasive species and aid habitat recovery.

56. All this needs to happen within a context where the optimal number of users can enjoy the widest possible number of activities, while also protecting the social fabric of the place, its communities and businesses.

Objectives

57. We propose five objectives. These work together, provide the foundations for a range of activities explained below and identified and prioritised in greater detail in the associated Action Plan. The first three are core priorities, with points four and five focussed on enabling and supporting delivery:

1. Boosting Awareness
2. Wye for All
3. Robust Management
4. Better Data
5. Making it Happen

58. There is an existing plan for the development of the countryside access network in the county. Monmouthshire's Countryside Access (Rights of Way) Improvement Plan (CAIP) published in 2020 sets out a clear approach to managing access and maintaining the county's public rights of way and countryside access network. This Strategy is focussed on a relatively small part of the county and is justified because it is one of the most significant landscapes in lowland Britain with a range of specific challenges that need focus and resolution. A number of the priorities outlined below will be taken forward in close collaboration with the Council's countryside access and highways teams and with support from other partners. Both sets of activity will be coordinated with the activity set out here being additional.

59. The Strategy reflects and will assist the delivery of the current Wye Valley AONB Management Plan which outlines the following recreation and access objectives:

- Encouraging recreational pursuits and responsible access;
- Assisting the resolution of conflicts between recreation, conservation and local interests;
- Support appropriate levels of design, repair, signage and maintenance on public rights of way, recreational trails and sites to conserve and enhance character and natural beauty;
- Assist in identifying gaps in access and recreational provision, including for under-represented and minority groups.

60. The Strategy will be led by the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership and the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum, with the support of Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales, and the local Community Councils through the Wye Valley Villages Delivery Group. All stakeholder groups with an interest, such as residents, landowners and other relevant partners will be encouraged to be involved. Funding bids will need to be developed to deliver much of this Strategy and Action Plan. The Wye Valley National Landscape Team and Monmouthshire County Council have considerable experience in securing strategic funding. Based on the success of this Strategy a strong case can and will be made to attract funding and roll-out of this approach across the border into England.

Boosting Information & Awareness

61. There are gaps in the understanding and knowledge of users about the network; what can be done where, how to behave responsibly and how to react when encountering other users. Walkers do not necessarily perceive the different circumstances or perspectives of motorcycle riders, for example, and in some cases, behaviour can be (or perceived to be) intimidating. Dog walkers may not give cyclists enough room, while large 4x4 vehicles and horses do not mix well on narrow lanes. Nature can take a back seat with all these visitors and routes can become eroded, more susceptible to run off and flooding, with the consequence that the understory and terrain are damaged and biodiversity reduced. This is typically a vicious cycle that diminishes natural resources over time.
62. So, the fragility of the landscape is not always valued, individual rights and responsibilities are not always fully understood, nor are the rights of different groups of users on parts of the network always appreciated. Signage and other trail 'furniture' such as gates and stiles may be in need of investment and will not necessarily show the route designation. The consultation revealed differing views on the extent to which the network should support users with information and advice. There are also differing views on the extent to which the landscape should be maintained or 'left alone' and the type of measures that are most appropriate.
63. The Strategy adopts the principle of *Least Restrictive Access*, explained below, as a guide underpinning the management and maintenance of the area.

Types of Information

64. Users can benefit from information on a variety of topics and typically content includes:
- What to see and do;
 - The ecology, landscape and heritage and why it is special;
 - Tracks & Trails maps, routes and directions;
 - Tracks & Trails etiquette, how to behave and react when meeting others;
 - User specific information to encourage and provide confidence for different groups of visitors to the area.
65. The list above is in ascending order, with information on 1 and 2 widely available, information on point 3 harder to find and little to be found relating to points 4 and 5. Knowledge of the Countryside Code for visitors and the version for landowners may be patchy and other codes, such as the Dog Walking Code, may not be widely known. In general the consultation revealed that there is a strong case for looking closely at the type and availability of information to raise the awareness of responsible use by different user groups, particularly those using wheeled vehicles, as their effect and impact locally can be higher than other users.

66. Growing the general awareness of the area's Tracks & Trails and encouraging their responsible use by all types of visitors and residents can be assisted by a marketing plan that delivers targeted messages to key users. This is not just the responsibility of the Wye Valley National Landscape team but should be shared across a range of agencies and departments including Monmouthshire County Council, Visit Monmouthshire, Visit Wye Valley & Forest of Dean, Natural Resources Wales, the business sector, user groups and residents' groups. Coordination across a range of partners is vital to ensure that the right messages are developed and to ensure that they can be delivered effectively. It is recommended that key stakeholders collaborate to audit what is currently communicated and look at how it can be improved, recognising the twin objectives to enable a more diverse audience to access the landscape and help people understand their individual responsibilities.
67. The current offer could be better integrated and positioned. This arises because the base resources are considered differently, some elements defined as PROW, others defined as Highways, swathes of publicly accessible land, principally part of the Welsh Government Woodland estate dedicated as Access Land, while other important areas are historic parks and gardens and historic landscape. These latter categories make up 30% of the land areas of the Lower Wye Valley. Typically, some of the resources and channels that could be developed to bring the whole area together include:
- The integration and common branding of UCRs, unsealed roads and public rights of way with consistent branding and signage across the network;
 - Publication of *Wye Etiquette* – a code of practice which could include maps and other links;
 - Greater integration of the local bus routes through the area between Monmouth and Chepstow (the 65 via Trellech and 69 via Tintern) as a way of experiencing and connecting to the Tracks & Trails across a wider geography and providing a more diverse range of experiences for visitors;
 - Volunteer Ranger services to offer support and advice to users;
 - A website incorporating the entire area for users and associated Web App for directions and updates to existing software to make it easier to report issues;
 - Ways to help get people around – *Trampers* and e-bike hire facilities for example – as part of a renewed offer;
 - Reinvestment in the offer, through new signage, visitor information and common branding across the network.

Wye for All

68. This Strategy provides a blueprint to encourage greater access. The Wye Valley National Landscape is for everyone and previous work to widen access opportunities and encourage more people from different backgrounds to visit should be refreshed with further investment made. Studies have consistently shown that underrepresented groups to the countryside include older people, members of black, Asian and minority ethnic populations and residents living in deprived areas.⁹
69. We will learn from previous initiatives, such as the MOSAIC project in the Peak District, to attract and offer a warm welcome to different groups of people that can gain transformative personal benefit by spending time in one of the UK's finest lowland landscapes.
70. These opportunities will draw on best practice already produced by NRW in collaboration with the Sensory Trust, notably *By All Reasonable Means* where the aim should be for everyone to have an equally high-quality experience, but recognising that universal access to all experiences is not always possible. The principle of *Least Restrictive Access* underpins this Strategy and the related action plan.¹⁰ The existing promoted routes are a useful asset but should be reviewed and rationalised where necessary to further enhance their accessibility to a wider audience.

Green Social Prescribing

71. This Strategy will encourage green and blue social prescribing, 'connecting citizens to community support to better manage their health and well-being' developing clear pathways that link GPs and charities to group-based leisure and recreation providers to benefit the health and wellbeing of individuals who might be unwell, recovering, have less means, need a new start or are suffering from concerns like eco-anxiety, something that increasing numbers of young people are reporting.¹¹ Increases in life expectancy reversed in 2010 with obesity on the rise and poor diet, lack of exercise and deprivation all contributory factors. The ONS calculates that recreation in Wales has an asset value of £22.6 bn in health benefits alone.¹² The therapeutic effects of a programme that immerses individuals in a National Landscape can undoubtedly help reverse poor health outcomes.

⁹ For example see Natural England (2019) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment available at this [link](#)

¹⁰ The principle of Least Restrictive Access requires that all work meets the highest possible access standards for that piece of work. It is an approach that helps raise the overall standard of access of a site, route or facility over time. See NRW (2017) [By All Reasonable Means](#).

¹¹ For more on the importance of this approach see the Public Health Wales link [here](#)

¹² Office for National Statistics (2023) UK natural capital accounts – [Asset Values](#)

72. The Marsden Review recommended that *the National Landscapes of Wales undertake more health and well-being related experiments in developing and reaching challenged urban and rural communities and sections of the population. These could be delivered jointly with local health boards.* The related funding will be sought as part of the implementation of the Action Plan.
73. Opening up access to less involved visitor groups is not without its challenges and the work required is resource and partnership intensive. The Traverse Review, looking at *Increasing Children's Engagement with Protected Landscapes*, identified eight key issues which are set out in Annex IV.¹³ Work to address this will need considered planning, the application of long-term and multi-year revenue funding and strong partnerships with the appropriate charities and agencies. Projects like *Generation Green* led by the YHA, inspired more than 115,000 young people to connect to nature and reveals the scale of the opportunity.
74. Work on social prescribing, such as that previously undertaken in Caerphilly, has shown that translating the concept into successful delivery needs the support of a range of non-countryside partners. The Gwent Public Service Board will be an ideal partner to help identify the opportunities and challenges. The current countryside partners do not have the resources to carry such a project forward on their own but an early action will begin to map out the optimum partners and resources needed and look at other examples of current practice.
75. Such a focus on health will be in addition to continuing a range of work to encourage access for people with impairments and health conditions: for example, by using Trampers to provide fuller access to the Tracks & Trails and encouraging neighbouring tourism attractions to become more accessible. This activity could include provision for sensory and quiet trails for those with visual impairments or neurodiverse conditions.

Volunteering

76. It is recommended that a plan is developed that can encourage visitors to get more deeply involved in the management of the Tracks & Trails network. This could draw on a network of willing volunteers from different backgrounds contributing to the upkeep of the place and supporting the National Landscape and Council teams with vital conservation, maintenance and educational work. This longer-term aim would complement a revitalised local volunteer network, covered later.

¹³ Traverse (2022) Increasing children's engagement with protected landscapes - BE0181 Available from this [link](#)

77. A Wye for All programme would also consider opportunities for group leisure in some areas that are off the beaten track, like the NRW managed woodland which could unlock new experiences for new visitors including a night under the stars, wildlife watching or cultural and arts events, perhaps linked to the Wye Valley River Festival.¹⁴ The educational and youth markets represent a strong growth opportunity and this may justify investment in new facilities to tie into updates to the Curriculum for Wales which may stimulate the frequency of school trips.
78. A new online portal, 'Tirlun' being delivered by Wales designated landscapes,¹⁵ will provide educational resources for Wales and will be an important element linked to the new Curriculum for Wales. The site will provide free resources for teachers and families to encourage access to the outdoors with packaged learning activities. These and other opportunities will also bring further benefits for both the partners and the area's tourism businesses.
79. It is recommended that management measures be considered to help spread the volume of visitors away from Tintern towards other less visited areas where carrying capacity allows. Such a dispersal strategy should be developed as part of the Action Plan. The Tracks & Trails represent an important resource to spread the load with an offer that will have appeal to many different visitor segments from both the UK and further afield. The network represents a unique canvas which can be sensitively interpreted and developed to provide an innovative set of natural experiences to cater for different and growing market segments.
80. Research undertaken for this project indicates there is the potential for the visitor economy to contribute greater economic impact to the area, particularly if investment in serviced hotels can be encouraged in neighbouring towns, local supply chains are developed and quirky small accommodation businesses are supported. Alongside this plan, a set of Tracks & Trails experiences should be developed. Examples could include digitising popular existing walks, such as the Tread and Trot series to work on mobile devices, linkage with public transport routes (65 and 69 buses), Nordic walking experience, hire e-bikes, a trials motorcycle challenge, tramper tracks for less mobile visitors and climbing experiences. To ensure that the primary purpose of the National Landscape is upheld, the opportunity to develop the visitor economy should not be 'just left to happen'. Ideally opportunities should be subject to concept development, evaluation of carrying capacity and master-planning in close collaboration with local businesses and communities, led by the partnership delivering this Strategy.

¹⁴ 'A night under the stars for every child' was a recommendation made by Julian Glover in his Landscapes Review to Government. Most of the Lower Wye Valley has the darkest skies available in Wales.

¹⁵ Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) is a partnership of the eight designated landscapes of Wales that supports structured joint working to unlock the potential of designated landscapes to deliver for climate, nature and people.

81. There is an opportunity for the Lower Wye valley to be an exemplar for both responsible recreation and regenerative tourism. This includes ensuring local businesses are supported to step up to the net zero challenge, setting measurable goals to minimise impact, involving local people, having visitors contribute financially to conservation efforts, developing opportunities for visitors to learn about the place and its history, and to contribute to its upkeep. Such activities can create a strong and meaningful bond between visitors, the landscape and the people that live there, creating authentic and longer lasting experiences of benefit to both hosts and guests, nature and culture.

Case Study – Volunteering

The Cairngorms National Park has implemented volunteering schemes to engage local communities and enthusiasts in the preservation of this unique natural area. Objectives typically include Biodiversity Conservation; Community Engagement; and Education & Awareness.

- The Cairngorms Connect Volunteering Programme is a collaboration between landowners and conservation organisations, offers a volunteering programme that focuses on habitat restoration and monitoring. Volunteers actively contribute to rewilding by planting native trees, removing invasive species, and collecting valuable data on wildlife populations.
- The Mountain Bothies Association organises regular maintenance to care for bothies (shelters). Volunteers ensure that these remote shelters are in good condition, supporting sustainable recreational use while minimising environmental impact.

These programmes have resulted in:

- Enhanced resilience of the ecosystem: particularly via habitat restoration increasing resilience to environmental changes and the re-establishment of native species.
- Empowered communities: A network of individuals passionate about the park's conservation. This has led to increased vigilance against illegal activities and a stronger commitment to sustainable practices.
- Clear Educational Outcomes: The educational component of volunteering has resulted in a more informed and environmentally conscious community. This awareness has translated into greater public support for conservation initiatives and policies.

Challenges include limited funding and ensuring that the programmes can be accessible for a wider range of participants including and reflecting the wider population. Other typical volunteering programmes include trail maintenance and wildlife monitoring.

Robust Management

82. A range of issues around the current management of the Tracks & Trails were identified by consultees and discussed further at Drop-in sessions. Overall, the need to encourage responsible behaviour among all users and discourage undesirable behaviour was identified as a priority for this Strategy, seen as important by 89% of all respondents. Allied to this view, 86% of respondents said it was important that groups of users are able to harmoniously enjoy the Lower Wye Valley by creating an environment supported and enhanced through resources, facilities and education.
83. Such widespread agreement provides a strong basis for a revised approach to the management of the area and its assets. It also reflects a major issue - user/resident conflict. Currently such issues often remain unresolved, exacerbated by the complexity of the network, the differing legal status of the various Tracks & Trails, their topography and remote location, ignorance on the part of many users, and a lack of wayfinding and enforcement resources 'on the ground'. These factors then combine with illegal use, anti-social behaviour, fractured management, limited communications and relatively few resources. Against such a background it is not surprising that complex problems go unresolved. Some of these issues will need engagement of other agencies such as Gwent Police. A new approach is needed.

By far the most common issue raised during the consultation was the topic of trail / enduro motorcycles using the Tracks & Trails and creating problems for other users and residents, and damaging the landscape. The number of off-road motorcycle riders has increased significantly over the past decade with reportedly, on some trails, groups of up to ten motorcycles at a frequency of six times a day. Impacts can include noise pollution, air pollution, erosion on routes, damage to nature, conflicts with other users / residents, illegal use of the PROW, development of route spurs from legal routes, and reportedly, aggressive or intimidatory behaviour to other users and residents.

A New Approach

84. The new approach sees a greater sophistication in the management of the asset base and users. It is evident that the issues that were widely reported in the consultation only affect a very small number of routes where a mixture of active management, voluntary zoning, route modification and other measures can play a part in addressing concerns. Unsealed roads, where most of these issues occur, represent 21 kilometres of a network that totals over 550 kilometres, so less than 4% of the network. On the basis of all the evidence submitted it is proposed that five of these routes could be subject to more robust management measures. It should be noted that all these routes are suffering from environmental degradation due to current usage, exacerbated by climate change, and need investment to stem these issues. See Annex V for a map showing these routes.

Case Study – Reducing Illegal Use

One of the objectives set out in the Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan is to maintain the area's Green Lanes, or unsealed routes. This policy is set out in *Special Qualities, Special Experiences*, the Recreation & Tourism strategy, one of six thematic strategies that also cover biodiversity, woodland, historic environment, volunteering and learning and engagement.

The management of the Dales' Green Lanes has been formally set out in a framework which considers relevant legislation and a range of factors that are applied. These include ecological sensitivity; heritage and landscape features; the durability and surface of the route; its current condition; the degree of conflict; and concerns from local residents or landowners. In evaluating the impact of recreational motor vehicles, detailed consideration of these factors ensures an evidence-based approach. On the basis of the evidence, a range of management options are considered including in summary:

- Do nothing;
- Repair the route;
- Maintain the route;
- Seek voluntary restraint on use of the route from specified users; and
- Place legal restriction (Traffic Regulation Order – TRO) on use of route from specified users.

Management solutions may include:

- Limit the use of particular unsealed routes to a specified number of users each month (a permit system such as used at [Gatescarth Pass](#) in the Lake District National Park);
- Seasonal restriction preventing use at specified times of year (such as the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order agreed for the Ridgeway National Trail in Wiltshire);
- Other partial restriction (for example, preventing use for certain number of days or at certain times of day);
- All year-round restriction on use;
- Working with all different users and their representative associations.

The methodological underpinning is a Sensitivity Assessment which uses four 'Trigger Factors': Nature Conservation, Heritage, Route Surface and Tranquillity scored as either Green, Amber or Red. This produces an assessment of overall sensitivity which can then be subject to the management solutions above.

85. The case study from the Yorkshire Dales recognises the over-riding importance of securing a more resilient ecosystem using a structured and transparent process. It is recommended that all the problematic Tracks & Trails be assessed against an agreed set of Trigger Factors with a view that some are likely to need safeguards to ensure biodiversity net gain, heritage value, local flood risk and other relevant local criteria. Elements of both the public rights of way and the highways network are likely to be the subject of this review.
86. This review should be undertaken in two stages – an examination of routes’ natural and cultural resources, along with an analysis of the extent and nature of usage, and its impact on the ecosystem and its heritage value. This work will provide robust and objective evidence based on the impact of current usage and, subject to the evidence, may present the case for ‘carefully targeted local action to protect sensitive areas.’¹⁶ It is likely that the review will prioritise unsealed roads, the BOAT and bridleways shown in Annex V as these routes are generally subject to a greater level of impact given the wheeled traffic that use them.
87. A range of options will then need to be developed and subject to consultation, with potential changes ranging from voluntary agreements, trail management plans or other measures including modifications to designations or experimental Traffic Regulation Orders. The process of stopping up any highway as a result will be subject to a further statutory process. Short term operations will also be considered, such as enforcement action in partnership with Gwent Police.
88. It should be noted that the stopping up of any unsealed road will not necessarily result in compliance and may also have the effect of moving demand to other unsealed roads nearby. The widespread availability of maps online, which show detailed (sometimes incorrect) routes around the area’s unsealed roads / BOAT network and can be download to mobile phones, has transformed the visibility and ‘rideability’ of this sub-set of the Tracks & Trails.
89. Over the last decade, this has resulted in additional pressures on the natural landscape of a completely different magnitude to those seen previously, because of the additional numbers of riders/drivers, other unauthorised off-trail activity and the size of groups. While technological change, such as electric motorcycles and 4x4s, will reduce the noise and air pollution elements in due course, their extra weight will mean potentially even greater impact on the Tracks & Trails. This is not just an issue with motorised vehicles as high numbers of mountain bikes, feet and hooves can also create impact, especially with wetter winters and dryer summers due to climate change. There is also a significant management challenge to reduce irresponsible ‘off-path’ trail building by some mountain bikers.

¹⁶ See HM Government Response to Q14-17 (2023) Implementing the Landscapes Review available at this [link](#)

90. A variety of solutions, working in close partnership with associations such as the Trails Riders Federation, Green Lanes Association, The Ramblers and British Mountain Bike Orienteering should be part of this Strategy's early work. These groups could be invited into formal partnerships to help align purposes and priorities. A range of innovations could be trialled – for example, a system of voucher ticketing to regulate frequency of motorised use with agreed quotas for all groups emanating from outside the local area.
91. Other options may include:
- the promotion of less ecologically vulnerable unsealed roads nearby;
 - partnerships with other alternative sites within 50 miles of the project area such as Walters Arena in Neath or Taff's Well in Caerphilly; and
 - the examination of self-contained sites such as quarries near the Lower Wye Valley that could be developed into a managed facility.
92. The consultation also identified the separate issue of anti-social behaviour that occurs on relatively few Tracks & Trails but is a live issue for focus due to impacts on residents. Instances of illegal trespass with enduro motorcycles in areas adjacent to unsealed roads also threaten the natural capital of the area. Better understanding of the extent and nature of trespass and anti-social behaviour will need to be sought with multi-agency collaboration. Subsequent action could include enforcement options such as public space protection orders that can include restrictions to the highway by installation of barriers for the duration of the order.¹⁷
93. Another important management aspect remains path erosion and surface degradation, control of water run-off and risks of flooding. The topography of the valley and the historic nature of many of the Tracks & Trails means it is important to provide ongoing resources to address the issue of flooding, using natural flood management techniques such as those piloted in Chapel Hill Road. Unsealed roads affected include Horse Way, Robins Way (both Whitebrook), Tintern Road and Glynwood Road. The options include the development of cross-drains, bunds, tree felling and path reconstruction or resurfacing.

¹⁷ HM Government (2014) Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act – [Section 64, 7-9](#)

Better Data & Insight

94. Monmouthshire County Council's Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) has a structured approach to managing and maintaining the County's entire PROW network. This Strategy reflects the themes of CAIP and will not affect the way that maintenance across the wider network is prioritised. It aims to add value to the CAIP with actions that can be regarded as a test-bed for new ideas to be considered and possibly rolled out across the wider area in due course.
95. To successfully boost awareness, increase accessibility and create greater accountability, the partnership needs to know significantly more about the value of the asset base, understand what is happening on the ground and measure the effectiveness of management measures. This work can only be achieved with significant increases in resources and improvements in data to provide a comprehensive evidence base on ecological value; user types, trends, visitor volumes and impacts.
96. There is a need for a much more forensic understanding of what is happening on the ground, the impact on landscape, ecology and heritage of different users and the ways in which user groups, landowners and individuals can be nudged, encouraged and influenced to modify behaviour. It is recommended that surveys of the heritage assets be undertaken, potentially by local volunteers, along with the roll-out of counters to monitor user numbers on specific routes. Other technologies may be worth investigating such as soundscape monitoring and camera-traps. This could be advanced through linkages with local universities.
97. As well as a greater understanding of the asset base, it is as important to have a better understanding of how different visitors may currently be impeded from visiting. New partnerships should be developed and a suite of tactics pursued that can help marginalised groups enjoy the landscape. The reasons why some people are unable to visit the countryside are complex and varied and depend on individual circumstances and, to some on extent, wider cultural factors such as a perceived lack of welcome. This objective will seek to build the evidence and utilise good practice from other areas to enable a positive and considered approach to attracting different types of visitors and users to the Lower Wye Valley.
98. There is a complementary need to be more innovative in the use of this data and modify existing technologies and build new solutions to transform collection and analysis across the visitor journey, ensure that existing systems such as Monmouthshire Council's Countryside Access Management System and Fix My Street apps are upgraded to offer greater functionality for visitors and residents and provide the usable data that practitioners need to monitor and evaluate delivery.

99. Qualitative data will be needed, for example, to support evaluation of habitat degradation and assess flood risk mitigation, with quantitative data gathered on user volumes, trends, state of the network and user incidents. Mapping and other systems need to be developed to express the results and produce regular status reports on defined areas for review by the Steering Group.
100. Gathering research and insight will need to be an early priority to provide the evidence and baseline data for funding bids and to delivery key projects. This will include:
- Assessment of Tracks & Trails against ecological criteria;
 - Assessment of heritage features along Tracks & Trails and their condition and any impacts of route usage;
 - Collation and audit of self-guided / promoted routes and promotional literature & information on the area, including websites and on-line material;
 - Condition survey of current state of priority unsealed roads;
 - Analysis of legal processes and management options;
 - Development of the evidence base to support hard to reach visitors;
 - Review of visitor & user monitoring systems, including counters and other technologies;
 - Assessment of requirements for a visitor survey, along with methodologies and questionnaire formats, for funding bids and subsequent implementation;
 - Assessment of technologies to improve management practice;
 - Mapping and identification of freeholders / leaseholders and access agreements (voluntary and/or statutory).

Making it Happen

Asset Management

101. The Tracks & Trails of the Lower Wye Valley are rooted in the historic infrastructure of Tintern Abbey and its Granges followed by the industrial revolution that began over 450 years ago. After the dissolution of the monasteries, the Company of Mineral and Battery Works was established in 1566 and chose the Angidy Valley in Tintern to produce wire and build what became the largest business in Wales. The Tracks & Trails, along with the abundant charcoal from local woodlands, water power from the steep tributaries and the River Wye as the main transport corridor, were the means by which this industry was developed. By the time that the industry declined in the late 19th century, overtaken by coal power and railways, enclosure acts and farming had created a further network of other routes across the Lower Wye Valley. Some of these then became public highways and Public Rights of Way, others part of the national forestry estate.

102. It is no surprise then that the management of the Tracks & Trails is somewhat piecemeal today with multiple designations and different departments and agencies responsible for various parts. All these Tracks & Trails however hold an appeal for the local community and visitors, who do not generally perceive any practical difference between, for example, an unsealed road and a bridleway. In addition, there are large tracts of land under public ownership that can be enjoyed off the beaten track.

103. It would be strategically very beneficial to be able to consider all the Tracks & Trails as one set of assets - as this would allow for more robust assessment, management, development, maintenance and ultimately collaborative branding and promotion. This could also include the Tracks & Trails in nearby open access land. While the different routes would remain legally distinct, they would be connected in management terms which would underpin and improve their long-term stewardship. The audit suggested in Section 4 above would help provide the management information to facilitate this collaborative and strategic approach. Taking account of the lessons learnt through this approach in Wales, a similar approach could be followed in the English part of the National Landscape.

Leadership

104. This Strategy seeks to integrate a range of actions and consider them in a systems-based manner. It combines measures to support biodiversity, improve the landscape, encourage responsible recreation, manage tourism growth and open access to a wider variety of people who would not normally visit. It closely relates to Wales Government legislation including the Environment Act 2016, the Well-Being Future Generations Act 2015 and the Equality Act 2010. It closely aligns to and delivers Goal 10 of the UK Government's 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan.

105. It is recommended that the Strategy be overseen by a small steering group constituted as a sub-group of Monmouthshire's Local Access Forum (LAF). The Steering Group should potentially have representatives from the LAF, the National Landscape team and other statutory agencies and key delivery partners.
106. The Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) should also have an overview of the Strategy and its implementation. Monmouthshire Councillors and the local Community Councils with the majority of the Tracks & Trails (Devauden, St Arvans, Trellech United & Wye Valley) should also be engaged through reports and feedback to the Wye Valley Villages Delivery Group.
107. The focus will be on implementation rather than policy development. It is recommended that a project officer post be secured to deliver the agreed priorities. Additional resources will need to be bid for to augment the existing resources from the Wye Valley National Landscape, Monmouthshire County Council, Natural Resources Wales as well as other partners, stakeholder organisations, user groups and the Community Councils.
108. It is recommended that regular communications be available to all partners and other interests and workshops and other events be held to advance discussions and activity relating to the Strategy. For example, an invitation could also be extended to a representative from Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) to ensure that best practice can be exchanged from other National Landscapes and National Parks in Wales. Other UK wide volunteer groups should be engaged in this work such as [Trash Free Trails](#) and [Adventure Smart](#).
109. The current range of volunteer groups should be supported to a greater degree and, as resources become available, new volunteer groups could be established and work pursued to widen access to less involved audiences. The volunteer network will need both investment and leadership from members of the community. The local Pathcare volunteers and other groups supporting conservation and enhancement of the Tracks & Trails should connect to the work of the Strategy. Each Community Council could nominate a formal Tracks & Trails lead if they are not already engaged through Monmouthshire's Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) and/or the Wye Valley Villages Delivery Group.
110. This Strategy is ambitious in its aims and innovative in its delivery. As such it can be considered as a national prototype initiative, with the potential to inform the delivery of wider government plans. A priority short-term action will be to prepare funding proposals to aid its implementation and build the partnerships to enable its delivery.

ACTION PLAN

Actions, their prioritisation and matters related to implementation will be agreed by the Local Access Forum.

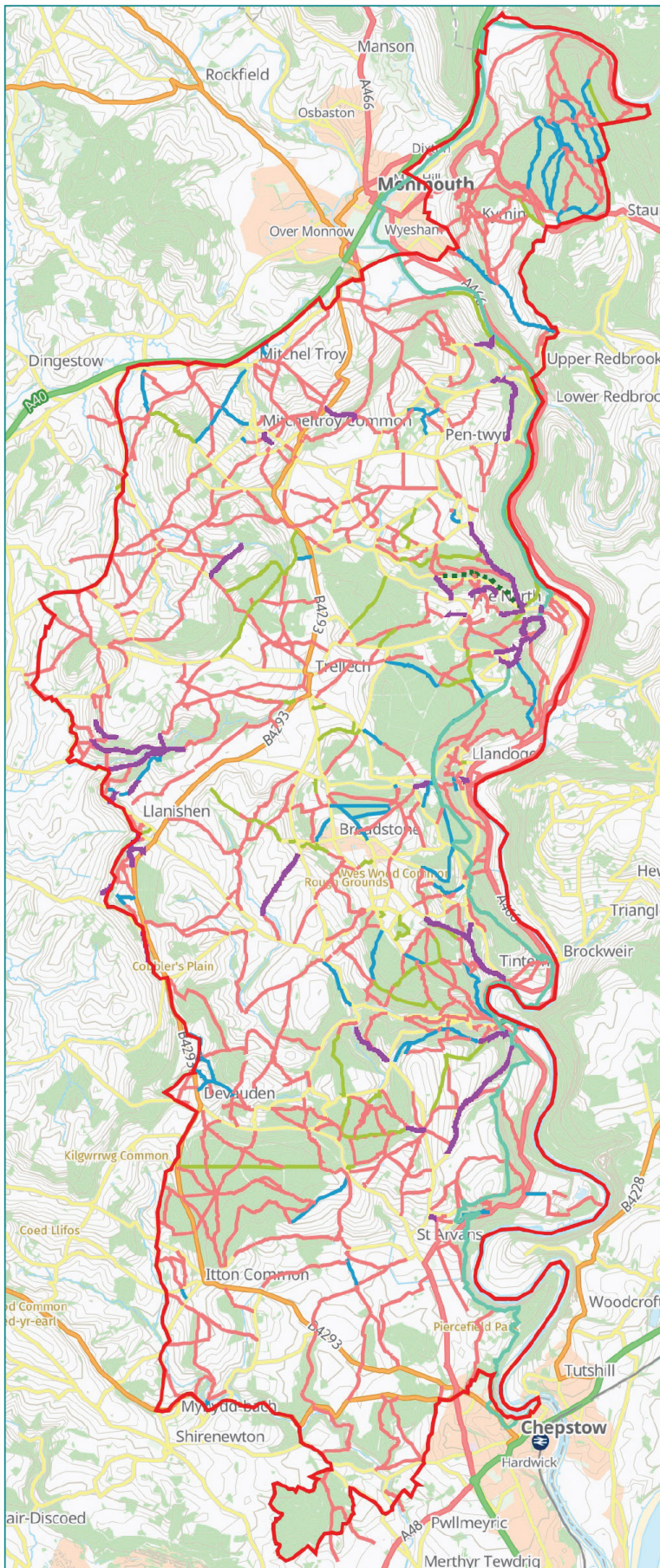
1. Boosting Awareness	Implementation Activities
1.1a Undertake an audit of formal / official promotional material relating to use of the Tracks & Trails	A structured audit of official current and online information along with a survey of its use, promotion and distribution
1.1b Investigate and Audit other promotional and marketing material from private and third sector organisations	For example, check all online GPS derived routes of the Unsealed roads network. Seek updates from providers where inaccurate
1.1c Develop a coordinated promotional framework to inform the Visitor Management Plan (See Action 4.3)	To include various elements informed by Action 1.1a and 1.1b potentially to include presence on partners' websites, promotion of open access routes etc.
1.2 Prepare, write and publish the Wye Etiquette guide	A guide produced on the basis of broad consensus and made widely available in digital and print form that influences behaviours and includes insight from the marketing review
1.3a Review current Tracks & Trails signage and trial new options	Review state and nature of current signage. Learning from the NRW pilot project in Caerphilly, identify trials to inform users about the routes and permitted use. The Objective is to ultimately have an inclusive and standardised / Wye valley branded approach across all PROW and UCRs
1.3b Implement rebranded signage across the network	Subject to 1.1c and 4.3, seek investment over the period of the Strategy, prioritising those areas which are most in need on the basis of the audit, other ROWIP and Highways selection criteria, health and safety considerations etc.

2. Wye For All	Implementation Activities
2.1a Desk research and assessment of current Green and Blue social prescribing models and current health inclusion projects	In-house activity would be usefully supported by specialist consultants in this field
2.1b Undertake best practice research on previous and current projects e.g. Peak District National Park MOSAIC project	Interview on the successes and challenges relating to Inclusion projects to examine the success of projects that aim to encourage more deprived audiences, BAME, school age children, young people 16-24 and ex-offenders
2.2 Review and report on current best practice on accessibility, potential funding sources, constraints and opportunities for the Lower Wye Valley	Develop appropriate proposals with a view to ensuring funding is secured for favoured options that are applicable are rolled out (linked to 2.5)
2.3 Review current local and national volunteer networks and develop a revised and enlarged volunteer programme	Examine operation, performance and best practice to support and potentially enlarge the volunteer base over the period of the Strategy. May include, for example, the development of the LANECARE concept with partners
2.4 Examine the scale and nature of NRW and other open access land in the area, and map the related Tracks & Trails and related resources	Undertake a condition audit of these routes and potential routes using the methodology developed in Action 3.1 below
2.5 With partners such as the Gwent Public Service Board, design and deliver a new generation Inclusion programme aimed at widening access	Using the research phase actions (2.1 and 2.2), design a programme aimed at widening access to the lower Wye Valley of non-typical user groups. Consider funding sources for a related proposal to the Welsh Government and/or Lottery
2.6 Meet with group operators in the educational sector with a view to encouraging trips from school age against the national curriculum	Connect to operators such as YHA and Rock UK who can advise on outdoor leisure concepts and may be interested in the development of partnerships to assist a collective mission such as a Generation Green project tailored to schools in Wales
2.7 Review the opportunity for new activities and events that draw on nature and landscape and encourage people to visit and enjoy the area	A selection of new events rooted in the special qualities of the place can raise the profile of the Tracks & Trails and shift perceptions of activities to be enjoyed. Identify and approach commercial, third sector or community interests to identify activities, venues, infrastructure and support requirements
2.8 Examine opportunities for new ways to increase inclusion including, for example trampers and electrically assisted pedal cycles, with potential investment and engagement by interested stakeholders	Consider securing grants and other incentives to enable partnerships with WVNL

3. Robust Management	Implementation Activities
3.1a Develop a methodology to enable the structured assessment of the value of the Tracks & Trails for landscape, ecology and heritage	Assessment of historic context, type, condition, value, issues and also options for accessibility - with a link to the volunteer programmes envisaged in Action 2.3
3.1b Pilot the assessment system developed at Action 3.1a on current routes that have identified management issues (Strategy Annex V)	This will assess key routes with current management challenges and enable the grading of each route against its inherent value
3.1c Using best practice developed elsewhere, examine the solutions for the management of the routes under particular pressure and prioritise	This will include the examination of alternative sites both within the Lower Wye Valley and nearby
3.2 Examine legal options of Tracks & Trails for maintenance and management, working closely with landowners to identify hotspots	Examine the options relating to the key Tracks & Trails including the impact of Welsh Government access reform measures
3.3 Develop and undertake a user survey of key identified routes	Design and deploy a survey that will identify user types, frequency, incidence of issues / conflicts etc. This should complement 3.1 and 3.2
3.4 Run a high profile and jointly funded operation with partners, user associations, landowners and Gwent Police	Subject to the evidence gathered in activity 3.1 run an (ideally) annual operation
3.5 Assess the Chapel Hill Road NFM pilot, and seek funding to undertake other similar capital projects	This type of investment will be important in other areas where Natural Flood Management can alleviate issues on other Tracks & Trails

4. Better Data & Insight	Implementation Activities
4.1 Review existing and if required develop a data sharing agreement between the core project partners including MCC and NRW and other partners	Strengthen mechanisms by which the partners can better share existing data, for example footfall and traffic counters. Other partners, such as Gwent Health Board, will be invited to share relevant data relating to Action 2.1
4.2 Drawing on Actions 1.2, 2.4 and 3.1, provide a map of the entire network including the identification of heritage feature, their condition and ownership	Include NRW Forest trails, permissive paths, open access land as well as PROW, UCRs and unsealed roads. Working with landowners, grade the importance of tangible / intangible heritage features
4.3 Develop a Visitor Management Plan to include dispersal and other strategies (informed by earlier actions)	This may include a visitor survey to help inform the development of management solutions and e.g. low carbon transport, dispersal to lesser used routes, flattening peaks via promotions, online vouchers to reduce use on overused paths etc.
4.4 Audit all current reporting tools designed for the wider public and consider how these tools work together in favour of the management of the LWV	Audit customer and professional usage of e.g. CAMS and Fix My Street etc. with a view to a collaborative user-friendly upgrade and increasing take-up as a reporting tool for all types of incidents
5. Making It Happen	Implementation Activities
5.1a Establish a cross-organisational team from the core partners to support the delivery of the Strategy and formalise partnerships with the Ramblers, GLASS, the TRF, BHS and other national user groups	Executive group will oversee delivery. These partnerships will be instrumental to enable the agreement of subsequent management plans for pressurised unsealed routes and the Byway Open to all traffic
5.1b Provide resources for the cross-organisational team	Bid for resources to appoint a project manager to enable the agreed actions to be advanced more rapidly and coherently
5.2 Integrate the management of all the different types of Tracks & Trails into one operation. Reflect these arrangements in the Visitor Management Plan	Identify how the entire network could be managed as one asset, branded as one area (and how best related departments and bodies can facilitate and benefit from such an integrated approach)
5.3 Develop organisational MoUs with key partners	MoUs to be agreed by core partners. This will include associations and other interest groups. Related to action 3.2
5.4 Stimulate collaboration and partnership through related workshops, seminars and other events	Hold regular sessions to advance discussion and delivery. These actions can be reviewed and revised over time by the LAF sub-group and JAC

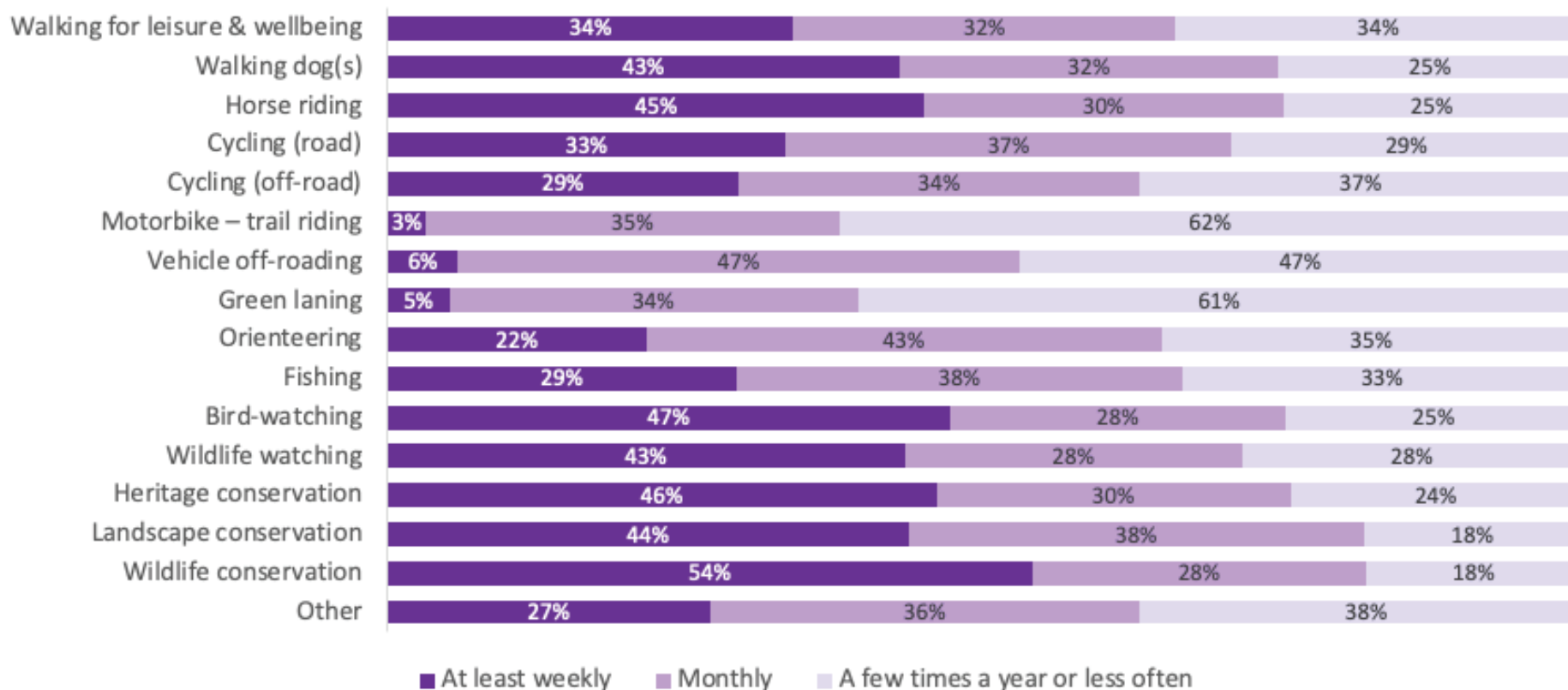
Annex I The Tracks & Trails



- Footpath
- Restricted Byway
- Bridleway
- - - Byway Open to All Traffic
- Unclassified County Road
- Unsealed Road
- 'B' Road
- Wye Valley Walk

Annex II Frequency of use by user type and locality

- The frequency of use data shows how those who walk, cycle and horse ride in the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails, do so with much greater frequency than those who visit with vehicles (trail bikes and 4x4's). Those who engage with the environment (wildlife/bird watching and conservation) also do so with greater frequency.



At least weekly includes 'daily or almost daily' and 'several times a week'

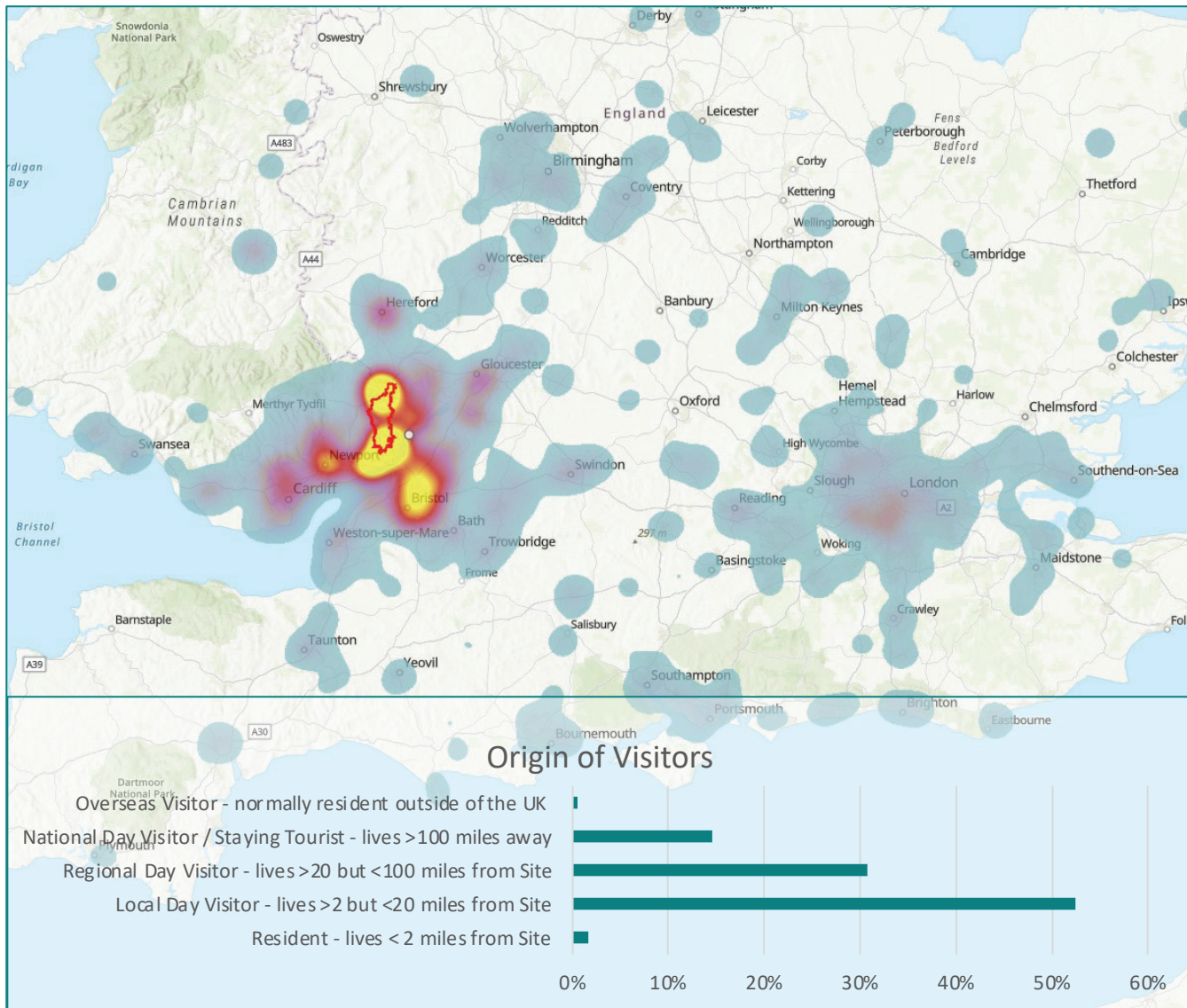
Monthly = 'several times a month'

A few times a year or less often includes 'a few times a year' and 'once a year or less often'

Base: 350 online responses

Annex III Origin of Visitors

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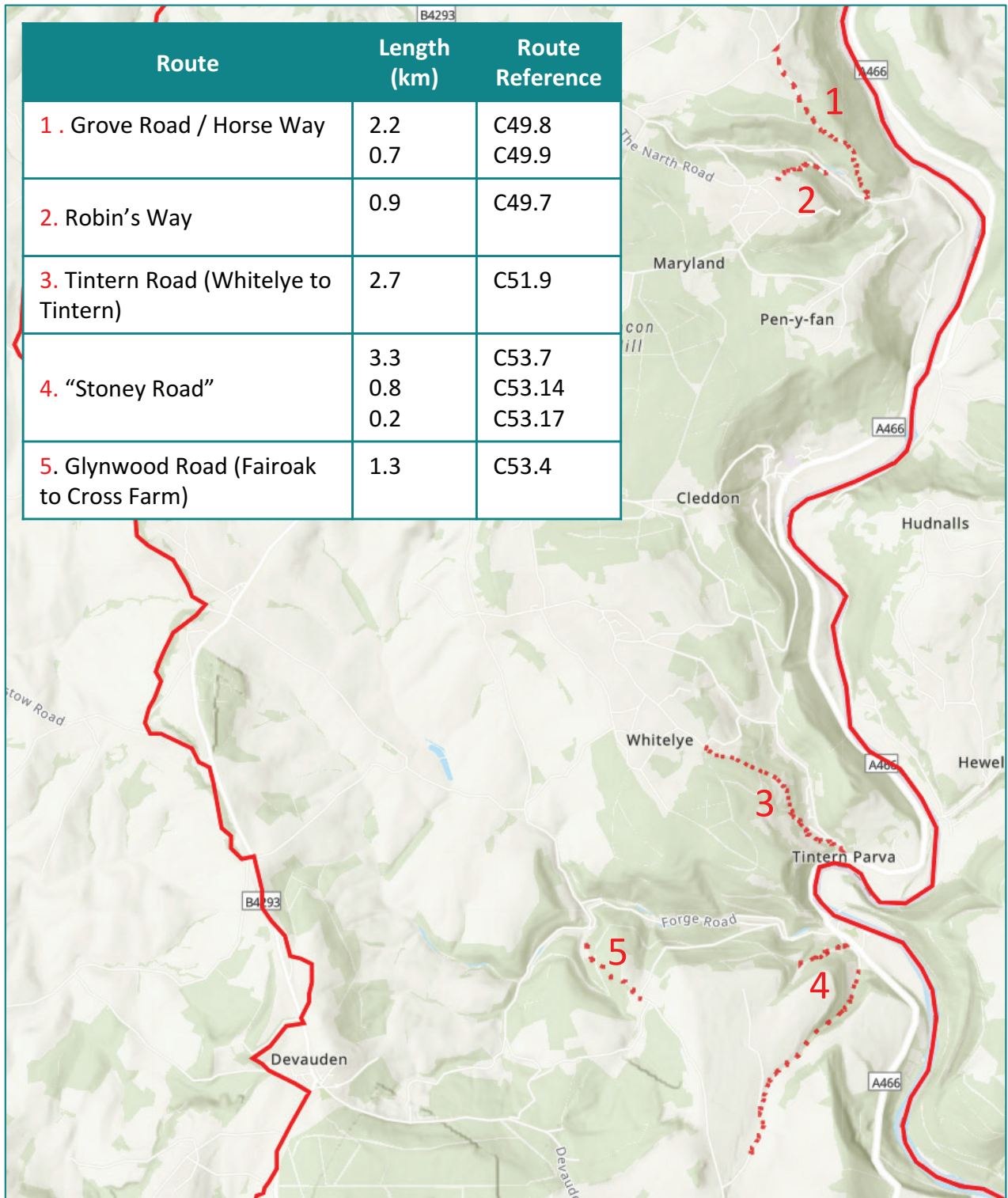


Annex IV Increasing children's engagement with protected landscape

Key Findings

1. Financial constraints present a significant barrier to engagement for families from underrepresented backgrounds as well as schools and other enabling organisations. Providing free or subsidised activities for families and schools is crucial, whilst increased sustainable funding options would help other organisations deliver their work more effectively.
2. Lack of facilities and accessibility can limit engagement, particularly for disabled children. Comprehensive information in advance as well as organisations providing equipment and trained staff can support families to engage.
3. Transport can be a key barrier to engagement for families and schools. This includes cost, travel distance and availability of transport in rural areas. Free or subsidised travel can help families and schools engage and funding for enabling organisations to provide transport is key.
4. Reaching underrepresented communities can be challenging, so partnerships with community organisations are important. Working via referral systems reduces bureaucratic barriers and can also help reach communities.
5. Children's engagement can be deeply affected by family and cultural factors like lack of experience or knowledge, or negative perceptions of nature. Stakeholders stressed the importance of accommodating different needs, which can help children and families feel supported to engage with protected landscapes.
6. Schools are a vital means through which to engage young people with protected landscapes. The curriculum can be a barrier to this; stakeholders felt that if the curriculum required engagement with protected landscapes, they would be more able to focus resources into delivering these activities.
7. Organisational partnerships that cut across stakeholder groups are key to ensuring that children can have a broad range of experiences, and this means that they are more likely to find the right activities and support.
8. The ability to engage with protected landscapes in a safe, inclusive space was important to young people and central to their enjoyment of activities.

Annex V Unsealed Roads highlighted in the Consultation



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MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM 23 July 2024 OPERATIONAL UPDATE

1. GRANTS

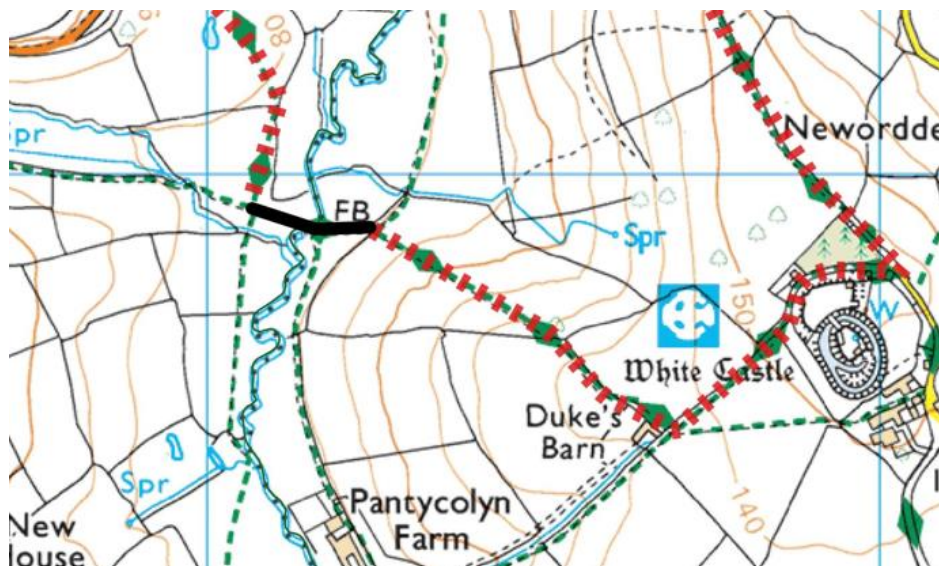
- 1.1 **Rogiet Country Park – A £10,000 GWR Customer & Community Improvement grant** has just been awarded. This funding is to enhance the visitor experience, respond to community need, encourage greater use and exploration of the park and surrounding landscape including by rail users. The project will involve
- New direction and welcome signage including links to Wales Coast Path and the National cycle network.
 - New orientation and information signage at entrance of Rogiet CP.
 - Soundscape recording to be delivered with other site information via Bloomberg Connects app
- 1.2 **Access Improvement Grant** - This is the final year of a three-year grant relating to the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025. The funding for 2024/25 is £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.
- 1.3 In the first two years of funding the grant supported improvements to the access at Black Rock Picnic Site, it also assisted with the purchase of a boardwalk for Castle Meadows. The principal project for all three years has been a Community Links Project. This provides materials for local volunteer groups to improve public rights of way and green spaces, particularly signage/clearance and promoting access opportunities. This has been very successful and so a Service Level Agreement with the Ramblers was enacted last year to help expand to areas which there were no volunteer groups. Monmouth, Usk and Magor and Undy were chosen, but other community groups can benefit from training events this year. A series of “Find the Wild”, “Find the Science” and “Find the Maintenance” events are planned throughout the coming year. This project and the Community Links project will be reported in much more detail to the LAF and others at the end of the grant in spring 2025. Note the Ramblers element of the project is called Paths to Communities.
- 1.4 Two videos showing accessibility of the sites have been created with the Access Improvement Grant funding and have been promoted.

Black Rock - <https://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/things-to-do/black-rock-picnic-site-p1504301>

Rogiet - <https://www.visitmonmouthshire.com/things-to-do/rogiet-countryside-park-p1505661>

Welsh Government representatives came to look at the projects completed and underway last month. Various volunteers from Park Run (Rogiet CP), Magor and Undy, Chepstow Walkers are Welcome and Grosmont came along and not only undertook practical work but were able to speak to the officers about the benefits of the projects. Thank you to all involved.

- 1.5 **Offa's Dyke** –In March 2023 the Treadam bridge (Pant y Colyn Farm 359/239/1) was removed due to dangerous piers. A diversion is currently in place and is well signed.



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. A further grant was awarded this year of £60,000. The bridge has now been purchased and tenders are being let for the bank improvement work (removal and replacement of gabion baskets) and the installation of the new bridge this year.

2. CURRENT ISSUES

- 2.1 **Erosion Issues** - There have been two significant erosion issues on the prow network recently.
- 2.2 The path from Black Rock Picnic site to the beach has undercut and has been closed. The public are advised to follow the Wales Coast Path signage. Soft temporary engineering solutions are being considered but a significant project is required here to protect this area in the immediate future, perhaps also looking to reinstate and prevent further loss of the salt marsh.



2005



2010



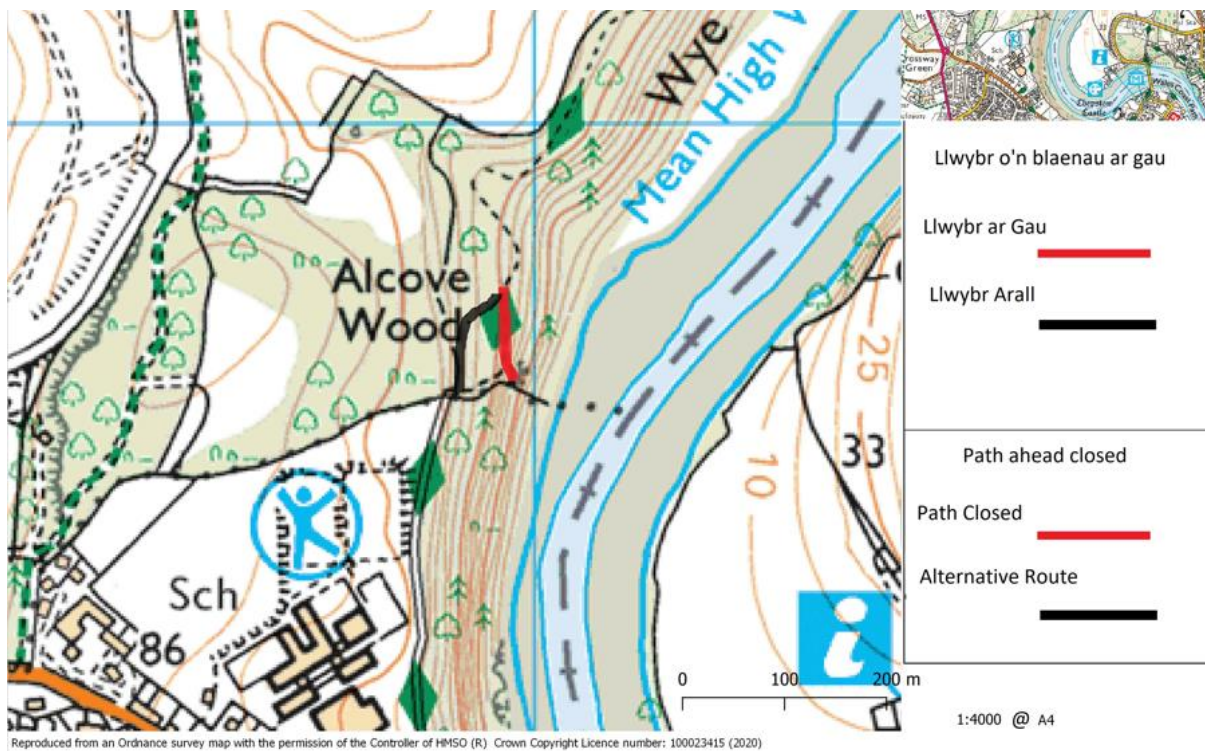
2017

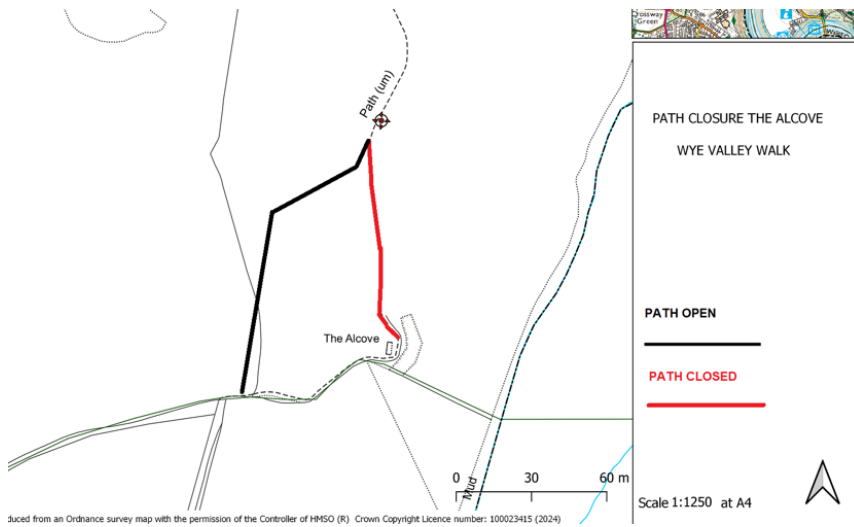


current google



2.3 On 8 July a permissive path, part of the Wye Valley Walk in Piercefield had a landslip. A diversion has been signed.





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