

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held at Shire Hall - Monmouth on Tuesday, 9th September, 2025 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT: Anthea Fairey,
Phil Allsopp,
Barbara Heys,
Ian Mawdsley,
Phil Mundell,
Anne Underwood
Kelvin Varney

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Garner	Public Right of Way Officer
Richard Ray	Paralegal
Ruth Rourke	Countryside Access Manager
Rob Stanyer	Active Travel Project Officer

ALSO PRESENT: Bob Campbell, Natural Resources Wales
Sarah Tindal, Natural Resources Wales
One Member of the Public

APOLOGIES AND WELCOME:

Bethany Handley, Irene Brooke, John Askew, Anthony Easson, Sallie Roderick and Huw Watkins.

LAF meeting opened with RG going through general housekeeping

1. Declarations of Interest

None received.

2. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum meeting of 5th May 2025.

The minutes of the meeting 13th May 2025 were accepted,
Proposer: BH, Seconded: KV.

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

Additional LAF member recruitment

RG updated the LAF regarding contacting Tillhil as a forestry landowner in the area who are unable to commit any time to the LAF, also no recommendations from LAF members received

ACTION: To continue to contact or pass on contact details of potential landowners/horse riders
– LAF members

Website for registers on cams web:

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Welsh language being updated after Welsh language officer report

ACTION: Update LAF when available for initial viewing -RG

4. Active travel update (Rob Stanyer, Active Travel Project Officer)

Rob delivered a presentation focused on the Kingswood Gate to Williamsfield Lane active travel route in Monmouth. He explained that each major urban settlement in Monmouthshire has an Active Travel Network Map, supported by an audit process that identifies which routes meet the Active Travel standards and which are proposed for improvement to achieve compliance. The presentation highlighted the structure of the network, which includes primary "spinal" routes forming the core of the system, complemented by ancillary routes that connect into these main corridors. In Monmouth, the example route extends from the Kingswood Gate development, traverses the town, and continues eastward to Wyesham.

Rob provided a detailed overview of the scheme, including its design, the various funding streams being utilised, and the construction challenges—particularly those related to drainage. He also emphasised the importance of monitoring, noting that a range of counters have been installed to track usage and trends. Data clearly shows that weekday school runs and commuting now constitute a significant portion of the route's usage following the improvement works. Further changes in local route usage are anticipated once the final construction works across the meadow near Kingswood Gate are completed.

Presentation is attached for reference.

Queries and Discussion:

- **Swale Definition:** A query was raised regarding the term "swale." Rob clarified that it refers to a drainage feature designed to protect the meadow habitat, which is designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).
- **Funding Process:** It was noted that Active Travel funding is allocated through annual bids submitted by local authorities across Wales. Previously, up to four projects could be submitted per authority; this has now been reduced to one per year. There is also a fund for "quick wins" projects which can be as small as installing bike shelters or drop kerbs to make routes more accessible and up to AT standards. These quick wins happen all across Monmouthshire as long as they are on or form part of an AT route.
- **Use of Strava Heat Maps:** These are used to complement counter data and provide additional insight into route usage.
- **Active Travel Coverage:** Active Travel projects are currently underway in Monmouthshire's main urban areas, including Caldicot, Magor/Undy, Usk, Monmouth, Chepstow, and Abergavenny.
- **Planning Input:** Active Travel also contributes to planning processes, often supporting comments from Countryside Access on new developments.

5. Tracks and Trails project update

BH provided an update on the Tracks and Trails project. The last meeting took place in February, and the group has since been awaiting a report from the consultants. The initial draft was deemed insufficient and required significant revision. The revised report is now with National Landscape for review, and a meeting is to be arranged to discuss its contents.

IM expressed concern over the delays, describing the situation as unacceptable and difficult to manage. He highlighted the impact on community expectations and the risk of losing public confidence in the process. He proposed that the Local Access Forum (LAF) write collectively to express these concerns.

PM agreed with IM's comments and shared his frustration. He requested an update from **RR**.

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RR noted that Celyn is awaiting comments from Graham in Highways. A meeting is expected to be arranged this week by National Landscape for the project's steering group. She acknowledged the significant volume of community feedback received regarding the routes, which has been difficult to respond to without the finalised report.

A query was raised by **AU** regarding the challenges in communication and passing on information.

RR acknowledged the need for improved communication. While some progress has been made, the group is still awaiting the final report and clarity on next steps. She also noted that the Highways department is undergoing internal changes, including updates to records, which has contributed to delays.

PM asked what specific actions are now required.

RR responded that Celyn and National Landscape are to arrange a meeting with the steering group as a priority.

PM also queried the current source of funding. It was confirmed that funding is being provided by National Landscape. However, the delay in receiving the report is now impacting the ability to submit bids for the next stage of funding for works.

IM suggested that the matter may need to be escalated to a county councillor to prompt further progress.

A query was made around signage by LAF members

RR responded that a signage report has been produced to help identify appropriate locations for installation.

IM reiterated the importance of receiving the report in order to move forward with the next stage of the project.

PM concluded that significant progress is required ahead of the next meeting with some the actions agreed (below).

ACTION: National landscape to organise steering group meeting

ACTION: Chair to draft letter concerning delays and position of the LAF -PM

ACTION: To invite National Landscape manager to next LAF-RG

ACTION: Update to next LAF meeting,- BH & National landscape officers

6. Natural Resources Wales update (Sarah Tindal, Senior Officer People and Places, South East Wales/ Bob Campbell Senior Officer Land Management, South East Wales)

Operational update from **ST/BC**.

Notes appended to meeting agenda

ST provided an internal update, noting that recent budget cuts have led to a cost-saving exercise, following on from the "Case for Change" document. As part of this, the corporate plan no longer includes recreation as a priority area, resulting in a strategic reset. This has led to decisions such as the closure of visitor centres and has raised questions about the statutory function of staff, including their role with Local Access Forums (LAF).

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However, this shift has prompted a renewed focus on the role and value of LAFs, including how they interact with wider organisational structures. ST confirmed that senior managers remain supportive of LAFs and their contributions, and there is now an opportunity to work more closely together moving forward.

BC added that these changes also vary by region, and confirmed that his role remains in place, which is a positive continuity.

An update was also provided by **BC** from the management team regarding the attached operational update. It was noted that extensive wildfires have required staff to be redeployed to support emergency response and recovery efforts.

AU raised a query regarding the Wentwood Steering Group. It was confirmed by **RG** that the group is scheduled to meet in September, with attendees currently invited being Newport and Monmouthshire county councils, Gwent Police, Woodland trust, Tillhill (landowner), plus Monmouthshire highways.

BC also went through the proposed forestry works and the move into general management of the woodland estate rather than reactionary, after a number of years having to deal with tree diseases, such as larch disease. These works will have some limited path closures, but efforts are being made to maintain public access where possible, by primarily the use of banksmen to manage safety.

7. LAF Written contribution questions.

RR provided an update on Countryside Access operations (written update attached). A new role has been introduced to support the Community Links Officer. It was also noted that the Volunteer Coordinator is currently on a one-year sabbatical, with interviews underway to appoint a temporary replacement.

Additionally, one of the Field Wardens is on jury service for the next month, and the team will experienced a reduction in volunteer support next year. It was confirmed that **Mark Langley** is also expected to retire around January.

RR acknowledged that these staffing changes have been challenging to manage across the wider team.

8. Countryside Access Service Update

9. Date of Next Meeting and venue

The following dates were put forward for future meetings:
November 26th 2025

ACTION: Confirm venue for next meeting-RG

ACTION: send out potential dates for a February meeting to LAF members - RG

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm