

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held at Innovation house, Wales1 Business Park, Newport Rd, Caldicot NP26 3DG on Wednesday, 10th June, 2026 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillors: P. Mundell, A. Underwood, B. Heys, J. Thurston, K. Varney, P. Allsopp, S. Roderick, I. Mawdsley, I. Brooke, Tony Easson and R. Campbell

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Garner	Public Right of Way Officer
Colette Bosley	Green Infrastructure Manager
Ruth Rourke	Countryside Access Manager
Richard Ray	Paralegal
Andy Powell	Rights of Way, Field Officer
Tom Arnold	Community Links Officer, Countryside Access
Ross Emery	Rights of Way Field Warden

APOLOGIES:

Councillors A.Fairey, S. Lewis, H. Watkins, R. Wynne-Jones, T. Mead, J. Askew and S. Tindal

1. Welcome

LAF meeting opened with RG going through general housekeeping, including recording of transcript of meeting for the purpose of helping with minutes, all present agreed to this.

2. Apologies for Absence / Introductions

Apologies were received from Anthea Fairey (AF), Sarah Tindal (ST), John Askew (JA), Shan Lewis (SL), Huw Watkins (HW), Terence Mead (TM), and Rhys Wynne-Jones (RWJ).

The secretary read out the letter of resignation from Bethany Handley for the Forum.

Action: Write to BH to express the LAF's best wishes for her health for the future - RG

3. Declarations of Interest

None received.

4. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum meeting of 11th of February 2026

The minutes of the previous meeting had not been fully circulated in advance and were therefore provided during the meeting. Following review, the minutes were agreed as an accurate record and accepted.

Proposed: BH

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Seconded: IB

5. Tracks and Trails project: To receive an update from the steering group

BH on behalf of the Tracks and Trails Subgroup, provided an update on progress during its meetings held on the 25th February and on site on the 26th May 2026. Four priority routes have been identified in the Tintern and Whitebrook areas for action, namely, Grove Road/Horseway, Maypole Road cluster and Tintern rd and Chapel Hill rd. Three of these sites were visited alongside Wye Valley National Landscape (NL) and Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) officers.

Initial actions to be progressed include:

- Erection of improved signage using both new and existing infrastructure
- To, as a pilot, install two AI-assisted cameras, at two locations, to monitor levels and types of use, at an approximate cost of £11,000. It is envisaged that the monitoring equipment will be able to give valuable information on the type and frequency of usage on these routes
- NL will also be looking to create a central hub website to hold supporting information for users including guidance on lawful use and how to best report antisocial behaviour.
- The subgroup is also planning to deliver two workshops for local residents later in the summer (moved from June and July) to encourage engagement and reporting of issues.

During discussion, IM raised concerns regarding the pace and scale of the work being undertaken by NL, particularly in the absence of a clearly defined project plan and milestones. Concerns were also expressed regarding capacity, given the limited staffing resource available and issues that this could create at any workshops with the community. IM has also volunteered to assist with the drafting of a Code of Practice as an initial, achievable output.

IB echoed concerns about the lack of clarity, particularly around legal input, and noted a growing lack of confidence in delivery. PM queried responsibility for progressing the work, which in answer should sit with NL, while CB emphasised that these matters would be more appropriately addressed through the Steering Group rather than the full LAF.

There was general agreement that the project requires a more robust and realistic plan.

ACTION: LAF to request project plan and monitoring via meeting with NL and MCC through sub group- LAF Sub Group

6. Volunteering update and issues arising

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AP, TA, and RE provided an update on volunteering activity and future development with associated presentation (attached online under item 5) on a number of works undertaken with volunteers, volunteer groups and also with businesses, such as recent work with National grid.

AP put forward a request to the LAF for their support by raising the profile for vital funding needed to continue and enhance this work, especially with the uncertainty around the access improvement grant, which is due to currently conclude in April 2027. An action in this regard was put forward for the LAF to contact the Welsh government Senedd member responsible for this area and the local representatives.

The Forum acknowledged the significant positive impact of the community links officers and project, the increased volunteer contribution and support, including delivery of access improvements, provision of training (including use of power tools), and partnership working with NRW.

PM commended the progress made and the tangible outcomes achieved. JT requested supporting data and case studies to strengthen future advocacy and communications, including use in social media. SR noted the benefits of engaging local businesses to support this work, particularly where tasks are complex or time-consuming. KV suggested that a similar model could be applied to Unclassified County Roads (UCRs), while PA highlighted the potential for support from Community and Town Councils both in regard to support and potential grant funding for projects.

CB noted the need to ensure long-term sustainability, particularly in the context of limited resources and thanked the LAF for its support and ideas.

AP then highlighted the importance of improving accessibility across Monmouthshire, noting that most members will be aware of individuals who would benefit from improved access. A proposal was put forward to establish a small subgroup to focus on accessibility, including as an initial action, identifying suitable routes and developing photo or video-based promotional materials or similar. There was support from the LAF for this to proceed.

ACTION: To forward details of contacts in Welsh government to the Chair - RER

ACTION: For a letter from the LAF to be sent to Welsh government around future support and funding for access - PM

ACTION: To seek expressions of interest for an accessibility subgroup – RG

ACTION: Set up subgroup, membership, terms of reference, initial actions, timescales.
-RG &Subgroup

7. Natural Resources Wales update for information purposes

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This item was changed to item 6 on the agenda instead of Item 7 due to speakers time constraints.

BC (Natural Resources Wales) provided a remote operational update to the Forum. Initial technical issues with audio were resolved, and RC proceeded to summarise key activities across his area. He reported that routine work continues, including ongoing tree safety operations. A particular issue was highlighted along the “365 steps” route, where ash dieback is resulting in failing trees. Management of this area is complex due to its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and additional funding is being sought to address the risks.

Updates were also provided on site works and environmental management. The replacement of Coppice mawr Bridge has been completed and the route is now reopened. Birch clearance at Beacon Hill is ongoing, alongside the continuation of cattle grazing to support heathland restoration. These measures are showing positive ecological outcomes, with increased nightjar numbers recorded. Work to the ancient monument is also nearing completion, and funding has been secured to improve accessibility at Whitestone, particularly to support less mobile users along key routes. In terms of forward planning, BC outlined a programme of forestry operations expected to begin in September, including thinning works in Hendra Forest, Chepstow area, and parts of Beacon Hill. He also noted that further public drop-in sessions would be arranged to allow stakeholders to review plans and raise site-specific queries. Members were invited to follow up directly with NRW outside the meeting for any detailed questions.

RG confirmed the written report had been circulated and suggested that, due to time constraints, any further queries be submitted via email. The Forum thanked BC for his update.

8. Goytre Hall wood project, woodland Improvement Grant (TWIG funding)

This item was changed to item 7 on the agenda instead of Item 6 due to the previous speakers time constraints.

CB provided an update on the Goytre Hall Wood Project, noting that there was a successful grant bid for the Woodland Improvement Grant (TWIG funding). Work is progressing to establish a volunteer or ‘Friends of’ group to support the site, with planned engagement involving the Local Access Forum (LAF) and the wider community. Proposed activities include green skills training, bioblitz events, and other community-focused initiatives. The project is being led by MCC officers; Elliot Waters, with Gareth John responsible for site management.

A community survey will be issued in due course to support further engagement and communications. Members were encouraged to contact CB if they, or anyone they know, would be interested in getting involved. In response to a query from PM regarding potential closures, it was confirmed that minor, temporary closures may be required to facilitate tree management works.

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9. LAF Future Work Programme for review and updating

This item was overviewed alongside item 9, the Annual Report, however due to a technical delay in getting this to LAF members it was felt this would be better deferred, presented and approved at the next LAF meeting.

ACTION: add to agenda for next LAF meeting -RG

10. LAF Annual Report

This item was overviewed alongside item 8, LAF future work programme, however due to a technical delay in getting this to LAF members it was felt this would be better deferred, presented and approved at the next LAF meeting.

ACTION: add to agenda for next LAF meeting-RG

11. LAF Written contribution questions.

Operational update countryside access- Progress in implementing the approved Countryside access improvement plan was sent via email to the LAF, no queries were raised at the meeting, however there was a technical delay in getting this sent out to the LAF - any questions to be forwarded to RR.

A written question arose from IB regarding the LAF being included as consultees for Definitive map modification orders (DMMO's). A written response was sent to IB by RG, which was shared with the LAF: That it was possible for individuals to receive consultations, but there was a cost associated with this, IB raised that this was communicated at a previous meeting but a full response was not received at the time, RER indicated that this was queried internally but without response, that she would chase this up again.

That all DMMOs were available as part of the register online on the Monmouthshire website.

That any consultations for DMMOs were also made available on the Monmouthshire website, IB queried whether the full reports are also available, to which RG confirmed consultations include the full report.

RG also indicated that it may be possible to create notifications to members via the My Monmouthshire service of any consultations, to which he will look into further and report back.

Finally, the long overdue CAMs interactive map expansion has overcome one of the final barriers around document sharing, and as such will centrally hold all the DMMO's, public path orders, Temporary closures and Section 31 deposits. It is hopeful that this will be presented to the LAF at the next meeting.

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ACTION: Disseminate costs and process for signing up for consultations on DMMOS -
RER

ACTION: Share current location of DMMO's and consultations – RG

ACTION: Look into auto notification for new consultations - RG

12. Dates and locations of future meetings

Next two meeting dates agreed as:

10am on Wednesday 16th September 2026.

10am on Wednesday 2nd December 2026.

Venue to be confirmed.