

Countryside Access Improvement Plan (ROWIP) Final Consultation Report 20/12/2019

ID	Name	Response
1	Gloucestershire County Council	<p>A very detailed and superb report!</p> <p>I don't believe we'll ever have the time to create such a masterpiece, firefighting all the issues that come our way. Well done.</p>
2	Monmouthshire LAF Chair Lady	<p>I have just received your email and attachments regarding the ROWIP. I have had a quick look through and it looks good, you have been very thorough and obviously spent a lot of time on it.</p> <p>I thought I would send you this message from BHS HQ about a new agreement with NRW, in case you are not aware of it.</p>
3	Canal & River Trust	<p>Thanks for the kind comments with regard to the Canal. I have spoken to Jenny Rogers who is our new Partnerships and Engagement Manager. She has suggested that the Trust may wish to be shown as a partners for some additional sections.</p> <p>Please would you consider adding us as a key partner to;</p> <p>WM1 (page 48) ALH1 (page 52) ALH2 (page 53) linked to WHS KWOT4 (page 57)</p> <p>Please note that the Reference to the Trust on Page 59 should read Canal & River Trust (or Glandwr Cymru) without the 's'.</p> <p>With regard to WM3 – we do not need to be a full partner but have schemes such as Share the space, Drop the Pace which may be relevant/helpful.</p>

ID	Name	Response
		<p>WM5 Green infrastructure- We believe the canal is a perfect example of multi- functional GI. We will of course expect the canal to be treated as such in any planning applications or wider policy and will always promote this in any responses. The Trust would be happy to attend stakeholder meetings on this matter, as we do with several other LPAs.</p>
4	Canoe Wales	<p>This is just a reminder to those of you whose ROWIP review processes are still underway (with apologies that I don't have the resources to engage individually with each of your individual consultations, where these are still ongoing): I should be grateful if you could all ensure that your ROWIPs include reference to a requirement along the lines that "Rights of Way and Access Land that are / is, or could be, used to gain recreational access to waterways for canoes and similar waterborne craft should be identified and maintained so as to promote and improve their use for this purpose".</p> <p>Also, for those of you who haven't yet responded (with thanks to those who have), we are keen that all LAFs in Wales have access to paddlers who can advise them on paddle sport issues and developments in their area. If you already have this expertise within your membership, I would be interested to know this – and if not, I would be pleased to arrange for someone to attend one of your meetings and / or to suggest new members who could represent paddle sport interests and views.</p> <p>I believe you will all have seen the message from the Powys LAF Secretary that, following advice from NRW, they have amended their terms of reference to include "access on the water", as well as "access to the water"; and I should be grateful if you would all consider taking the same approach.</p> <p>Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further advice around paddle sport access to waterways in your area.</p>
5	Disabled Ramblers	<p>Thank you for producing this comprehensive ROWIP – which will be challenging to deliver so the best of luck with funding!</p>

ID Name

Response

I've a couple of comments which don't affect the ROWIP itself:

- 1) The on-line definitive map seems only to have the RoW and no background (OS) map.
<https://access.monmouthshire.gov.uk/standardmap.aspx>
- 2) Any idea of when the, very useful, Countryside Access Design Guide will be updated?

Sadly, our charity is too small to be of help in Monmouthshire in the same way that the Ramblers and others are. Please let us know if you would like any interesting accessible, preferably circular, routes of 5 to 8 miles checked and promoted and we will do our best to help. Hopefully we will then run a ramble there for our members.

6 Wye Valley AONB

The following comments are made on behalf of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership. Broadly we are supportive of the policies and strategy outlined in the ROWIP. Specific comments are as follows: -
Page 4: 2. Replace "their" in the 2nd Vision sentence to read "the", as it currently seems to imply or refer to "the local rights of way and countryside sites" possessing "physical and mental well-being".
Page 5. We welcome the ambitions of this Draft Plan and note the pragmatic approach outlined in section 3.
PAGE 6: 4 Themes. Insert "the" before "network".
3. change "an" to "and".
Page 7 What is Monmouthshire Like? End of 2nd para Insert "Natural" between "Outstanding" and "Beauty" and add "(AONB)" at end, to read...and the picturesque river gorge of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)."
Page 9:6.1 Current access provision. This paragraph neglects to mention the National Trail. 2nd sentence "Monmouthshire is the gateway to the Brecon Beacons National Park and has canals, rivers..." Insert the word "county" after "National Park and "otherwise this subsequent long list can appear to refer to the BBNP rather than the county as a whole.

Page 12: 6.5 Countryside Sites, Green and Blue Spaces. 3rd Bullet point Cadw is a name not an acronym, so does not need to be all in capitals.

4th Bullet: We welcome the inclusion of the Wye Valley AONB here.

Page 15: 6.14 Other types of Existing Access. 3rd bullet: 4 Fiddlers Elbow NNR, Also add, "near Monmouth".

Page 22:9 Policy context. 1st sentence "The importance of the prow network" "prow" is an acronym so should be in capitals.

Page 23: diagram of policies and strategies that share common objectives to the ROWIP. We welcome the inclusion of the WV AONB Management Plan in this diagram.

Page 24 10.1 3rd paragraph last sentence: 2Partnership working with these organisations and services is key to delivery of this plan." We fully endorse this statement and welcome the inclusion of the Wye Valley AONB in the subsequent box of "key partners".

Page 27 10:4 Public Rights Of Way Asset - The final two bullets only partially mitigate the fact that the "current capital budget for maintaining the network" is more than 10x too small. Despite the success of partnership initiatives, the on-going short fall should be a serious concern to all interested parties.

Page 33:12.3 Promotion - 2nd sentence, replace "Wye Valley AONB" with "www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk"
3rd bullet: 2 Stronger Invigorated Regional partnerships along the whole of these trails..." On behalf of the Wye Valley Walk Partnership we fully endorse this point.

Page 36: 13 Community Involvement 3rd bullet? "volunteers often do more than one task, or work across departments and sometimes even different authorities". This statement seriously underplays the dedication and dynamism of volunteers, despite the previous bullet point. Suggest replacing with "Volunteers are often dynamic and skilled workers/contributors that may volunteer across departments, authorities and organisations."

13.2 Volunteer Resource: - The Wye Valley AONB Volunteers have tended to avoid working on PROW, instead concentrating their efforts on permissive paths and wider landscape & nature conservation and enhancement (including invasive non-native species control). We would be prepared to review this in line with the revised ROWIP if appropriate.

Page 39: 13.5 ROWIP Actions for Community Involvement. - 1st bullet: "Work with the Wye Valley AONB

ID	Name	Response
		<p>Partnership Group to establish a "Friends of" Group to assist with the promotion and path caring of the Wye Valley Walk." We support this but replace "Wye Valley AONB Partnership Group..." with "the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and Wye Valley Walk Partnership."</p> <p>Page 42: 15.3 Development Pressures para, last sentence: "Otherwise the number of obstructions (266) on rights of way continuing to expand" Should read "...on rights of way will continue to expand."</p> <p>Page 43: 15.5 Quality of Life/connection to landscape and biodiversity: - 1st paragraph I am not sure where the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan has "evidenced the loss of connection with people and the natural environment". It certainly references and alludes to it, but any evidence is either national or anecdotal. Suggest rewording this sentence to read "However, the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan and the development of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership scheme have both recognised the national trend of the loss of connection between people and the natural environment."</p> <p>15.6 Partnership Working- 2nd paragraph insert "Management" between "AONB" AND "Plan". Page 44 3rd paragraph suggest amending to read: "Such partnership project work requires significant amount of staff time, some times over many years, both to create the partnerships, deliver the projects themselves and then manage their legacy."</p> <p>PAGE 49: wm1 Better network/sites for leisure & daily use. We welcome the inclusion of "natural flood management"</p> <p>Page53: Action 7.9 ROW should be in capitals.</p> <p>Page 54: Action 8.3 "Provide motorised traffic free, safe walking, cycling and equestrian routes linking towns, villages and rural areas." This seems an unachievable Action given the considerable constraints on resources, especially as it does not quantify between how many "towns, villages" etc. The Action would be more achievable if it was prefixed with "Pursue the provision of motorised..." &/or suffixed with "where appropriate" or "where possible".</p>
7	Forest of Dean District Council	<p>Many thanks for consulting us on this Countryside Access Improvement Plan. The Local Plans Team at the Forest of Dean District Council does not have any comments to make on the issues within it. However, I will also pass it onto our Sustainability Team, as they may wish to have some input.</p>

ID	Name	Response
8	Minister for Housing and Local Government	<p>Thank you for your email of 17 September, regarding Monmouthshire County Council’s Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). I am eager to see that every authority fulfils its statutory duty to review its ROWIP within the statutory timeframe. The plans are a way for the public to express their priorities for how the network should be looked after, which in turn allows authorities to focus their resources. Since their original publication, ROWIPs have been a useful tool for rights of way teams in identifying, planning and prioritising improvements to the path network. Over the next ten years and beyond they will help authorities to co-ordinate and implement other key statutory priorities, including active travel and responsibilities under the Well-being and Future Generations Act 2016. Crucially, having an up to date ROWIP will also assist with any future funding schemes made available by the Welsh Government or third sector.</p> <p>I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for putting together the new ROWIP, it will put Monmouthshire CC in good stead for supporting the economy, encouraging active lifestyles and contributing to making Monmouthshire a great place to work, live and visit.</p>
9	Natural Resources Wales	<p>It is evident that the Monmouthshire ROWIP is based on very comprehensive and thorough assessments. These have been skilfully condensed into a focussed, well written and presented document which we think will provide an excellent basis for access management for the next ten years.</p> <p>The themes from the statement of action identified early in the plan help provide context and continuity. The statement of action is clearly presented, and it’s helpful that you include the benefits of actions that demonstrate the value of undertaking them, alongside resources and key partners. The level of detail for the objectives and actions is appropriate for the statement of action and lends itself to guiding the development of more specific actions or commitments in the delivery plan. Further, it was good to see a ‘Future Focussed’ section within the Statement of Action.</p>

Making all the reports available and highlighting opportunities for further information in the relevant sections of the draft ROWIP enhances understanding of the points being made and emphasises the open and transparent approach you have taken.

Whilst noting the reference to Brecon Beacons National Park Authority maintaining public rights of way in Monmouthshire on page 9 of the ROWIP, for clarity, and in line with section 2.5 of Welsh Government Guidance, it would be helpful to state the arrangements in place with regard to the ROWIP for the area of Monmouthshire in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Matters within NRW's remit:

Relevant sections of the draft ROWIP are referenced and shown in italics with our response below:

P12 6.4 Horse riding and carriage drivers *There is opportunity to make more use of county unclassified roads as "quiet lanes" which would benefit more recreational users by looking at how these routes are signed, managed and promoted. There is also opportunity to increase riding routes in some of the public forests managed by Natural Resources Wales.*

Large sections of the Welsh Government woodland estate are subject to a concordat between Natural Resources Wales as the managing agency, and the British Horse Society, which provides permissive access for horse riders. NRW and the BHS have a mutually agreed concordat, setting out our collaborative approach to horse-riding. To clarify, this applies to permissive access on forest roads and tracks on NRW managed freehold estate and not generally to leasehold estate, which includes Welsh Water land.

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NRW would welcome the opportunity to support priorities identified in the ROWIP statement of action by engagement with Monmouthshire to look at opportunities to deliver improvements to the network.

We have developed position statements to support activities on the land we manage. The position statement for equestrian access is available on our website.

Theme Active Healthy Lifestyles 9.1 *Work with NRW to improve connectivity between the bridleway network and areas of Welsh Government woodland estate where permissive access by horse riders exists.*

The concordat between the BHS and NRW referred to above makes a commitment for NRW and the BHS to "*Consider opportunities to manage, improve and enhance equestrian access, especially in linking existing networks of PROW, promoted routes and forest roads. Work together to identify and prioritise development and source funding to carry out the work.*" NRW will now be looking at the detail of how we do this in a consistent manner across Wales.

We are happy to work with you to look at opportunities to improve connectivity to better meet the needs of the public and reflect the relevant outcomes in Woodlands for Wales, the WG strategy for woodlands and trees.³ Maps showing the location of Forest Roads are available on the Lle portal. This could provide a useful starting point to look at opportunities to improve connectivity where a partnership approach could bring wider benefits. Alternatively, you may already have some priorities you would like to share with us.

P16 6.15 WHERE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS PROVISION IS NOT MET *There is a need to work with landowners of woodlands, in particular, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to extend access for a wider range of users.*

We welcome this suggestion and with reference to our position statements which we discuss in detail below, we would welcome discussion to see how we can best support this.

P21 3 Woodlands for Wales, the WG strategy for woodlands and trees

8.4 EVOLUTION OF THE NETWORK. *Through stakeholder engagement the following were identified as key ways in which countryside access needs to evolve to meet future demands:*

- *Commitment from Natural Resources Wales & other landowners to the maintenance and provision of waymarked walks/rides* We acknowledge that the historical legacy of forest management practices has resulted in anomalies where the route shown on the definitive map does not correspond with a route on the ground. Uncertainty about routes is not desirable from a user or land manager perspective. In managing the WG forest estate, NRW must balance a range of issues and legislative demands.

We would welcome the opportunity to help you review the rights of way network in light of the emerging priorities from the ROWIP. This would help us target our limited budgets in the most effective way where the needs for improvement works has been established through this strategic process and where a partnership approach could bring wider benefits.

We are currently piloting an innovative approach to develop routes and circuits using traditional and modern technology in order to address the needs of the widest range of existing and future users.

P35 Seek clarity from NRW on access rights (particularly for group activities) The land we manage is a significant public asset and it is our priority to make this asset available, attractive and welcoming to people. To help develop understanding of the way we manage activities on the land and water we look after, we are creating a series of statements that outline our position on a range of recreation, access, community and regeneration activities. These set out our position and where in addition to access rights we make clear the additional permissive access we provide and also when those participating in activities need to ask for permission. Further information is available on our website here.

<https://naturalresources.wales/days-out/recreation-and-access-policy-advice-and-guidance/using-the-land-we-manage-foryour-activities-position-statements/?lang=en>

We hope this helps to clarify the situation but would be happy to discuss these and any comments or further clarifications with you.

P38 13.4 *The ability to carry out Volunteer work with Natural Resources Wales on permissive routes on their land and to take account of the Equality Act and Monmouthshire's Least Restrictive Access Policy.* We are actively reviewing our volunteering policy and recognise the importance of volunteering on the land we manage in terms of benefit to access and recreation, biodiversity, sustainable management of natural resources and wellbeing. We are aware that

Monmouthshire have a well-established volunteer resource which offers potential in this area and we would welcome the opportunity to explore with Monmouthshire how we might facilitate this which in turn could help inform our policy review.

Theme Knowing what's out there 13.4 *Work with NRW & other woodland partners to provide better information about what access is available in woodlands.* 13.5 *To encourage NRW to provide and share an easily accessible map showing the extent of Welsh Government woodland estate that is subject to permissive access by horse riders.* We recognise the limitations of our current mapped (spatial) provision for access and recreational opportunities available to the public. We understand that clarity about freehold and leasehold forest is important to enable equestrians to understand where the access arrangements under the BHS concordat apply. Whilst we would point out that Public Rights of Way are available through our 'Days Out' map (<https://naturalresources.wales/days-out/places-to-visit/?lang=en> click on the map banner at top of page). Our intention remains to provide an external map that does allow the areas of the NRW estate that is freehold to be selected (displayed) – which would then indicate to potential visitors the areas in which they are able to access in addition to PRoW and/or permissive routes specifically provided by us. We would further state that we recognise that this will benefit all areas of Wales, not just the Monmouthshire geographic area. Our current position is that we continue to work with colleagues in ICT and Communications (who lead on our Digital Strategy) to develop our mapping capability for all access and recreational opportunities on land managed by NRW. We would be happy to keep Monmouthshire, and other ROWIP authorities, abreast of developments in this area and would welcome suggestions for the best way to do this.

P30 11.3 THE ACCESSIBILITY OF RIGHTS OF WAY TO BLIND OR PARTIALLY SIGHTED PERSONS AND OTHERS WITH MOBILITY PROBLEMS. *The opportunities provided by designated access land within Monmouthshire and the land managed by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are particularly valued given their suitability for all ability access. (Also appreciated is the provision of car parking, toilets, waymarked routes and information posted on NRW's website).* We welcome the recognition in the Draft ROWIP that the land we manage in Monmouthshire has a role in meeting public access needs and particularly the role it plays in providing all ability access.

We recognise that different levels of development and facilitation of access are appropriate in different zones, as referenced in 'By All Reasonable Means' especially the section in Appendix 1 on Access Standards for different management zones. These zones have been aligned as far as possible with those used in the BT Countryside for All standards.

There may be opportunities for future joint working on inclusive access on routes and sites which cross NRW managed land within Monmouthshire. In this context, we share a desire to work together to achieve these benefits in a strategic way that reflects the needs and opportunity within Monmouthshire and the region as a whole.

Lack of information. The RoWIP identifies lack of information as a key barrier to particularly for people with disabilities (section 8.2, 8.3) and the importance of information to enable decision making about route choice (8.4). The inclusion of specific consideration of how to improve information for people with disabilities complements an area of work that we are looking at with regard to visual information. We are currently working on a pilot project using NRW sites to consider alternative visual information formats; for example, videos showing disabled users negotiating a trail to enable users to decide whether a route or site is suitable for them and their equipment. We are happy to share the findings from this pilot with partners. 'Photo trail' information could also be considered as a lower cost visual format.

Other protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 Section 16.1 *Engage with relevant organisations to ensure hard copy material is made available to meet the needs of those other minorities' e.g. visual impairment and those from ethnic groups.* We welcome the strong focus on mobility issues/disability within the RoWIP. There should be increased consideration of other protected characteristics. Appendix 3 outlines the positive impact on other Protected Characteristics and the fact that in most cases this is 'none' shows the need for more consideration of inclusivity in relation to other Protected Characteristics. We recognise that increasing participation and removal of barriers for Protected Characteristics other than age and disability is less tangible and less focused on physical infrastructure and therefore more of a challenge to address. Equally we welcome the assessment report referenced in the appendix with its focus on disability but the impact of interventions on other protected characteristics should be also considered.

P15 6.13 AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES With reference to the point made in your ROWIP under Agri-Environment Schemes, you may find the following information useful: Under the Glastir agreements, landowners must 'Comply with legal duties relating to existing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and public access such as open access. You must demonstrate compliance with the legal requirements relating to existing Public

Rights of Way (PRoW) and Public Access such as open access that are on Contract Land, including not obstructing them, and reinstating them after ploughing'. Local Authorities must be contacted if there are any issues concerning the Public Rights of Way on land under Contract. Written consent must be obtained from Local Authorities or National Park Authorities for each Management Option that obstructs a Public Right of Way and made available on request. The land under Contract must be kept free of rubbish such as derelict vehicles, discarded fencing, plastic wrap and disused domestic appliances. Any existing rubbish should be cleared from the premises before the outset of the Contract.

Responsible Recreation P42 15.4 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR *Littering and fly-tipping is now becoming a problem in Countryside sites and rights of way. There is a need for promoting widely responsible behaviour and for continued partnership working with Keep Wales Tidy and our volunteers.* The position statements that we have produced in consultation with stakeholders support this approach. These are

available on the NRW website here for information and include statements on Equestrian Access, Recreational Motor Vehicle Driving, Mountain Biking and Cycling and Dogs on our Land. We would support the objectives in 3.1 – 3.4 to promoting responsible recreation, whether it be on publicly managed land or that under private ownership. We promote the family of Countryside Codes which are available on our website should you wish to reference these.

Protected Sites We note that you reference internationally and nationally designated landscapes in section 5. We wonder if it would be useful to include reference to European protected sites and the need to balance requirements under the habitats directives with the benefits these sites bring to public in terms of access and wellbeing. As we know you are aware, where European protected sites (Special Areas of Conservation - SACs) are involved, any such project to increase visitors or re-route paths etc. that had potential to affect a site, would need assessing under the Habitat Regulations. The Authority should also consider impacts of such plans on other protected sites and the wider environment. From this perspective we also see that value that the ROWIP can bring in developing and promoting routes that can direct people away from sensitive areas. We are happy to provide advice to support you in doing this.

Flood risk management – assets managed by NRW

Policy FF4 The statement of action references two specific actions relating to flood risk and management in relation to Rights of Way: *24.2 Identify flood risk areas and likely impact on PROW. Put in place mitigation measures. Seek alternative routes for those parts of Offa's Dyke Path National Trail and regional routes prone to flooding; and 24.4 Explore natural flood management potential as part of wider landscape initiatives to address ROW issues and secure future access.*

General comments. It should be noted that there can be implications in management of rights of way on the operation and maintenance of flood risk assets that we may undertake. This needs to be considered by the authority, for example, when you come to develop site specific projects. In developing projects and considering management and promotion of rights of way near main rivers you should be aware of the potential impact rights of way can have on the management of flood risk assets such as embankments or berm areas and ensure that appropriate measures are taken to ensure flood risk assets are not compromised as a result.

Further information about this and the areas where any measures may need a flood risk activity permit (FRAP) are available on our website. We would encourage you to get in touch with us if you have any queries relating to this. We would also make you aware that should there be any proposals to create new rights of way over or along existing flood risk assets, the local authority should be aware that although we may operate or maintain these assets, we do not own the asset or the land on which they are located and are not in a position to grant permission for use of the land. The permission of the landowner will have to be sought as part of any process to create the right of way.

Site-specific comments, though possibly not an issue to be covered by the ROWIP, we take the opportunity to raise the matter of inappropriate and in some instances illegal, activities along the Gwent foreshore. Of particular concern is illegal vehicular access; the use of vehicles has the potential to impact on the integrity of the sea defence embankments and vandalised gates/barriers may pose a risk to public safety. We recommend that all access structures such as gates and barriers managed by your authority both on ROW permitting access to the foreshore and along the Wales Coast Path (where the path runs along or adjacent to sea defences) are suitably robust and maintained with a view to preventing inappropriate vehicle access (that also have potential to affect the safety of legitimate users of the area).

When considering rights of way near managed watercourses (reens) within the Gwent Inland Drainage District (IDD) you should be aware of the desire of the IDD to maintain a minimum 7m exclusion zone bordering IDD managed watercourses to permit maintenance and plant activities. We would encourage you to get in touch with the Gwent IDD if you have any queries relating to works in the vicinity of any reen.

Minor points and clarifications:

6.7 OPEN ACCESS LAND We picked up the following very minor observations whilst considering the draft plan:

- For clarification, Open Access land is shown on Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 scale maps.
- It is Welsh Government Woodland Estate has been dedicated.

ID	Name	Response
10	CADW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WG is looking at increasing the rights of access to include the coast (i.e. it's not definite.) Section 15.7 is correct that it's a proposal. • National should be Natural • For clarity, it might be best to refer to freehold public forest. <p>6.14 OTHER TYPES OF EXISTING ACCESS Natural Resources Wales manages four National Nature Reserves in Monmouthshire: 2. Cym Clydach, in the Clydach Gorge - should be Cwm 3. Lady Park Wood NNR, near Monmouth - although in Wales, this site is managed under agreement by Natural England</p> <p>3. Summary</p> <p>We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Monmouthshire draft ROWIP. This is a good forward-thinking plan which is progressive in its actions, mindful of future considerations in Wales. We consider that it provides a sound basis for future management and collaborative working to deliver benefits to the public and contribute to multiple national policies PROW and Networks</p> <p>Thank you for this; a very interesting document with a lot of useful information. Some thoughts and a proposal as much as comments.</p> <p>The main thing that strikes me is that apart from a few references to Monmouthshire CC owned or managed scheduled monuments, the historic environment is almost entirely overlooked. This misses a wide range of potential opportunities for the collaborative working and joint funding applications set out throughout the document and which I'd like to make a few suggestions about below.</p> <p>To correct the figures presented in 6.1.4 the current number of scheduled monuments in Monmouthshire is 201 (including several dozen rather than 8 castles). Cadw has 15 monuments in its guardianship (the National Trust own Skenfrith but it is in our guardianship), most of which are located rural or semi-rural areas and all lie either on or within a few hundred metres of public rights of way.</p>

Some of these, including the Roman City of Caerwent and Grosmont Castle form part of substantial landholdings with multiple routes crossing them; all of them form outdoor visitor destinations or amenities.

6.1.4 also points out that rights of way offer the only public access to or views of many scheduled monuments, listed buildings or registered landscapes and many more undesignated assets, which provide potential points of interest if not destinations along routes. This has already been successfully explored on the Offa's Dyke National Trail, which provides finger post interpretation for historic sites it that it crosses or passes by i.e. Grace Dieu Abbey.

The outlined capital works funding deficit for rights of way of £38,000 against a £4 million backlog is alarming but as set out in 15.5 there is great potential for this to be addressed by identifying partner organisations with common objectives and through collaborative projects, ranging from more ambitious landscape partnership schemes noted in Section 10.4 (Blaenafon World Heritage Site Forgotten Landscapes, Living levels, Wye Valley) or on a very local scale outlined in 13.5 on RoWIP Community involvement.

There have been a number of other successful cross-disciplinary landscape partnership schemes such as Heather and Hillforts (Denbs CC, Clwydian Range AONB) and Blue Remembered Hills (Shropshire CC / AONB) which have obtained very substantial funding for a combination of land management, ambitious natural and historic environment conservation, interpretation, public access and engagement and another is underway on the Carneddau (Cadw, Gwynedd CC, Snowdonia National Park). Cadw, Historic England and the Offa's Dyke Association are presently exploring this on a larger scale as part of the implementation of the Offa's Dyke Conservation Management Plan. A key element of this is the conservation and holistic management of the Dyke itself, the National Trail and the numerous other rights of way that run along or across it as a single entity or outdoor amenity, which will hopefully be able to draw on a much wider range of funding sources (health, wellbeing, tourism, heritage) than they would normally do alone by addressing a broader range of interests. In addition to numerous individual projects I have been overseeing a joint-funded, rolling programme of conservation, access (inc right of way enhancement) and interpretation works to publically or privately owned monuments and listed buildings in collaboration with the Clwydian Range AONB, Denbighshire CC and Wrexham CBC under a regional heritage forum. This has worked very well because of the dense clustering of proactive officers (heritage, countryside, rights of way, AONB rangers) spread across several authorities, the relatively dense regional

ID	Name	Response
10	CADW continued	<p>population and therefore public interest /range of local groups and funding sources.</p> <p>To this end, there is great potential to implement either individual smaller, local schemes or a more ambitious conservation and access project in Monmouthshire. As the Plan rightly points out there is a strong interest and volunteer base in the county, a range of potential partner organisations, a range of specialist in house officers and a great density of historic assets accessible or potentially linked by newly created or enhanced trails formed from the existing right of way network. We've already tentatively discussed Sudbrook Chapel and Camp and there are potentially dozens of publically accessible assets located on rights of way.</p> <p>In short it would be very useful to see a reference or a policy in the Plan to projects combining the conservation of historic assets with access schemes and right of way enhancement and I would very much like to set some time aside to explore making this happen in a more systematic manner, perhaps using some lists and maps as a starting point. As discussed previously we are happy to lead on, act as partners or potentially offer grant aid, match funding and other assistance in developing schemes and identifying sources of funding. Perhaps we could have a chat about this at the Offa's Dyke meeting tomorrow / today or by phone?</p>
11	Usk Trail Access Group UTAG	<p>The Draft ROWIP appears to be a policy document with overarching objectives. Similar to your UDP, there are general statements of improving the network and increasing sustainable transport options.</p> <p>What we need to see is the specific projects that have been requested through consultation and access forums that MCC aims to deliver within a timely manner.</p> <p>What distance of paths will be upgraded to allow for disabled access? What distance of new safe cycle tracks or bridleways will be created?</p>

ID	Name	Response
11	Usk Trail Access Group UTAG Continued	<p>This should be set out clearly within the plan (or linked action plan) and MCC should be measured against it.</p> <p>As you know, UTAG has been trying to create a new cycle track for years and has also requested that the riverside path is improved between Usk town bridge and the cricket ground to allow access for all. UTAG would also like to see other improved cycle links from Usk to local communities (eg. along A472 verge East out of Usk to link to lanes to Gwernesney / Llandenny) Are these requests logged in the ROWIP? If not, where are the local requests recorded?</p> <p>I have attached copies of letters previously sent to MCC in 2008 and 2018 – both request that this local need is recorded in your plans. Our objective to create a cycle track entirely meets the objectives set out in your ROWIP and UDP.</p> <p>Could MCC confirm whether the requests are being considered and provide a list of projects to be delivered over the next 5 years? Thanks for your reply.</p> <p>The idea for a target was that it would give the public an idea of what MCC aims to achieve within set timescales. I appreciate that there are variables but how else can we measure MCCs commitments to improving access. I suppose one way would be to state what length of new upgraded ‘access for all’ routes (i.e. barrier free and surfaced) were provided during each of the last 5 years? What length of new cycle tracks were created by MCC? Our concern with statements of intent is that of course we all sign up to improving access, but this needs to be backed up by resources from MCC to enable this to happen or it is meaningless!</p>
12	Byways & Bridleways Trust	Due to the number of notices received, we will not necessarily respond.

ID	Name	Response
13	Caldicot U3A	<p>In response to the consultation you cannot fault the plan as something that everybody involved in the countryside, and walking can aspire to. However, it is essential that whilst looking to the next 10 years that our present problems are not overlooked. As a walking group we consider it essential that paths are kept clear and good signage is in place. If not, then we risk losing some of the walkers we have and not being able to attract more. The people we need to reach out to are those who see only problems when they think of a walk in the countryside. The way to combat this is to produce easy to follow leaflets. Also regular conducted walks are needed particularly in towns and villages. We want to see more stiles replaced with gates and good response to reporting of blocked paths which should include some indication of when work will be carried out.</p> <p>We look forward to continuing work with the countryside team. We all have the same objective - to get more people walking.</p>
14	MOD	<p>Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to look over your ROWIP. I have one very small comment on what is a very positive document. I note in you Glossary you have MOD – Ministry of Defence. I’ve had a good look through and can’t actually find the MOD anywhere in the document other than in the glossary. Am I missing it or can this come out?</p>
15	Abergavenny Town Council	<p>Specific Comments Section 2 Vision for Monmouthshire – suggested different wording as currently it doesn’t make sense. “To maintain and improve local rights of way and countryside sites in order to promote and encourage greater use and contribute to the physical and mental well-being of all of Monmouthshire’s residents and visitors” Or “To maintain and improve local rights of way and countryside sites in order to promote and encourage their use and enjoyment for their the physical and mental well-being of all of Monmouthshire’s residents and visitors”</p>

ID	Name	Response
15	Abergavenny Town Council continued	<p>Pages 5, 22 & 42 (and probably other pages) reference to Wellbeing and Future Generations Act – this should be Wellbeing of Future Generations Act</p> <p>Page 41 - There is reference to publishing a set of 4x4 trails. This is not supported by Abergavenny Town Council as it would be contrary to a number of other policies around climate change and active travel as well as being a potentially damaging activity in the countryside.</p> <p>There is inconsistency to how the abbreviation ROWIP is presented throughout the document alternating between ROWIP and RoWIP.</p> <p>General Comments</p> <p>Page 22 – There is reference to Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2015 and the duty of public authorities. Community & Town Councils come within the definition of public authorities so have a duty to maintain and enhance biodiversity so this is probably worth acknowledging somewhere in the document. Community & Town Councils, under this duty, will be required to prepare a plan setting out how they will meet this duty.</p> <p>Throughout the document there are very few references to community & town councils (C&TCs), yet they feature heavily in the action table. We would like to see a specific section on the role that community & town councils can play in delivering ROWIP and how the relationship will C&TCs will be strengthened. The four larger Town Councils – Abergavenny, Chepstow, Caldicot and Monmouth – have a duty under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act to contribute to the Monmouthshire PSB wellbeing objectives and to prepare an annual report setting out what has been achieved. All Community & Town Councils can raise a precept and there may be merit in requesting a contribution from all (or some) to enable maintenance and improvement works to be carried out. The current 2019 budget of £38,000 is considered woefully inadequate and there needs to be a clear way forward on the action to be taken to increase this.</p>

ID	Name	Response
		<p data-bbox="808 271 2067 414">One Voice Wales, the umbrella organisation for community & town councils arranges a quarterly meeting for community & town councils in Newport and Monmouthshire. It may be worth considering a presentation to this meeting to have further discussions with the sector on their role. The contact is Shan Bowden, shan.bowden@onevoicewales.org.uk, Tel 01269 595400.</p> <p data-bbox="808 454 2067 598">Community & Town Councils already deliver or are involved in many activities which directly impact on the use and enjoyment of the rights of way network such as litter picking, dog waste bin emptying, financial support to local volunteer groups, promotion of tourism, arranging walks. It is suggested that this should be acknowledged.</p> <p data-bbox="808 630 2067 742">The action table is comprehensive, however some indication of the priority attached to the actions and associated cost would be useful. As it stands, without categorisation into short, medium and long-term actions the proposals are more aspirational than deliverable.</p>
16	Usk Town Council	Please could you send a JPEG of the poster and I will circulate on our Facebook page.
17	Goytre Fawr	This item was discussed by Community Councillors at their meeting on Tuesday night. The general viewpoint was that the members agreed with the majority of the proposals in the plan and as a result a resolution was passed that the Community Council should support it.
18	Llanbadoc CC	<p data-bbox="808 1109 2067 1189">Thank you Ruth, this has been promoted on the Llanbadoc Community Council Facebook Page and Website.</p> <p data-bbox="808 1228 2067 1334">On another matter, can I ask if MCC are pursuing the complaints of barbed wire along the footpath at Yew Tree Farm, Glascoed along the Reservoir Trail. The Community Council have written to the landowners, however as yet have not received a response.</p>

ID	Name	Response
19	Trellech United CC	<p>Thank you for circulating this to the community council. At its meeting this week TUCC welcomed the report, but regretted that MCC simply does not have the resources to enforce rights of way, or to improve them as laid out in your plan.</p> <p>They are aware of the important contribution made by voluntary groups such as the North Footpaths Group, which has received a grant this year from TUCC towards equipment. They are considering actively encouraging the formation of more such groups in the other villages included within TUCC.</p>
20	Chepstow U3A	<p>Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the latest version of the Draft ROWIP.</p> <p>We are a charitable organisation based at Chepstow. We have nearly 950 members who are mainly within the age range from 60 to 90 years and are retired or work part time. We work to provide facilities for leisure time and recreational activities for our members with the objective of improving the conditions of life in the interests of their social welfare. Our activities include a strong representation of walking groups.</p> <p>We offer a wide range of opportunities to suit all abilities from "Easy Walkers" to "Strollers", "Wanderers", "Striders" and "Hill Walkers" with most groups meeting weekly throughout the year.</p> <p>Easy Walkers walk for up to 2 miles on good terrain with no stiles, whilst Hill Walkers will tackle anything that the Brecon Beacons has to offer and will usually walk ten miles or more. We also have a cycling group who make use of both on and off-road opportunities.</p> <p>Monmouthshire is very much our home territory and our members make full use of the opportunities that its countryside and access network offer. We have more than 200 members in our walking groups who between them walk over 20,000 miles in a typical year, much of it on Monmouthshire's public rights of way network and access land. Our leaders make use of all parts of the network in devising their routes. We have a keen interest in the ROWIP and can see that it will have a significant bearing on our members and activities. Our ability to continue to expand the delivery of our charitable objectives and the health, wellbeing and enjoyment of our members depends on the review having a positive and constructive outcome which secures a sustainable future for all the rights of way network and designated Access Land</p>

ID	Name	Response
	Chepstow U3A continued	<p data-bbox="801 368 1021 387">within our county.</p> <p data-bbox="801 440 2051 501">We have responded to both of the earlier consultation opportunities and are pleased to see the latest version of the ROWIP has taken on board many of our comments, including in the following areas:</p> <ul data-bbox="869 512 2051 983" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="869 512 2051 572">• The inclusion of "Access Land" and in particular the importance of land owned and managed by Natural Resources Wales. <li data-bbox="869 584 2051 644">• Commitments to give greater prominence and visibility to Unclassified County Roads and to improve their maintenance and use. <li data-bbox="869 655 2051 716">• A commitment to improving access for the less able and continuation of the "Least Restrictive Access" Policy. <li data-bbox="869 727 2051 868">• Recognition of the importance of a well-maintained PROW network. In our view this must comprise a network that is fully fit for purpose - i.e. it is not obstructed, appropriately signed with a user friendly surface and with furniture that is well- maintained, safe to use and in good order. <li data-bbox="869 879 2051 983">• Confirmation that: "a dedicated and properly resourced countryside access service with a strong public service ethic and commitment to the network and its use for residents and visitors is essential". <p data-bbox="837 1038 2074 1351">We were disappointed that our comment on the value and importance of public transport in our questionnaire response was not included in the draft ROWIP. We said "We would like to see a strong connection between countryside access and public transport. Our groups do use public transport wherever possible - principally scheduled bus services. In the last year we have made use of the 43, 65, 69, x3 and x74. We would do this more often if there was better information available about the opportunities afforded by making use of bus services and if we could be sure that buses would reliably run on time and with sufficient capacity to accommodate a walking group of 10-20 people with their rucksacks. As both public transport and the PROW network lie within the responsibilities of MCC we would like to see a strong joining up of these two MCC services to promote the opportunities to gain</p>

access to the countryside by bus service. We would like to see the final ROWIP take a much more positive view of the role of public transport, and in particular scheduled bus services, in gaining access to PROW, Countryside Sites and the wider countryside. We believe there are many positive opportunities ready to be grasped and that increased use by walkers and tourists can help build passenger use for the benefit of all.

We have the following additional comments on the content of the draft ROWIP: Whilst we understand that limited resources require choices to be made, we are concerned that the plan will lead to the creation of a two-tier PROW network with certain routes maintained to an adequate standard and others left to decline. The plan should set out positive ideas as to how the maintenance of the whole network can be improved – e.g. through partnerships with communities. As we use all parts of the network, one of our principal concerns is about routes becoming impassable or unsafe because of encroaching vegetation or problems with recreational furniture or surfaces. As an example of one of recent walks we were faced with crossing a field into woodland. The stile was rotten and severely unstable and the ground around the stile had been paddled into deep liquid mud by livestock. Our challenge was the slow process of seeing twenty walkers through these obstacles while holding back a herd of inquisitive bullocks. We suggest that the plan could be much stronger in encouraging landowners to fulfil their responsibilities for public rights of way, particularly in relation for maintaining and replacing stiles and gates - many of which are in disrepair.

We particularly value the opportunity to use Natural Resources Wales "Access Land" especially for our less able members. We would like to see a clear statement from NRW about their commitment to delivering and maintaining high quality, all ability countryside access provision on their land.

Monmouthshire has significant number of walking groups who represent an important "user group" for public rights of way within the County. These groups make very regular use of the network and hold a great deal of knowledge about its condition and use. We would like to see the ROWIP explore how walking groups might become more involved in supporting the network and the work of MCC. We are concerned about the proposed legislative change to "allow horse riders and cyclists to use footpaths", given the acknowledged current condition of the network. If this is a proposal that is realistically expected to become reality then it would seem to us to have such a major impact that the implications should be set out more fully in the current ROWIP. We hope these additional comments on the Draft ROWIP are helpful.

We look forward to seeing the final version and please do let us know if we can be of further

assistance.

ID	Name	Response
21	Resident	<p>When styles are upgraded or replaced they should where possible be replaced with dog friendly ones. Recognised routes such as the Usk circular routes should be regularly maintained to ensure access for all groups of walkers</p>
22	Resident	<p>A thorough and comprehensive document. I wish the funding for the Countryside and RoW Services would be increased to ensure their vital work is continued, and those maintenance statistics really could improve. Our health, mental and physical, depends upon it!</p> <p>I echo those stakeholders requests to have access improved for dogs/dog-walkers. Having to lift heavy, mucky dogs over fences and styles is definitely a barrier to enjoyment.</p> <p>I would also like to put in an appeal as a local stakeholder / Llandogo resident / ex-B&B owner / trail-runner and dog-walker, an appeal for manpower and funding to ensure that Llandogo is linked up, off-road, with our neighbouring communities. I'm not sure this is the right document to raise this, but I hope it can be included in a relevant section so that Llandogo is not overlooked in the upcoming review.</p> <p>We're an 800+ strong community but, for most of us, walking/running/cycling/riding any distance around Llandogo is difficult and reaching our nearby neighbouring communities without using the car is impossible. This is so frustrating when the solution is simple and stares us in the face every day - access along the riverbank to the north and south of the village so we can safely reach neighbouring communities without having to use the car. The key barriers are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="808 1114 2072 1337">• Llandogo is overlooked as a visitor destination. Current, clear examples are, the Sustrans Peregrine route extension aims to reach Redbrook (one village away from Llandogo to the north). The Chepstow to Tintern Shared Path aims to reach Tintern (one village away to the South). Llandogo = the void in the middle. It's also clear that Llandogo is the poor relation when it comes to marketing from MCC and partners. Sadly, Llandogo has lost 6 of its 7 B&B's (including mine) in the past few years, and it is possible that this has something to do with it.

ID
22 continued

Name

Response

- Lack of 'doorstep opportunities' in Llandogo due to:
 1. The geography. The steep hillsides around and above Llandogo provide a network of footpaths and a couple of promoted routes, but the steep, muddy and often overgrown nature of these paths means they are the domain of the fit and able, and adventurous. Most people would find these routes a struggle and they're certainly not a realistic, regular means of reaching our neighbouring communities. 80% of visitors to my B&B asked for advice on walking to Tintern or Brockweir, but when the current walking route from Llandogo was described to them, 99% of those elected to drive instead as it was deemed too far or too strenuous.
 2. The A466. The main A road in the lower Wye Valley is too dangerous to walk, run or ride along, and most locals avoid cycling on it. Vehicle speeds of over 70mph have been recorded, even within the village 30mph zone! This road acts as a barrier to recreational activity and significantly isolates Llandogo. One reason car travel is the norm is because it's the safest way to get about. The village is working hard, campaigning to slow speeds down in the village, but there's nothing it can do regarding the rest of the A466.
 3. The fishery estates. Bigsweir and Coedithel estates curtail the riverside footpath to both the north and south of the village with No Trespassing signs. General public enjoyment of the river is prohibited by the signs saying 'no boating or bathing' and even 'no picnicking'. Bigsweir Estate prohibits access to a local historic landmark, Llandogo Holt, and access to the iconic Bigsweir Bridge is directed via the busy A road, despite there being a highly visible, safe off-road track leading past the Holt and straight to the bridge. We're all aware of the benefits of the fishing industry to the economy and environment, but the restrictions imposed upon the local community, and through all 12 months of the year, are deemed very unfair and are very unpopular. In addition, the story goes, the previous owner of Bigsweir House no longer wanted to see the 'local riff' bathing in the river opposite his house and so denied public access along the old railway track. And so the healthy, social swimming activities enjoyed by local residents for many years were brought swiftly to an end. So it's no surprise that all these restrictions are seen as

ID
22 continued

Name

Response

archaic and to benefit only the elite and privileged few versus 800+ local residents. This barrier is the one that could be changed and could change everything. Brokering discussions with residents and the estates needs to happen and, at the very least, seasonal access along the riverbank should be granted.

It's a pretty unforgiving situation we have here - the numerous negative signs from the estates and the perception of what would happen if we did trespass(!), the A road that's a very real danger to pedestrians, cyclists and riders, the very strenuous hillside footpaths. It's easy to understand why many feel isolated. A safe off-road riverside trail linking Llandogo with Brockweir and Tintern to the south and Whitebrook and Redbrook to the north, would improve the quality of life for Llandogo's residents and visitors exponentially and undoubtedly lead to greater business opportunity. Also the option of a Wye footbridge providing villagers and visitors with access to the Gloucestershire side and Brockweir village has serious merit.

I do hope this can be included in the relevant plans and strategies going forward

22 continued

Hi Ruth,

Many thanks for your prompt response, that's kind. I have been wondering how it would be best to get across the isolation issue that we face here in Llandogo, because a long impassioned email can be off-putting for many. I've been out this morning with my dogs and mapped and photographed my walk along the riverbank on Relive and have included the link below – hopefully you're able to open it.

Check out Nickie's Llandogo River Walk on Relive! <https://www.relive.cc/view/v26M82zJ4EO>

ID	Name	Response
		<p>The very short video clip aims to demonstrate firstly, how lovely the river walk is, but secondly, how hemmed-in we are by the Coedithel and Bigsweir Estates' signage and restrictions – all year, every year. Downstream we are stopped at a barbed-wire gate and can only gaze along the lovely old railway line, knowing that it follows the river to our neighbouring communities at Brockweir and Tintern. You can tell how unpopular this restriction is by the amount of times the no access sign at this gate has been vandalised and smeared in mud (hence the new additional CCTV signs). At the upstream extent we are directed away from the river, over two styles to walk along a busy A-road, away from a perfect-looking trail that would provide safe, off-road access to two local historic landmarks (Llandogo Holt and Bigsweir Bridge). Again, a very unpopular restriction, especially when the river there was a very popular local wild-swimming spot. We'd love to understand <i>why</i> we are restricted in this way and through the full 12 months of the year.</p> <p>Hopefully you can add this video clip to my initial comments?</p>
23	Head of Mon Life Finance	I read the rowip and just wanted to say that it was a pleasure to read – job really well done!
24	Member of Public	<p>I have been interested to read the above report – it brings back memories of my time on the LAF! Congratulations on a comprehensive well-written document. The following personal observations may be of some help.</p> <p>While recognising that the plan is primarily about PRowS, the main means of access to the enclosed countryside, the document rightly includes references to the relevance of unclassified roads, countryside sites, open access land and accessible woodland as other means of enjoying the countryside.</p> <p>Thus section 6.10 deals with on- and off-road cycling with a link to visitmonmouthshire.com (which does not give details of all the NCN routes in the county, shown indistinctly in 6.10). Reference is made to</p>

ID
24 continued

Name

Response

Active Travel but it is surprising that there is no reference to the main result of the Active Travel Act – the Existing Route and Integrated Network Maps at <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/the-active-travel-act/>. I realise that these maps are primarily about moving around urban areas, but the routes often give access to suitable countryside roads. The plan makes several references to routes to schools (eg Action 7.8); most will be in urban areas, as are some PRowS. I also realise that the Integrated Network Maps are very aspirational and need some explanation; page 22 does not do this either.

The second bullet point in 6.15 refers to the inhibiting effect of the reduced maintenance of minor roads and verges. As I am sure you know, the management of verges and hedges is increasingly wildlife friendly, a tendency that most walkers surely welcome, even if a few brambles must be avoided. Speeding traffic is a much greater inhibition.

References in 8.1 to average walking distances prompt me to ask whether these are off-road. Gwehelog has a dense PRow network, but most walkers choose to be on the lanes and byways.

With reference to section 16, there is a long-standing ambition among Abergavenny groups to enhance the Gavenny valley in terms of water quality, green infrastructure, wildlife resources and public access. Unfortunately, a change of NRW staffing meant that a partnership project failed to get under way, but I believe there are signs of life again.

In section 17 Actions 4.3 and 6.3 are welcome. Some cycling interests favour a 40mph limit on all rural roads as well as 20mph in urban areas, but there would be enforcement problems and the character of rural roads is so variable that a 40mph limit would be often be irrelevantly excessive. Speed reduction measures may be more effective but costly, suitable only where danger is greatest. There may be lessons from elsewhere. A particular problem arises at Gwehelog where a local stable exercises horses on quite busy lanes. It would be interesting to learn from their experience and views.

ID	Name	Response
25	Member of Public	<p data-bbox="797 276 1727 295">Please find below my views and comments in respect of the above mentioned.</p> <p data-bbox="797 312 2018 371">Firstly, I wish to say that the Plan is well written, comprehensive, inclusive and commend you for it. It has a strong vision and clearly sets out the aims and objectives for the next ten years.</p> <p data-bbox="797 421 2063 624">Your Plan states that there are issues with funding and lack of resources and targets have to be prioritised. The ROWs form an important outlet to me and some of my friends for allowing us to access the countryside. On most Tuesdays since I retired 12 years ago and before then as often as possible, time permitting, I have personally logged up several thousand miles of walking within a general radius of some 25 miles of home. The average mileage for Tuesday would cover a circular route of about 7 miles and each time aims to cover a different area.</p> <p data-bbox="797 679 2074 1137">I think it is fair to say that I have a great deal of experience of the ROWs within Monmouthshire alone and can boast that I have walked, where possible, probably within every square mile of the area. Clearly, there are problems with the state of the ROWS which consultations and the Draft Plan has identified. I have reported quite a number of these to the Countryside Section over the years and could spend a lot of my time reporting many more. However, on one point, I would be interested to know how you assess and qualify the statistics. In my experience, I feel that the figure of '89% of stiles and 96% of gates are in good condition' is somewhat high! While I have found that there are decent styles and gates in several places, if my friends and I did not carry pruning shears and walking poles, it would be impossible to complete a route. It is no exaggeration to say that hardly a week goes by without spending time clearing vegetation and obstructions and encountering unsafe/dangerous stiles, gates and sometimes bridges. It has taken us up to 25 minutes to clear a stile and there are times we have to plan a diversion from our intended path owing to a problem encountered. Also, frequently we have had to climb over five bar gates owing to them being locked, tied very securely or jammed.</p> <p data-bbox="797 1187 2033 1356">On another general point, when we meet farmers and landowners they welcome our presence and are quite friendly. However, we have met the odd person who clearly does not like us on their land, despite the ROW status. A Mr X of "xxxxxxx", Llantrisant Fawr, has been the most aggressive and threatening in manner in this respect (I have not yet had a reply to my correspondence dated 9 August 2016 & 27 October 2016, despite enforcement action being promised by staff).</p>

ID Name

Response

25 continued

The Plan mentions the need for updating the O.S mapping. I cannot agree more. While I am aware that the OS revises maps for larger areas of development in open countryside the mapping is generally well out of date. For example, many field boundaries such as hedges and walls have disappeared. Farm buildings have changed by demolition or new build. Wooded areas have perhaps been cleared and new areas of woodland have been planted. Rivers and drainage patterns have changed. Such incidents present a challenge to navigation and keeping to the legal routes. In particular, it would be helpful if direction arrows are implemented through farm yards where the alteration and construction of new buildings often obstruct the ROW.

There are also the clear arguments for economic, social and health benefits. ROWs I consider a valuable asset and can address such benefits. I find it is regrettable that resources allocated do not match these benefits accordingly. I think that there must be an emphasis on achieving greater financial support as I believe that the amount of benefit from a ROW system in better shape, which the Plan sets out to achieve, can improve the outputs of economic, social and health benefits for all concerned. Tourism and businesses have a lot to gain if more people have the opportunity to use a well maintained ROW network, which is the overall objective of the Plan. It would be nice if the private sector could chip in with some funding contribution/sponsorship!) I and my friends would certainly benefit from a more accessible and important resource when out in the countryside.

Otherwise my overall views are in line with those found on pages 25 and 26 of the Plan, which have been highlighted by 'Stakeholders' following the consultations carried out.

ID	Name	Response
26	Usk Civic Society	<p data-bbox="808 320 2072 432">I read the article on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan in the Usk and Raglan Diary with interest. I have also looked at a hard copy of the plan at the library. You invite comments, so I would like to tell you about a neglected footpath that has come to my attention.</p> <p data-bbox="808 480 2072 584">Earlier this year Usk Civic Society hosted an excellent talk about the Cefn Ila estate which is now run by the Woodland Trust. As a result of that talk I became aware of a footpath which runs directly from the town to this recreational area.</p> <p data-bbox="808 632 2072 847">The usual approach to Cefn Ila from Usk is by car, driving down to Llanbadoc church and turning right up the lane to the Cefn Ila's car park. The lane has no footpath. However, there is a direct footpath from the Usk Bridge (opposite the old Britannia Pub) to Cefn Ila. It is little used because the footpath sign is indistinct and labelled Coed Duon. I have walked this path which is shown on the Definite Map. Starting in Usk one walks 362/49/1, then 362/48/1, and 362/50/1. The path divides here. 362/51/1 leads to an entrance to Cefn Ila near the walled garden, and 362/52/3 leads to the car park.</p> <p data-bbox="808 879 2072 951">The footpath is poorly waymarked along the route and I reported the problem in February using a facility on the MCC definitive map. I can see that the Ramblers also reported this problem in 1915.</p> <p data-bbox="808 999 2072 1102">It occurs to me that the Woodland Trust and other interested bodies such as the local Ramblers, Usk Civic Society and possibly Usk U3A walking group, may be interested in working with Monmouthshire County Council to improve the signage and waymarks.</p> <p data-bbox="808 1150 2072 1254">'Coed Duon' would not be recognised by many people living in Usk town, but Cefn Ila is a popular, increasingly well-known destination, and the access routes deserve to be promoted. The direct footpath is also shorter, and traffic free.</p>

ID	Name	Response
26	Usk Civic Society Continued	<p>Our speaker at the Civic Society talk had spoken to people who worked at Cefn Ila when it was a Maternity hospital. They had told him there was a short cut to the hospital that expectant mothers from Usk used. If it was this footpath they were certainly very fit considering their condition because the initial part of the path rises steeply in a zig zag from the town!</p> <p>I hope you will bear these observations in mind when considering how best to improve the rights of way in the Usk area.</p>
27	Member of Public	<p>My elderly partially blind neighbour has informed me about this plan. I am a little sad that it hasn't been publicised well enough amongst the rural community.</p> <p>Please could you send two copies, one with large print for my neighbour who is keen to read the plan as well as one for us. We walk the pathways around here which are becoming harder to access partly due to poor maintenance and deliberate obstruction due to electric fencing and barbed wire. I have had several injuries due to these obstructions but still walk my dog regularly.</p> <p>I live in Llanybi and would appreciate identifying these issues with yourselves. I appreciate that some people neglect to take due care and consideration of farmers and their property in the area but generally, a minority of people spoil it for the majority. When I was at school in West Wales our Head teacher taught us the Country Code by taking us for a walk in the country every Friday afternoon, I value the countryside and every aspect of it but I do feel sad that we have a few hostile farmers who are aggressive and unreasonable in our vicinity.</p> <p>I value your recognition of the need to encourage a greater development of public access in such a beautiful area as this.</p>

ID	Name	Response
28	Llanhennock CC	<p>I am writing in response to the email I received containing the policy from the council's website: https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/rights-of-way-improvement-plan-rowip/ .</p> <p>In our community council meeting this month this draft policy from MCC was discussed and the concerns they expressed were as follows:</p> <p>The councillors expressed concerns that the wording of the policy suggested that existing footpaths might be extended to use of cyclists and/or horses and the right of way could extend across the fields rather than being restricted to designated paths; this may have a detrimental effect on the farmers land, such as rutting and damage to crops and livestock.</p> <p>In addition, the costs incurred for such changes to stiles etc. could be huge and for what purpose? How many extra people would it actually attract in this area? The existing footpaths in our ward are not even well maintained, so why doesn't MCC concentrate on updating these instead of creating new paths?</p> <p>Hopefully these concerns will be considered and I look forward to hearing a response on the matter in due course.</p>
29	Friends of the 65 Bus	<p>We think that, somehow, the submission that we prepared for the initial consultation did not get through to you, so apologies for that.</p> <p>However, we have now seen the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan and we think its content still very much applies, so it is attached as part of our response to the draft document.</p>

ID
29 continued

Name

Response

We have the following additional comments on what we have seen in the draft ROWIP:

1. We were surprised and depressed to find only two references to public transport in the Draft ROWIP and associated documents and that they were both negative, when there is in fact a great opportunity to link public transport to access to the countryside and PROW network:

a. In Chapter 5 of the ROWIP it states: “There is a reliance on car ownership due to the rural nature of the county. Public transport remains a problem with travel times on public transport considerably longer in parts of Monmouthshire, than in other parts of Wales. Poor public transport was highlighted as an issue by the Countryside Access and Disability Assessment Report.”

b. The Countryside Access and Disability Statement report in section 5E “Issues with Transport” talks about problems with the Grass Routes “on demand” bus service and then goes on to say: “More generally, on the transport topic, we raised the possibility of setting up a public transport forum to evaluate the scope for some integration of local bus routes to offer improved access to walking opportunities. However, it was concluded that success would be unlikely given that previous attempts in this direction fell down on operational cost grounds, the impact of waning public support generally and frequent changes of bus operators.”

2. We think that both of these statements take an erroneous and unnecessarily negative view of the role of public transport in the ROWIP – and particularly of scheduled bus services. Looking forward, there are a number of reasons why we believe that public transport should feature strongly and positively in the ROWIP, not least that Monmouthshire County Council has declared a “Climate Emergency” and acceptance of continuing and increasing private car usage cannot continue through the ten-year life of the ROWIP.

ID Name

29 continued

Response

3. Monmouthshire is actually reasonably well-provided with scheduled bus services, compared to many other rural counties. There are significant gaps in provision in some parts of the county (egg north of Monmouth) where other means of public transport are needed, but where scheduled bus services are available:

a. Scheduled bus routes connect well with the public rights of way network, access land, promoted routes and link them to surrounding towns and villages.

b. These connections provide very many options for both circular and linear walks using the PROW network and Access Land. c. Scheduled bus services are currently very poorly promoted, have poor availability of information about timetables and “things to do” and can lack reliability and consistency. Resolving these issues provides significant opportunities for walking and general access to the countryside using public transport.

c. There is significant underused capacity – empty seats that need filling - in existing bus services that, with appropriate promotion and availability of information, can be utilised to support the aims and objectives of the ROWIP in getting people out into the countryside for all the benefits that brings. The resulting increase in passenger numbers makes the bus services more sustainable – a real “win-win”.

d. Buses integrate well with “Active Travel” plans. There is significant scope for journeys that incorporate both use of the bus and walking on the PROW network as a mode of “Active Travel”.

e. Buses are generally accessible, fares are modest and they are free to use for bus pass holders.

f Bus services are available to residents, visitors and tourists.

4. As a Case Study, we have set below out our own experience from the 65 Bus Route operated by Monmouthshire County Council. The 65 Bus service was proposed for closure in summer 2018, but was retained following a public campaign. We subsequently formed “Friends of the 65 Bus” (F65B) which works in partnership with MCC to bring together passengers, communities, our bus drivers, local businesses and all who have an interest in the bus service to work together to increase not only usage, but also impact. Using the sub-paragraph letters from Para 3 above, our experience is:

Along its 14-mile route, with between four and seven journeys each way on Monday to Saturday, the 65 Bus connects 2 towns (Monmouth and Chepstow) and six significant villages (Penallt, The Narth, Trellech, Llanishen, Devauden and Itton).

Its route touches:

- • 51 Public Footpaths
- 7 Public Bridleways, 7 Restricted Byways
- • 4 Unclassified County Roads
- • 2 Permissive Paths
- • 2 NRW Waymarked Trails
- • 9 areas of “Access Land”
- Offa’s Dyke Path and Wye Valley Walk at Chepstow and Monmouth

This represents significant, readily available, potential for connecting people with the countryside and PROW network. b. Using the above connections there are many available options for linear and circular walking routes, particularly starting and finishing in the towns and villages. F65B have recognised a significant opportunity to devise and promote routes based on the 65 Bus and have this in our programme.

Since becoming involved with the 65 Bus we have developed more comprehensive and accessible information about bus times, fares and things to do. The route has its own website, Facebook group and Twitter account for sharing information and ideas. Recently, we have developed timetables and information specific to accommodation providers to encourage their guests to use the Bus, including for walks. This is proving very successful. We have worked hard with MCC to improve reliability and consistency of the service. This has resulted in a new bus with improved capacity, full accessibility and two dedicated drivers who know their route and are able to pass on information to passengers. We are working with “Walkers are Welcome” to designate the 65 as a “Walkers are Welcome Bus”, and this only

awaits a response from MCC on the details of a launch event. d. We have discovered that bus services in Monmouthshire are generally not promoted and this means that both residents and visitors are unaware of the many opportunities that they offer. This results in buses running with empty seats, not because of “waning public support” but rather a lack of knowledge, information and advocacy. As a vivid example, “Visit Monmouthshire” does not even have a section for public transport on its website. Its listing for public transport for Tintern Old Railway Station states “Chepstow Station 5 miles” when the 69 Bus stops outside the entrance!

For the 65 Bus we have developed a network of “Village Champions” who are able to advocate and gain support for the Bus within their communities. Walking Groups will make use of buses if they can be confident about capacity and reliability. The 65 and 69 services are regularly used by Chepstow U3A Walking Groups for linear walks. Chepstow Walking Festival promotes use of public transport to access its walks and in the 2019 Festival we ran a specific “65 Bus Walk” which brought walkers from Chepstow to The Narth for a three-hour circular walk using PROW and Access Land. “Wye Valley Women” also make use of the Bus to include linear walks in their “Walk and Talk” programme which is aimed at tackling isolation and improving mental and physical health through social walking. e. For rural residents there is an important “Active Travel” opportunity which combines using the Bus with walking on the PROW network. In our example, residents regularly take the Bus from The Narth to Trellech to visit “the Lion” or “Trellech Teas” and then walk back home over the fields and through the NRW woodlands. The alternative would be a round trip by car. We know of other people who walk into Monmouth from Penallt and get the Bus back. There are lots of “Bus out and walk back” options to develop and explore and which can bring a wide range of personal, social and economic benefits. f. Promoted in a positive way, there are many good reasons that can be demonstrated for using the Bus g. We have found excellent examples of people using the 65 Bus to gain access to the countryside. We have two elderly gentlemen who regularly travel from Cwmbran by bus to pick up the 65 at Chepstow. They get off at one of the villages, walk for a couple of hours, and then get the bus back, perhaps fitting in a stop at one of the local pubs. We recently had a couple from America who had decided to take a 16 night “car-free” holiday in the Wye Valley, staying in a self-catering cottage in Whitebrook. They were keen walkers, but also wanted to travel further afield. I have attached the feedback they sent after their visit. The combination of using the scheduled bus service and walking gave them a very successful

ID Name
29 continued

Response

holiday and is, we think, a model that could easily be replicated – again demonstrating an approach to “Active Travel” that brings real benefits to our communities.

We hope that our comments and Case Study from the 65 Bus, showing what is possible, will persuade you to include a much more positive approach to public transport, and particularly scheduled bus services, in the final version of the ROWIP. A collaborative approach, together with improved promotion and information on bus services can ensure that they play a significant and very positive role in meeting the ROWIP’s vision.

We are happy to discuss this further with you if that would be helpful.

30 Member of Public

Having looked at your document I would personally make some comments.

I do not consider Open Access through farmland should be encouraged for consideration of the farmer and animals/crops. However, I do think that footpaths through farms should be well maintained and there should be a robust policy from Mon CC to ensure this. Cropping over footpaths does cause problems which should be rectified asap as the problem persists though out the growing season causing frustration and damage to crops.

Recently on 14th September 2019 I completed walking around Wales. In about 1042 miles I have never felt so unsafe as the last few miles in Flintshire. This is because it is Cycle Route 5. It is a well maintained cycle path which was busy on the Saturday we completed the whole walk. Cyclists and walkers do not cohabit well especially if cyclists move at speed. It was difficult to chat to fellow walkers without constantly looking over one’s shoulder to ensure not being in collision. It spoilt my walk on that day especially. Cyclists should not be allowed on dual use paths unless they have a way of warning

ID
30 continued

Name

Response

walkers of their presence. A bell would be useful but anything that works would be fine.

Some white roads are not appropriate for 4x4s and motor bikes. They should be restricted as the route is being destroyed. The Rocky Road used by Coleridge in late 1700s is in a terrible state leading down to Tintern from Porth Casseg direction. A robust policy is needed in Mon CC to protect ancient routes.

Countryside and Highways need to work together and not pass the buck. Promoted Route 24 has a white road behind Dingle Cottage between Ninewells and Cleddon. It is a lovely ancient route but prone to flooding as part of Cleddon Bog really. Together a solution could be found if 2 departments worked together for the benefit of those who could enjoy it. This route is also used by motorbikes which does not help the state of the surface.

Reporting footpath problems is not easy and I cannot afford the time to go through the computer route which seems to have problems recorded but not kept up-to-date when resolved. It is easy for me now as I have found a way which works having informed a reliable person in Countryside who then passes the problem onto the person who needs to deal with it.

Many thanks for all the work done in the countryside on our behalf. Monmouthshire is a beautiful county for many to enjoy in different ways but it is also precious and needs to be protected. Although these comments are personal I am sure many who love to be in Monmouthshire exploring and especially walking will relate to the difficulties and observations mentioned. Please acknowledge receipt of this letter.

ID	Name	Response
31	Member of Public	<p data-bbox="808 215 2047 279">Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your draft ROWIP. I should perhaps declare that I used to audit improvement plans when I worked for the WAO.</p> <p data-bbox="808 327 1122 359">My feedback is as follows:</p> <p data-bbox="808 367 2047 614">The Improvement Plan is very long and detailed which makes it very difficult for the public to read, understand and therefore engage with the Councils improvement plans. I personally found it quite difficult to understand what the Council is actually aiming to achieve and the timescales for achieving it. It is more of an internal document for professionals. I suggest to address this a summary (no more than 2 sides of A4) is produced to aid public engagement and understanding. Perhaps in a table which lists against each key theme what the key improvement outcomes are, the current position, key actions (these need to be measurable activities), measures of success and timescales.</p> <p data-bbox="808 662 2047 805">Under each key theme, there should be a short paragraph that articulates clearly what success will look like to a member of the public. E.g. xx more circular routes, 90% accurate definitive map i.e. an 8% improvement. I could not understand this in the current draft plan. There should also be clear /measurable actions outlining how this will be achieved.</p> <p data-bbox="808 853 2047 1204">Many of the actions are vague and things that the council should be doing anyway so should not be classified as improvement actions. They should be specific, focused on improvement and measurable e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="891 925 2047 989">• 7.0 Target priority areas..... what are these, what does target mean, should you do this any way? <li data-bbox="891 997 1816 1029">• 7.1 Prioritises maintenance....., this is strategic rather than an action. <li data-bbox="891 1037 1957 1069">• 7.2 Support volunteers how can this be measured and what does it achieve? <li data-bbox="891 1077 1957 1141">• 13.3 Seek to improve circular route. What does seek mean, how many additional routes, how many improvements and by when? <li data-bbox="891 1149 2047 1204">• 13.5 Encourage NRW how do you measure the effect of encouraging, what is the outcome of this?

ID Name

Response

31 Continued

I feel that the plan should be more honest about the current situation. For example, how accurate is the definitive map. From my experience it is quite inaccurate but this was not clear in the improvement plan. Many of the bridleways marked on the current definitive map are completely non-existent today so any reference to miles /KM of bridleways is incorrect. The plan should identify honestly identify many are accessible, how many are not, how many ROW are reported as incorrectly classified. Actions and improvements measures should be identified against this information. I notified the Council of a number of inaccessible bridleways over two years ago. There has been no action taken, the map has not been revised and I do not know what the Council plans to do about this. This is the sort of information that would be helpful to me and enable me to evaluate the success in delivering the improvement plan.

32

Llanvapley Walking Group

Introduction Llanvapley Walking Group is a community-based venture that was set up in early 2019 to encourage people to utilise and help maintain the Public Rights of Way (PROW) in our local area. We have been very successful in attracting local residents and some visitors to join our monthly walks (twice a month in the summer). Our walks have attracted between 10 and 20 people over the past ten months, with numbers continuing to grow.

Based on discussion, mainly while walking of course, as convenor of the group, I have prepared the following response to Monmouthshire's Countryside Access Draft Improvement Plan 2019-2029 Public Consultation.

I have not commented on all sections of the plan but have instead concentrated on areas I consider to be strengths and weaknesses. This is a personal response for which I bear sole responsibility, although I have shared it amongst the walking group and have adjusted it in the light of comments made by group members.

ID Name

Response

32 Continued

Section 3. About this Plan I very much welcome the plan's stated aim, which is to provide a "bold and visionary approach to providing and managing access to Monmouthshire's countryside for the benefit of all Monmouthshire's residents and visitors."¹

After recognising some of the benefits of ensuring access to public rights of way, the plan then goes on to say "The assessments show the countryside access service must prioritise where it focuses resources and standards to accurately reflect the areas of most demand...The plan sets out some bold ambitions, not necessarily constrained by the resources available, or by our legal duties, but focussed on meeting the needs of customers."² As convenor of a community walking group, I do feel that the use of the word "customers" in this sentence is incorrect, as we are not, by any normal use of the word, customers. However, I am very pleased to read the vision is based on bold ambitions and not constrained by resources.

The report goes on to say that "reduction in funding levels are likely to continue for some years to come, and will create new challenges for service delivery."³ This sentence is unfortunate, firstly because it appears to suggest that funding the ambition of the plan should not be taken for granted, and secondly because it is by no means certain it will be the case that there will be further reductions in funding levels. The 2019 election, which was on-going at the time of writing, may well change the situation as all the main parties are committed to increasing public funds. Given that, I feel that the plan needs to be both ambitious and have an expectation of delivery. After all, a bold, ambitious plan needs to be

Monmouthshire's Countryside Access Draft Improvement Plan 2019-2029 Public Consultation, p.4 2

ID
32 continued

Name

Response

p.5 argued for and I feel the case for improvement of the PROW network is a very important one, with many potential benefits (as your plan points out) for the local communities, the health of local people and the local economy.

Section 5. What is Monmouthshire Like? This section refers to several factors of importance, including Monmouthshire's "breath taking natural scenery", an ageing population, the growing importance of tourism to the local economy and includes comments about the strong sense of community and volunteering base. I agree with all of this.

Llanvapley walking group is community-led and has members from, and walking routes encompassing, the villages of Llanvapley/Llanfable, Llantilio Crossenny/Llandeilo Gresynni and Llanddewi Rhydderch. We walk once or twice a month both as a social activity and to ensure that there is access to the footpath network in our area. At least two of our group are 'pathcare volunteers' with Monmouthshire County Council's Countryside Service, while some of our members are also actively involved in CPRW and Gwent Wildlife Trust amongst other voluntary organisations. Our walks are advertised in the local parish magazine monthly and through an email group. We have sometimes had younger walkers with us, and are open to all, but the local demographic tends towards the over 50s. The health and social benefits for everyone has seen the numbers joining our walks grow monthly, even in the difficult weather conditions experienced this autumn.

Section 7. Reflection on the delivery of the ROWIP 2007-2017 I feel the bullet points in this section are all well made. In our local area, we see some improvement to the footpath network, largely through the efforts of volunteers, but there is a long, long way to go, unfortunately.

Recently, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW) has obtained funds to provide gates instead of stiles in ten locations around Llanvapley. This is, at the time of writing, still in the hands of MCC who are consulting with landowners about the scheme, which we hope to see in place by summer 2020. I would like to see such partnership schemes publicised and encouraged across the county as a way to help achieve the goals set out in the proposal.

ID Name

Response

32 continued

Section 8. Extent to which rights of way and other access provision meets present and potential future use. I can identify with all of the bullet points in section 8.2 regarding barriers which currently exist and therefore, need to be overcome.

Walking together as a group, removes some of the barriers we feel, but clearly even when doing so, overgrown vegetation and unclear routes still prevail. In the area around our villages, these problems are manifest. In some cases, the barriers to accessing public rights of way are insurmountable.

Although, in my experience, some local landowners are co-operative with the aims of our group and can be seen as potential partners in achieving the plan, others are not. Unfortunately, walkers in our area do occasionally have bad experiences. Members of our group have reported being shouted at and even threatened by landowners, sometimes when trying to follow a badly waymarked path and wanting advice on the correct route, sometimes even when clearly on a right of way as shown using a GPS device. Such experiences are serious barriers to people feeling confident to use the PROW network locally.

More often the footpaths are simply not kept accessible, due to crops being grown across a PROW without any attempt to provide an access route for walkers. We have also found (and reported) stiles which have been removed, signs damaged by design or accident and totally inaccessible footpaths. I have included a 1:25000 OS map extract that shows some of the issues regarding accessibility (in most cases rendering the PROW actually unusable) reported by members of our group from first-hand experience.

Clearly anyone who visits Monmouthshire with an OS map, and following the marked public rights of way, should expect to be able to find those rights of way accessible. When they do not, they will no doubt conclude that Monmouthshire is not welcome to visitors, a very damaging conclusion for unlocking the potential of our area.

10.3 What is the condition of the network? As a local walking group, we clearly do not have experience of accessing the whole PROW network in Monmouthshire and we appreciate its extensive nature. I am aware of the restrictions in public funding and availability of resources that have taken place over a number of years. I also very much welcome, as I have said, the bold vision encompassed by the draft report and believe it is necessary to overcome the visible recent lack of investment in the PROW network.

Having said that, I do feel this section grossly underestimates the number of outstanding issues in the PROW network, particularly in our local area. Issues regarding access to the PROW network locally have been reported over many years but complainants have seen little or no progress made to resolve them. Seeing such a lack of progress, the attitude of many is, not surprisingly, "it's not worth reporting it. Nothing is ever done." This clearly leads to under-reporting of the issues faced trying to access the PROW network.

In particular, the figure of 89% of stiles in good condition would appear to be a serious overestimate. On our walks the number of stiles in good condition and accessible is estimated to be around 10-20%. Members of our group have attempted to cut back seasonal bramble and nettle growth in order to maintain the stiles that are useable, but I have numerous pictures showing evidence of stiles that are dangerous or simply unusable (and can provide them should this be of use to the consultation).

Conclusion In conclusion, I very much welcome the report and the consultation. I feel that the report makes good and sensible statements regarding the importance of the PROW network. I welcome the bold ambition within the report and hope that Monmouthshire pursues this ambition with much needed investment to enable the vision we share with regard to countryside access to be achieved.

Years of underinvestment are very apparent. Despite the excellent work of volunteers and the staff at Monmouthshire Countryside Service, walking in our area of Monmouthshire is problematic and barriers are too common. Anyone visiting the area with the intention of walking and experiencing the countryside would often find it difficult or impossible to do so if they venture off the well-maintained Offa's Dyke or Three Castle Walk footpaths.

ID
32 continued

Name

Response

I feel it would be good to get more feedback on how problems accessing public rights of way which are reported are being resolved.

I also feel that more needs to be done to bring local landowners on board with the plan and insist that all landowners know of, and adhere to, the access requirements of the Countryside Act.6

I have, while reporting problems with PROW on the definitive map via the website, briefly related some of the conversations I have had with landowners. To give a couple of examples, one landowner I met and asked for directions (showing him the map I had) claimed that 'the council had closed that path in the 70's and there hasn't been a way through there for years' (there wasn't – leaving me stranded in a field with no obvious way to complete my walk) and another landowner who, after at first denying any knowledge of a public right of way, then agreed he knew of one but said 'oh no, you won't get through there. You can't get through the crops for one thing and then there's no way through the hedge.'" These comments were reported via the council's website.

Sadly, there seems to be too little enforcement of PROW in our local area. It may be that there are real problems enforcing the rights of way under the Countryside Act, but those who report blockages to them often receive no feedback about what those problems are. I think this needs to be addressed by the Countryside Service and be a part of the plan going forward.

I have often felt a sense of despair that so much of the countryside is inaccessible to us as local residents, let alone the many visitors such a beautiful part of the UK could attract. I hope the bold vision encompassed within the draft report can address many of these issues and I look forward to working with Monmouthshire County Council to help improve access to the countryside locally and county-wide.

ID	Name	Response
33	Learning Manager MonLife	<p>Thanks for this – I’ve only had a chance for a brief read but wondered if we could have a conversation at some point about Dementia and opportunities in that area. It may not need ‘spelling out’ in the ROWIP but I would be interested to see how we can increase opportunities and therefore benefits for people living with this condition and their carers as part of a wider strategy.</p> <p>As a horse rider I’m really pleased to see the work going on around improved access for riders - as a vulnerable group any improvement to safety is welcome and I’m glad to see the BHS is involved and that my membership fee is being spent wisely!!</p>
34	The Narth & District Footpath Group	<p>Thank you for the opportunity to provide further comment on the Draft ROWIP. We understand that the consultation has been extended to 16th December. As you know our Group works in support of Monmouthshire County Council on the management and maintenance of almost 50km of public rights of way in and around our community.</p> <p>Thank you for taking account of many of our earlier comments in preparing the latest version of the draft ROWIP. We are pleased they were of help. After reading through the latest draft, we have the following additional comments, which we hope you will be able to consider in preparing the next version: a) We support the "Vision" but, just as a thought, wondered if the first element of it is a bit passive. Are we perhaps looking to "increase the level of recognition", "see it more widely recognised"...?</p> <p>B) We also support the choice of themes. However, we think there needs to be an additional bullet point under "Well Maintained Network" to cover the improvement and maintenance of the rest of the network not covered by the first bullet point, and to fit with the commitment in Point 2 of the Vision. As stated at present it looks like this part of the network could be abandoned.</p> <p>C) We are pleased to see the inclusion of "Access Land". In our area we have a particular interest in land owned and managed by Natural Resources Wales. We would like to see NRW becoming a true partner in the plan through the inclusion of a clear statement from them about their commitment to delivering and maintaining high quality, all-ability countryside access provision on their land. We have in mind particular issues such as:</p>

ID
34 continued

Name

Response

- High quality provision and maintenance of recreation facilities such as car parks, toilets, picnic sites and waymarked walks.
- Minimising closures of PROW for operational reasons and always providing safe alternative diversions.
- Providing easy access around entrance barriers and ensuring forest road and track surfaces are suitable for use for pedestrians, cyclists and wheel chair users.

We welcome the commitments to give greater prominence and visibility to Unclassified County Roads and improve their maintenance, role and use. However, many of these routes are deteriorating very badly due to a combination of motorcycle and vehicle access and erosion by surface runoff. The plan should have a clearer vision as to how this might be tackled and an appropriately resourced joining up of the management of UCR's and PROW network under the responsibility of the Countryside Team. We would also like to see UCR's included on the on-line "Definitive Map".

We support the continuation of the "Least Restrictive Access Policy".

We are pleased to see the recognition of the importance of a well-maintained PROW network. In our view this must comprise a network that is fully fit for purpose – i.e. unobstructed, appropriately signed, with a user-friendly surface and with furniture that is well-maintained, safe to use and in good order. Our particular concerns are:

- Improved road signage – fingerposts with destination names to support Active Travel
- Dealing with the fact that much of the current recreational furniture (especially waymarks, stiles and fingerposts) is reaching the end of its life and in poor condition.

We support the recognition of the role that volunteers can play in supporting the PROW network and commitment to develop this further. In our view, this covers both management and maintenance and encouraging use of the network for Active Travel and to improve health and wellbeing. We are happy to help in any way we can.

ID
34 continued

Name

Response

We are pleased to see the inclusion of “a dedicated and properly resourced countryside access service with a strong public ethic and commitment to the network and its use by residents and visitors” as essential. Any expansion of volunteering will require a further investment in MCC staff and IT systems to support and coordinate the efforts of volunteers – the two go together.

We are disappointed to see that the draft ROWIP and associated documents take such a negative view of the value and importance of public transport in gaining access to the PROW network, countryside sites and wider countryside. We would like to see the final ROWIP take a much more positive view of the role of public transport and particularly scheduled bus services. We are fortunate in having the 65 Bus pass through our village and have been working successfully to encourage both local residents and visitors to the area to make use of it as part of both Active Travel and leisure walking.

It is of course disappointing that the amount of MCC resources expected to be available during the life of the ROWIP is likely to only be sufficient to scratch the surface of the works required to see real improvements across the network. Whilst we understand that limited resources requires choices to be made, we are concerned that the Plan will lead to a creation of a two-tier PROW network with certain routes maintained to an adequate standard and others left to decline. We see a number of opportunities:

- “Conventional” funding bids to public bodies, charitable trusts, Lottery etc.
- Partnerships with communities, their representative bodies and other interest groups to become involved in managing and maintaining the network
- A high profile initiative to encourage farming enterprises and other landowners to better understand and fulfil their responsibilities towards public rights of way.

This approach has the potential to bring a significant additional resource to tasks such as repairing and replacing stiles and gates and dealing with vegetation. We believe that landowners already have this responsibility, but it is most often not exercised even though it is expected if they are in receipt of agricultural subsidies.

ID Name
34 continued

Response

Given the current condition of the Footpath network, the proposed legislative change “to allow horse riders and cyclists to use footpaths” is a very significant concern to us. This proposal would have such a major impact on the ROWIP that we would like to see a more detailed exploration of its implications and impacts included in the Plan.

We think that section 15.4 needs to contain a stronger commitment to bringing together the relevant organisations to develop a clear strategy to tackle the problem of illegal use of routes and Access Land, particularly by motorcycles and quads.

We think it would be beneficial to have explicit reference to a commitment to interdepartmental working within MCC to deliver the ROWIP – Countryside/Highways/Passenger Transport/Tourism.

We strongly support the intention to produce an Annual Delivery Plan to review progress.

We hope these additional comments on the draft ROWIP are helpful. We look forward to seeing the final version and please do let us know if we can be of any further assistance.