

Lower Wye Tracks & Trails

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

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Who is involved in the strategy?

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

2. What area will the Strategy cover?

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

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

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



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

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

<https://naturalresources.wales/types-of-protected-areas-of-land-and-sea>
<https://landscapesforlife.org.uk>

4. Why is this voluntary consultation being carried out?

A few reasons:

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

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

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

The Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB is home to an extensive recreational access network, which includes Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and forestry tracks, unpaved Unclassified County Roads (UCRs), permissive paths and the popular regional trail, the Wye Valley Walk. The strategy will look at current use in order to create a vision for the future.

It will not review claims around historic routes, cover the river (navigation) nor the paved road network.

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

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

- Public Access for diverse purposes** - These tracks and trails provide unrivalled public access in and around the AONB. The network provides vital off-main road links between farms, hamlets, villages, towns and other sites and features. It provides exceptional recreation opportunities for a diversity of users, including both local residents and visitors and it is used by a wide range of people including walkers, runners, cyclists, horse riders and motor vehicles.
- A unique landscape** - The Wye Valley AONB is one of the most naturally beautiful and historically rich landscapes in the UK. Both the network and the individual routes themselves are irreplaceable heritage features, including their miles of drystone walls, nearby heritage structures, lines of veteran trees and hedges that form wildlife corridors for rare, protected and declining species.
- A threatened environment** - The future of a number of these historic routes is threatened by high rates of erosion, to a point where:
 - They are funnelling high levels of water runoff from the surrounding ground, leading to further erosion and increasing localised flood risk, with associated socio-economic costs. A threat that is being exacerbated by climate change and the increase in the number and ferocity of storms.
 - They are sometimes difficult to use safely by those who have the legal right to use them.
 - The cost of desired repairs to routes is a challenge, with reduced local authority budgets and many different calls being made on those resources.
 - Treasured landscape and heritage features alongside routes may be lost or pose a risk to health, safety and future access, if not restored or protected.

² <https://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/the-wye-valley-villages-project>

³ <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/green-infrastructure-improvements>

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

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

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

8. Who is helping us with the consultation?

An Invitation to Tender was developed by the Wye Valley AONB, working with Herefordshire Council Procurement team, for the development of the Integrated Recreation Access Strategy for the Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley AONB. As a result of that tender process, Tomorrow's Tourism⁴ have been appointed. The Tomorrow's Tourism team, supported by XV Insight⁵ bring experience of tourism, recreation and effective consultation.

9. What happens next?

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

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

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

⁴ <https://tomorrowstourism.com>

⁵ <https://xvinsight.com>