

# Monmouthshire

## Local Access Forum

### AGENDA ITEM: 5

**SUBJECT: Countryside Access Update**

**MEETING: MONMOUTHSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM**

**DATE: 09 November 2023**

#### 1. PURPOSE:

1.1 To update the Forum on Countryside Access projects.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATION:

2.1 For Information and monitoring of the Countryside Access Improvement Plan.

#### 3. BACKGROUND:

3.1 **Records Management** – The team have been busy in the past month moving records to a new Sharepoint drive. This has included the installation of a new server for CAMS and much work to link the records and ensure our mapping still works. There is over 30 years of records held digitally which have had to be moved and also the traditional paper folders of records have also had to be scanned and integrated into the new Sharepoint folders. There may well be some disruption in next few weeks to ensure the systems all work properly and staff are trained to access the information.

3.2 **Registers-** Section 53B of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Public Rights of Way (Registers) (Wales) Regulations 2006 requires authorities to keep a [register of applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders](#), which can be found on the authority's website.

3.3 There is no requirement in Wales for a register of Section 31 Declarations or Legal Orders. However, the current register for DMMO's is hard to find and extremely difficult to update. Information on legal orders is also important. Therefore, we have been working on new registers, which will fulfil the requirements in the CROW Act 2000 should it be fully enacted in Wales and to ensure that these records are more easily accessible to all. These will link to our CAMS system and be available from our public mapping site. There will be three new registers, section 31, DMMOs and Legal Orders. A fourth is also in development for Temporary Closures. Currently we are working on what the public interface will look like and ensuring all the records behind the scenes are linked appropriately, so when the registers go live, they can be viewed directly from our online mapping platform.

# Monmouthshire

## Local Access Forum

- 3.4 **Access Improvement Grant** - This a three-year grant relating to the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025. The funding for 2023/24 was £80,775. The grant is reduced by 50% should an authority not have a Rights of way Improvement Plan in place or a Local Access Forum.
- 3.5 The projects that are underway support physical improvements to existing routes, improvements to information and signage, improvements to access points to green space, improve access to water related recreation and increase under-represented groups access to the outdoors.
- 3.6 **Black Rock Picnic Site** – This project improves access from the car park into the site, enabling better access for the disabled and fishermen. It involves surfacing of 20m of path, segregation of the new pathway from the car park and replacing the old wooden kissing gate with an accessible k barrier. Currently we are waiting for bollards to arrive. It is expected that the whole project will be completed by end November (or early December) dependant on the weather. A video has partially been made to record before, after and during the works.
- 3.7 **Community Links** – A questionnaire was produced and sent to the volunteers to see what training requirements they might have, or what would enable them or others to become more actively engaged. Links have been made with the Regional Landscape and Countryside Green Skills Co-ordinator (employed under the Gwent Green Grid Partnership) in order to maximise training courses moving forward and to look at re-connecting to GP Referral scheme.
- 3.8 The following has been achieved since April 2023: -
- 3 bridges and H frames, stakes, bridge decking, finger post blades ordered.
  - 5 training events held for 19 volunteers.
  - 31 practical maintenance days, resolving 87 issues. 81 volunteers installed 26 waymark post, waymarkers, 2158m clearance, vegetation removed from things like stiles 71, surveying, 15 fingerposts, 12 gates. Fixed 16 steps, 10 stiles and 2 bridges.
  - 1254 (more yet to be counted) Volunteer hours
- 3.9 A new “3 villages route” has been identified and surveyed in Llanvapley area and a programme of works has been identified that will need to be carried out prior to promoting the walk.

# Monmouthshire

## Local Access Forum

- 3.10 Two videos showing accessibility of the sites have been created with the Access Improvement Grant funding and will be promoted and available to view on our website shortly. In addition, there will be a project page for the grant which will have information on the project and other projects being delivered. This will also include a video of the Community Links Officer, Tom Arnold, introducing himself and opportunities for volunteering and another one about how to use our on-line mapping.
- 3.11 Materials that were identified for maintenance improvements by volunteers have been ordered including stakes, bridge decking, fingerpost blades and three bridges with H frames. Some of these materials have been installed by volunteers in the practical maintenance days.
- 3.12 Pre-April 2022 there were 5 groups contributing to maintenance, involving 19 people. There are now 10 active groups (93 people) involved with maintenance. Grosmont and Pontypool Ramblers existed as groups although weren't working directly with us on paths and now have regular days doing a range of jobs both with Tom Arnold and self-supervised on their own. Chepstow WAW have revived their path work subgroup with new volunteers and have their first training session end of November. New groups this year are
- Langybi Community groups (4 smaller village groups with separate leaders)
  - Llanishen village group.
  - Tintern Village Group is looking to start in spring.
- 3.13 To help expand the Community Links project to other communities an SLA agreement was agreed with Ramblers Cymru. The project was re-named Paths to Communities. They are working in Monmouth, Usk and Magor & Undy
- 3.14 53 organisations and individuals were contacted to appraise initial interest in the project. These consisted of local council members, and key stakeholders within the access and environmental community within Monmouthshire. The project officer has engaged with local communities through qualitative data capture via questionnaires, with the aim of better understanding of local issues and barriers to access in the community.
- 3.15 Consultations have been held with local stakeholders including the Living Levels and SEWRIG's regarding input and closer working to promote the

# Monmouthshire

## Local Access Forum

project as well as engage with volunteers on educational and geological points of interest in the area. Three Community Consultations took place, 1 for each community with the final one also used as a launch event taking place at Magor and Undy Community Hub. These involved engaging with more community members through [questionnaires](#) to ensure they have enough data to analyse and guide the delivery stage of the project.

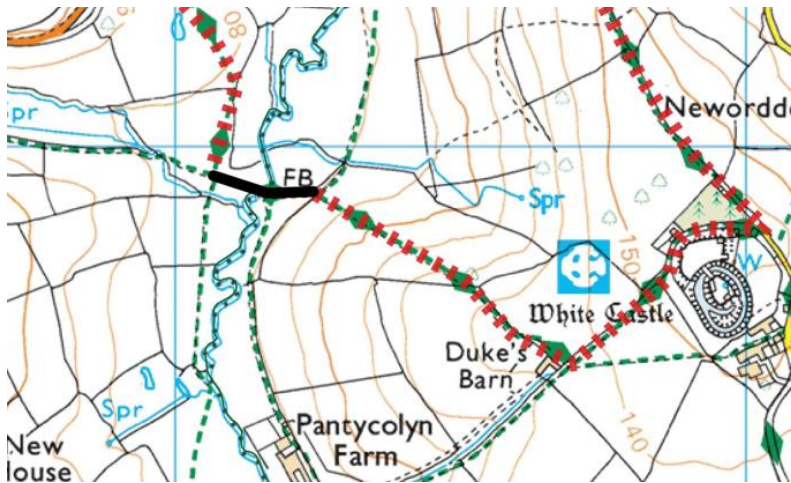
- 3.16 Pollution monitoring equipment has been acquired to allow volunteers to engage with citizen science as way to create interest in walking in the local area and facilitate further walking activities. This data will inform future debate around environmental sustainability and can be used by a variety of different stakeholders in the community.
- 3.17 22km of footpaths has already been surveyed in the three communities. Potential new family friendly walking routes have been identified in Monmouth and Usk. 8 walks are to be promoted through Living Levels and section 106 funding. The project officer for this has shared her findings of improvements required so that we can use the volunteers to help with physical improvements required and to ensure the routes are kept sustainable with long term care.
- 3.18 The Regional Health and Well-being Officer has also been approached re training for health walk leaders and making links to the local surgeries.
- 3.19 Contact with the University of Surrey has been established to support their trip to South Wales to educate students on the value of Access, issues around engagement and their participation in project activities secured for the duration of their trip in April. Students will assist in pollution monitoring and data analysis as well as assist with footpath maintenance and training events.
- 3.20 Currently we are drafting a programme of events for each community which will be published widely. All consultations and publicity have been delivered in both English and Welsh. They have been shared and delivered across social media platforms and press by both the Ramblers Cymru and MonLife. Initial analysis shows we are reaching a greater audience than before and there is wide interest in the project. There were 1800 + views of the latest press release. Our SLA has also been shared with other authorities, one of which is starting a similar project.
- 3.21 **Bridges** – There are over 1360 bridges on the public rights of way network (18% sleeper bridges and 41% other bridges). 500 bridges are being surveyed to ascertain risk. Things such as timber products, stone and increase in fuel prices for contractors means on average an increase across

# Monmouthshire

## Local Access Forum

the board closer to 25% in costs for bridges and other structures. 22 communities and towns within Monmouthshire are affected by outstanding bridge issues. Mitchel Troy, Llangattock Vibon Avel, Llantillio Crossenny, Devauden and Grosmont are the worst affected. There are 56 missing bridges, and 31 bridges are currently closed by order, or other means. An asset management plan is currently being drafted and a presentation will be given to the next LAF regarding this issue.

### 3.22 **Offa's Dyke** –In March 2023 the Treadam bridge (Pant y Colyn Farm



359/239/1) was removed due to dangerous piers. The removal enabled examination and reports on what consents and design would be required to replace the bridge safely. A competitive grant

from Natural Resources Wales has enabled the banks and works required to be assessed by an engineer. We are now waiting for the works to be approved and consents to be granted by NRW. Once this has been received a new bridge will be purchased ready for installation next year. A diversion is in place and well signed.

### 3.23 **Countryside Code Promotion** - We are working with Alison Roberts, Specialist Advisor Responsible Recreation for NRW on the Countryside Code who has a new strategy and action plan for Wales. MonLife is in a unique place to share the new code across its sites, buildings and services reaching children youth and other targeted audiences. NRW have branding guidelines and have a variety of media which we can share to the public, such as [responsible walking with dogs](#) and [preparing ahead](#).

- There is a [New Countryside Code website](#) –this includes information about code champions who promote and share the code more widely.
- [Shaun the Sheep Countryside Code Campaign](#): was launched at the end May. This is being led by NE with input and support from NRW. The campaign is aimed at raising awareness with children, young people and families. Teaching resources are also being developed.

# Monmouthshire

## Local Access Forum

- 3.24 This is something which the next Forum may want to consider as this opportunity develops.
- 3.25 **Legislative Update** - The Sustainable Farming Scheme and Agricultural Wales Bill was introduced to the Senedd in September. The next consultation stage is expected to take place towards the end of this year. Following this the final scheme details are expected to be published in 2024 and then for Farmers to be able to join the scheme in 2025. In terms of priority for public access, public access proposals are listed in the 10 Sustainable Land Management outcomes – enhanced access and engagement is one of the things that it wanted to achieve and is explicitly listed on the Bill itself – the challenge is turning this into action.
- 3.26 **Access Reform update** – Monmouthshire are hosting a meeting with other Welsh mangers and Welsh Government to consider small changes in regulations, guidance or legislation that would reduce burdens for local landowners and local authorities such as removing the need to advertise orders in newspapers.
- 3.27 With regards to updating LAF Regulations the draft is expected in Spring 2024 and following final consultation will come into force late spring/summer 2024.

#### 4. **AUTHOR:**

Ruth Rourke  
Countryside Access Manager  
ruthrourke@monmouthshire.gov.uk