



# THE TRACKS & TRAILS OF THE LOWER WYE VALLEY

## INTEGRATED ACCESS STRATEGY



**Dyffryn Gwy**  
Tirwedd Cenedlaethol  
**Wye Valley**  
National Landscape



monmouthshire  
sir fynwy



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## Executive Summary

The Monmouthshire part of the Wye Valley is home to an extensive network of tracks and trails that allow wide-ranging access to one of Britain's finest lowland landscapes.

This recreation Strategy and Action Plan was commissioned by the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership. It sets out how these routes will be looked after, improved, enjoyed, enhanced for a wider audience and conserved for the longer term. It responds to Terms of Reference that set out to:

- better understand the benefits, pressures and issues relating to the network;
- provide a means for people to have their say on key issues and opportunities;
- strengthen working relationships between partners;
- design solutions to resolve current conflicts and help the network to thrive; and,
- provide a clear plan of action to address the key issues identified.

The methodology included extensive research on the nature and type of tracks and trails and the landscape in which they are placed; the extent and importance of the visitor economy; together with a widespread consultation with both public and professional audiences. These findings are reported in a detailed appendix to this document.

Our vision is for the Lower Wye Valley's Tracks & Trails to be a resilient, well-managed and welcoming place for all responsible users.

The Strategy identifies a range of key themes and actions which need to be delivered in close collaboration with a wide range of groups including residents, volunteers and visitors alongside professional stakeholders and other interested organisations. A high level of partnership is envisaged to support delivery.

The Welsh Government's current policies on well-being inclusion, landscape, heritage and tourism provide a highly relevant context within which this Strategy closely aligns and can be supported. Key objectives include encouraging much greater awareness of what the area has to offer as well as inspiring many different types of people to visit and supporting these audiences to do so responsibly. The Strategy also identifies the need for the development of specific management measures that can effectively respond to current concerns between different user groups and, in some cases, between specific user groups and residential communities.

This Strategy is to be endorsed by the Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and overseen by the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum (LAF). Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales, along with many others, will play an important role in helping take the recommendations forward.

We would like to thank all those who offered insight and participated in the development of this work. The core partners welcome the continued support and involvement of many interests to ensure that this framework can now make a real difference, improving the tracks and trails for the benefit of existing users and for those yet to come.

**Wye Valley National Landscape Team**  
**June 2024**

## About this Strategy

1. This Strategy and the related Action Plan sets out the way in which the Tracks & Trails of the Wye Valley National Landscape will be enjoyed, maintained and managed over the next six years to 2030. The work has been enabled by the Welsh Government's *Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places* fund.
2. The valley of the River Wye between Hereford and Chepstow is one of the most significant landscapes in lowland Britain. A rich combination of breath-taking views, impressive geology, historic legacies and diverse wildlife led to its designation as the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1971. It has recently been rebranded as a National Landscape.
3. The Lower Wye Valley covers 117 km<sup>2</sup> of the lower reaches of the River Wye, all of which is in Monmouthshire, Wales. This represents 36% of the total area of the National Landscape, the rest is in England which also makes it unique. The study area represents 13% of Monmouthshire and has a population of 16,394. Part of the area is within the Register of Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest in Wales (Cadw 1998).
4. The aim of this project was to produce a widely supported Integrated Strategy for the Tracks & Trails of the Lower Wye Valley. This has been facilitated by bringing together stakeholders through an inclusive consultation that prioritised recreation access issues and sought ideas and solutions to include in the Action Plan.
5. This Strategy has been supported and informed by an asset audit along with the consultation exercise. The former examined the Tracks & Trails as well as the assets that support their use, including accommodation, visitor attractions, pubs and restaurants, and festivals and events. The audit also assessed the policy framework and examined the type and origin of visitors. The consultation process took place from 8 November 2023 to 12 January 2024 with a total of 350 responses, many from individuals but also 50 from organisations with an interest in the subject matter.
6. This document first describes the policy context and the evidence base before setting out the key objectives to boost information and awareness; encourage greater participation and inclusion; provide robust management measures and deliver better data. The last section identifies the principal actions agreed, which are also contained in a more detailed Action Plan that should be read in association with the Strategy.

## The Policy Context

7. Alongside the Wye Valley's designation as a National Landscape (an area of outstanding natural beauty), a comprehensive set of Wales-based legislation has guided this work. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 both embed the principle of the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR) to maximise the contribution to well-being goals, emphasising long-term thinking, collaboration and integration. This overarching legislation sets the tone for this Strategy, supporting a holistic approach to the management of the place.
8. 8. The Welsh Government's Priorities for the country's designated landscapes published in 2018 <sup>1</sup> set out four goals:
  - *Valued Places* - reach out beyond traditional audiences and engage a more diverse cross section of Welsh society to feel they have a stake in these national landscapes.
  - *Resilient Environments* - action to halt the decline in biodiversity to ensure the value of nature is enhanced.
  - *Resilient Communities* - develop understanding of local economic resilience and opportunities, create employment and provide fit for purpose places and facilities for outdoor recreation.
  - *Resilient Ways of Working* - champion collaborative approaches to maximise the benefits and tackle the challenges faced in these landscapes.
9. 9. The strategy reflects these headings and also adheres to the principle of *Least Restrictive Access* which aims to facilitate public access for as many people as possible. This principle requires that all work undertaken to improve access and create recreational opportunities also meets the highest access standards, while also aiding wider conservation and land management objectives.
10. UK-wide legislation also affects the policy context. Of particular note is the Equality Act 2010 and the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW). The Equality Act brought together previous legislation to legally protect people from discrimination in employment and wider society. It protects individuals from unfair treatment in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. These are referred to as 'protected characteristics'. This impacts this Strategy, for example, where road improvements are planned, highway authorities need to consider the requirements of the Equality Act to make any improvements as accessible as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government (2018) Valued and Resilient: The Welsh Government's Priorities for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks available [here](#)

11. The CRoW Act grants the public greater access to the countryside including open access land and requires local authorities to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan every ten years. This strategy is aligned to Monmouthshire County Council's current Countryside Access (Rights of Way) Improvement Plan<sup>2</sup> and also to the related Public Rights of Way Biodiversity Action Plan.<sup>3</sup>
12. Broader reviews on nationally designated landscapes, namely National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) have also been undertaken in both Wales and England, with the Marsden and Glover Reviews (2015 and 2019 respectively) making a range of recommendations in relation to statutory purposes, protecting nationally important landscapes and making connections between protected landscapes of different types. The rebranding of AONBs to National Landscapes in 2023 was part of the response to these Reviews.
13. This strategy is also developed within the context of Monmouthshire County Council's Local Development Plan which has policies on promoting tourism as part of encouraging a sustainable economy and ensuring the environment is valued, particularly in relation to high quality landscapes:
  - *To protect, enhance and manage Monmouthshire's natural heritage, including the Wye Valley AONB, the County's other high quality and distinctive landscapes, protected sites, protected species and other biodiversity interests and the ecological connectivity between them, for their own sake, and to maximise benefits for the economy, tourism and social well-being.*
14. The Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership is dedicated to conserving and enhancing the nationally designated national landscape, guided by the statutory Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2021-2026. The National Landscape Partnership is led by a Joint Advisory Committee established under agreement by the Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council.
15. The current AONB Management Plan, prepared as a requirement of the CRoW Act, runs from 2021–2026. A summary of the Management Plan objectives relating to Recreation & Access and Sustainable Tourism are given below and form another important underpinning for this Strategy.

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<sup>2</sup> Monmouthshire County Council (2020) Countryside Access Improvement Plan 2020-2030 available at this [link](#)

<sup>3</sup> Monmouthshire County Council (2011) Monmouthshire Public Rights of Way Biodiversity Action Plan available at this [link](#)

## 16. Recreation & Access

- *Encourage and promote recreational pursuits and responsible access compatible with the AONB purposes, particularly linking sustainable transport and town and village facilities; (R1)*
- *Assist the resolving of conflicts, real and perceived, between recreation, conservation and local interests... in relation to the purposes of the AONB designation; (R2)*
- *Support appropriate levels of sustainable design, repair, signage and maintenance on public rights of way, recreational trails and sites; (R3)*
- *Assist in identifying gaps in access and recreational provision, including for under-represented and minority groups, and... support and promote access enhancements and improved access for all, where this does not conflict with the Special Qualities of the AONB and the SACs. (R4)*

## 17. Sustainable Tourism

- *Encourage and promote the AONB as a sustainable tourism destination; (S1)*
- *Promote the improvement of the visitor experience... and facilitate the opportunity for visitors to explore and discover other... less used locations; (S2)*
- *Ensure adequate provision of co-ordinated tourism data and visitor engagement... enhancing the Special Qualities of the AONB; (S3)*
- *Encourage the mitigation and/or reduction of the adverse impacts of existing tourism activity and attractions... (S4)*

# The Evidence Base

## *The Lower Wye Valley's Tracks & Trails*

18. This document uses 'Tracks & Trails' as a collective term for all the routes in the study area. There are a number of different types of routes including public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic); highways (unclassified county roads and unsealed roads) as well as other tracks that may have been agreed as permissive paths (such as the section of the Wye Valley Walk through Piercefield Woods) or be access land by virtue of public or benevolent 3rd Sector ownership.
19. The different types of routes, and the users that are permitted to enjoy them, are not always understood either by users or the general population. Routes on the ground can occasionally differ from the historical record, and signage depicting route type can be inaccurate, particularly if it is many years old.
20. The legal differences are important from a management perspective and also for users and residents to appreciate and follow as permitted activities differ on the different types of routes.
21. A map of the Tracks & Trails is shown at Annex I. Over half of the network in terms of length is defined as footpaths, with a further 13% suitable for cycling and riding as well as walking. Unclassified county roads, normally minor roads with a tarmac surface, make up 31% of the network with only 4% of the network being unsealed roads, or Green Lanes as they are often known. These lanes can be used by appropriately licenced motor vehicles.
22. Table 1 overleaf shows the Public Rights of Way network (PROW) in the study area with over 90% of the network in five Community Council areas.<sup>4</sup> Some 80% of the PROW is made up of footpaths, 9% are Bridleways and 10% Restricted Byways. Total length is 360 km.

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that there are many public rights of way in the other Community Council areas but they are not within the boundary of the National Landscape



<b>Table 1</b>				
<b>Public Rights of Way in the Lower Wye Valley - By Type and Community Council</b>				
<b>Community Council</b>	<b>Footpath Sections</b>	<b>Bridleway Sections</b>	<b>Restricted Byway</b>	<b>Byway open to all traffic</b>
Trellech United	285	49	35	1
Devauden	116	14	14	0
Wye Valley	100	15	18	1
Mitchel Troy	104	4	8	0
Monmouth	112	4	23	0
St. Arvans	59	1	5	0
Mathern	12	0	0	0
Shirenewton	4	0	1	0
Chepstow	1	0	0	0
	<b>793</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>2</b>

23. Some 190 miles of the PROW network is promoted but this also includes permissive paths / permissive bridleways. Table 2 below shows the Unclassified County Roads network with a similar proportion of routes across five main Community Councils, but with this route type St. Arvans switches places with Monmouth. Total length is 192 km. Unsealed Roads number just 15 with a total length of 21.1 km. All are concentrated in the five Community Councils with the most in Trellech United and other clusters in Wye Valley and St. Arvans.

<b>Table 2</b>				
<b>Unclassified County Roads &amp; Unsealed Roads</b>				
<b>Community Council</b>	<b>UCR # Sections</b>	<b>UCR Length (km)</b>	<b>Unsealed Roads # Sec.</b>	<b>Unsealed Roads (km)</b>
Trellech United	17	84.5	6	12.9
Devauden	12	24.7	2	0.7
Mitchel Troy	6	23.6	3	1.5
Wye Valley	6	16.5	3	2.8
St. Arvans	4	8.0	1	3.1
Monmouth	8	7.6	0	0.0
Mathern	1	4.8	0	0.0
Shirenewton	1	1.1	0	0.0
Chepstow	3	0.4	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>171.1</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21.1</b>

24. The Highways and Rights of Way network is an evolution of historic transport infrastructure. Many of the Tracks & Trails are bounded by drystone walls; some walls are in a derelict state, others, though visible, support extensive plant coverage. The Lower Wye Valley is an area with its own distinctive style of drystone walls. There are several extensive networks of drystone walls concentrated around Penallt, Whitebrook, The Narth and Catbrook and above Llandogo. Their physical nature, extent and history have not undergone detailed investigation and their existence is rarely noted in published accounts of drystone walls in Britain. The age of the walls ranges from a very few, perhaps being prehistoric, through to occasional medieval structures, probably linked to Tintern Abbey, and as infrastructure to the industrialisation of the lower Wye Valley, followed by more systematic enclosure walls of the 18th & 19th century.

### Visitor Economy Assets

25. The Lower Wye Valley has an important visitor economy that is generating income, supporting jobs, 2,700 FTE in total<sup>5</sup> and encouraging a local supply chain. An estimated 550 jobs in the area are created by the accommodation sector alone. Table 3 below shows the extent of the supply side within the project area (noting this excludes most of Monmouth and Chepstow towns); there are over 500 assets in total, i.e.:

- Up to 400 places to stay;
- 47 visitor attractions (including promoted routes, nature reserves, churches, parks and gardens);
- 24 food and beverage businesses;
- 24 annual events.

<b>Visitor Economy Assets in the Lower Wye Valley</b>								
<b>Community</b>	<b>Accommodation</b>		<b>Visitor Attractions</b>		<b>Restaurants, Café's, Pubs &amp; Clubs</b>		<b>Festivals &amp; Events</b>	
	<b>Nos.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Nos.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Nos.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Nos.</b>	<b>%</b>
Trellech United	160	39%	13	28%	8	33%	11	46%
Wye Valley	93	23%	13	28%	11	46%	11	46%
Mitchel Troy	61	15%	6	13%	1	4%	0	0%
Monmouth	46	11%	7	15%	0	0%	1	4%
St. Arvans	19	5%	5	11%	1	4%	0	0%
Devauden	16	4%	2	4%	0	0%	1	4%
Chepstow	9	2%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Shirenewton	2	0%	0	0%	3	13%	0	0%
Mathern	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total - (Project Area only)</b>	<b>407</b>		<b>47</b>		<b>24</b>		<b>24</b>	

<sup>5</sup> Derived from Global Tourism Solutions 'STEAM' model (2015) included in Monmouthshire Destination Management Plan 2017-20

26. A good understanding of the assets that visitors and residents enjoy provides important context for the Strategy. The vast majority of accommodation is non-serviced, with Airbnb properties making up 50% of the total. Some of these will open irregularly. There are just 16 B&Bs, inns and hotels making up the serviced offer which is relatively low when compared to similar destinations. However, it is important to note that there are numerous accommodation options nearby in the towns of Monmouth and Chepstow, just outside the project area.
27. As a broad overall estimate, at least 20% of spending in restaurants and cafés is likely to be related to visitor spending, but some cafés and pubs will be much more reliant on visitor income, subject to their location. The food and drink offer is well distributed between pubs and restaurants with some pubs with rooms helping to underpin the serviced accommodation offer. Restaurants and cafés in general are of high quality with 84% in the top quartile in terms of quality.<sup>6</sup>
28. Festivals and events are almost entirely concentrated in Trellech United and Wye Valley areas, though again significantly more events take place in Monmouth and Chepstow, just outside the project area. There are likely to be opportunities to develop an events programme based on the natural assets in the area, potentially complementing or in support of the Wye Valley River Festival.
29. As can be expected, experiences based around walking and nature are popular, although equally important is the area's heritage. The Wye Valley has a rich heritage that has been host to many activities that have been instrumental in laying the foundations to the cultural identity of Britain. Its historic properties and industrial past are nationally important assets. It is clear that much of what attracts both residents and visitors are these natural and cultural assets.
30. From a management perspective any negative impact is likely to be increased in places that attract high quantities of visitors, that see numerous different user types, or have a topography that makes it prone to being affected by natural phenomena, such as flooding. These circumstances are particularly prevalent in the Lower Wye valley.

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<sup>6</sup> Quality scores derived from Trip Advisor and calculated by adding 'Excellent' and 'Very Good' together and dividing by the total number of reviews received. These are then sorted into four Quartiles.

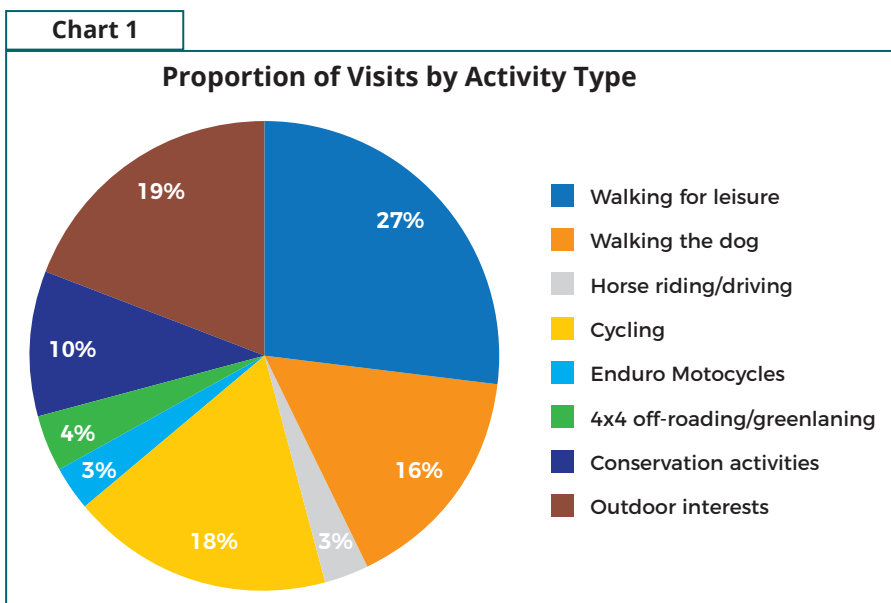
## The Users of the Tracks & Trails

31. This strategy was underpinned by independent consultation that ran from 8 November 2023 to 12 January 2024, generating 356 responses.
32. Table 4 shows the frequency of use by type and whether users are local or not:
- Two thirds of respondents who live locally use the paths and tracks at least weekly;
  - Those who volunteer are a broad spread from very frequent users through to infrequent users;
  - Among frequent visitors to the area, many are actually relatively infrequent. Occasional visitors typically only use the Tracks & Trails a few times a year at most.

	Live here	Work here	Visit here frequently	Visit here occasionally	Work for organisation with an interest in the area	Volunteer with an organisation with interest/involvement in the area
At least weekly	68%	51%	9%	0%	18%	37%
Monthly	28%	43%	48%	5%	45%	39%
A few times a year	3%	6%	43%	95%	36%	24%

At least weekly includes 'daily or almost daily' and 'several times a week'  
 Monthly = 'several times a month'  
 A few times a year includes 'a few times a year' and 'once a year or less often'  
 Base: 350 online responses

33. Considering all the people taking part in the consultation, circa 92,600 individual visits are represented. Chart 1 breaks these down into the types of activity showing relative proportions. Those who walk, cycle and horse ride in the Lower Wye Valley, do so with much greater frequency than those who visit with vehicles (enduro motorcycles and 4x4's). Those who engage with the environment (wildlife/bird watching and conservation) also do so with greater frequency than those that use vehicles.

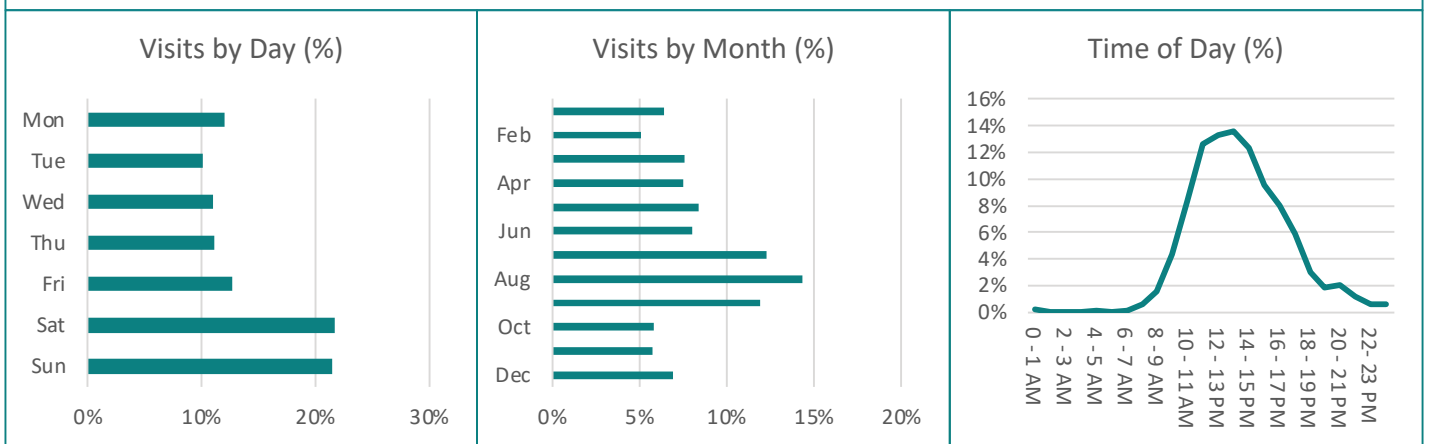


*This analysis is indicative only. Some people may do more than one activity so there is some double counting. Pie chart does not account for multiple responses from membership organisations which may increase the proportion.*

34. Annex II shows this breakdown in more detail. Among the activities taken part in the Lower Wye Valley, as would be expected, walking is the most prevalent.
35. Respondents confirmed that the appeal of the Tracks & Trails is the natural beauty and the access to it that they provide, together with the wider landscape, scenery and wildlife and the uniqueness of the environment. In terms of improvements, access to the area was mentioned by many, along with the need for regular maintenance and good signage.
36. When asked to comment on future priorities, 89% agreed that it was important *to encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discourage any undesirable behaviours, with 68% of this group identifying this as very important. In relation to this point, 86% of respondents noted the importance of the authorities creating an environment, through resources, facilities and education that enables all user groups to harmoniously enjoy the Tracks & Trails.* This sentiment is felt particularly strongly by motorised users with more than 9 out of 10 thinking this is important.
37. To augment the consultation results, a sample of visitors to six different Tracks & Trails together with Tintern Abbey were reviewed using mobile data, reporting aspects of their visit as well as home location.
38. Among the seven study areas, the largest sample (44% of the total), and by inference the most visited site, is Tintern Abbey. The least visited sites are Peckett Stone Car Park by Trellech Common and Upper Wyndcliff Car Park. Considering all seven destinations together some 54% of visitors live within 20 miles and most trips are day visits with relatively few staying overnight.

**Chart 2**

**Typical Distribution of Visitors to the Lower Wye Valley Tracks & Trails**



39. Chart 2 indicates, as expected, a leisure-oriented visitor profile that enjoys the Lower Wye Valley in the summer, at weekends and across a relatively narrow time band from 10:00 to 15:00. This may cause traffic and visitor management issues at some of the more visited sites. There is variation between the sites. Whitestone Car Park for example, having a very clear spike in visitors on Saturdays, while Tintern Abbey and Lower Wyndcliff are somewhat more evenly spread throughout the week. Trellech Common sees more of a year-round spread and receives the highest proportion of residents and local visitors at 94% of the total.
40. Of the visitors coming from further afield, the majority come from larger population centres, as is to be expected. The Tracks & Trails have wide appeal and draw from a wide catchment including South East England and the West Midlands as well as significant numbers of regional visitors from Wales. Some 15% of all visitors travel from more than 100 miles away; often these visitors will stay either with friends & relatives or in commercial accommodation. See Annex III for a related map.

## Case Study – Responsible Tourism

The Picos de Europa National Park, located in northern Spain, is renowned for its breath-taking landscapes, diverse flora and fauna and rich cultural heritage. The park has embraced various Responsible Tourism schemes to better balance environmental conservation with visitor enjoyment.

Five streams of activity included:

1. **Visitor Education and Awareness:** The Park, working with local authorities and NGOs, developed educational programmes and informational materials to raise awareness among visitors about the park's fragile ecosystems.
2. **Waste Management:** To tackle the issue of litter and waste, the Park has introduced recycling facilities and initiatives encouraging visitors to dispose of their waste responsibly.
3. **Local Community Involvement:** The Park engages with local communities, promoting their involvement in tourism-related activities, ensuring that economic benefits are distributed locally where possible.
4. **Infrastructure Development:** investment in sustainable infrastructure, including eco-friendly accommodation and well-marked trails, helps minimise the impact of tourism on the natural environment.
5. **Carrying Capacity:** visitor management system to monitor and control the number of visitors in specific areas, is in place. This helps prevent overcrowding and minimises environmental impact.

Impacts of this programme have included a reduction in environmental degradation and damage, greater economic opportunities for local businesses and more positive visitor feedback. Striking the right balance between conservation efforts and tourism development remains an ongoing challenge, requiring regular monitoring of impacts and adapting strategies based on feedback and dynamic conditions.

## The Strategy

41. This Strategy aims to contribute to the primary purpose of the National Landscape, that is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. It will help reverse the depletion of nature and biodiversity, an imperative now regrettably all too common across protected landscapes, and the wider countryside, in both Wales and England.<sup>7</sup>
42. The Strategy also aims to provide the framework and impetus to protect the renowned natural and cultural heritage of the Wye Valley and make it accessible in the least restrictive way possible. Some visitors will become loyal ambassadors for a well-managed and sought-after destination. A supplementary aim is to contribute to renewing the area, making it more resilient in social, economic and ecological terms.
43. The Strategy is ambitious in its aims and will be innovative in its delivery so that its beneficial impact will be felt well beyond the immediate area. It also demands that current users may need to accept some change in the way they currently enjoy the Tracks & Trails. As referenced earlier, it draws on other policy threads that will shape our common future and builds these into a plan that takes account of the views of a widespread sample of users, aiming to join the dots so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This is designed to make the Wye Valley National Landscape team and its partners:
- Experts on broadening participation to recreation and making the area more accessible to benefit many types of people;
  - A motivator and convener to help both local communities and visitors get involved, helping to ensure the area remains one of the finest lowland landscapes;
  - A leader in delivering regenerative recreation and responsible tourism;
  - A pathfinder for the rest of the Wye Valley National Landscape and a route that potentially others can also follow.
44. Concerns from respondents to the survey about the network include conflicts between different users and/or residents; the behaviour of some users; impacts on the landscape / ecology; repairs and maintenance issues; flooding; a lack of information; and worries about the actions of some landowners. However, on the positive side, there are relatively few places where major problems are reported and likewise relatively few places which are seeing very high numbers of visitors, unlike some other national landscapes.

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<sup>7</sup> The 2020 State of Natural Resources Report shows that currently no ecosystems in Wales are showing all the attributes of resilience. Overall, biological diversity is declining.



45. Generally for the vast majority of the Tracks & Trails the appropriate response is to maintain the status quo on how they are managed, whilst recognising that certain routes need more intensive management and new solutions putting in place. The Strategy is designed to support the whole network, with additional action relating specifically to identified 'problem' areas.

### *Vision*

46. Our vision is for the Wye Valley's Tracks & Trails to be a resilient, well managed and welcoming place for all responsible users. The principal aim is to open up recreational opportunities for all types of people to enjoy many different activities. Closely reflecting wider Welsh government policy on equality and inclusion, this Strategy seeks a *"Just Nature Transition"* which will benefit all diverse communities who may not think to currently visit the area but could benefit from doing so.
47. While a central aim is to open up recreational opportunities for all, the plan also reflects other policy pillars including improving health and well-being, expanding biodiversity, action on net zero and the encouragement of active travel. The Tracks & Trails of the Lower Wye Valley can contribute solutions to these policy areas. By doing so the Strategy becomes more relevant and important as a framework for action, offering a way to progress a range of important and interlinked policy priorities. So, this plan is not just about the users or the routes they enjoy, but encompasses a wider canvas.
48. The impact of climate change, habitat change and unequal access to landscapes and nature affects marginalised communities to a greater extent than most current visitors. These cohorts find it hard to visit for many different reasons. The Strategy builds the evidence base to better understand how to reach, connect and encourage different types of visitors to come and enjoy the landscape. Action will require the development of a number of new partnerships, with for example health, housing and probation services, to help facilitate and widen access. However, while this strategy points the way to action, implementation will need funding and support from other public authorities.
49. There is an expectation that all those that visit the area will respect its nature, the landscape and the people that live here. In general terms, this Strategy demands a level of responsibility from all those that use the Tracks & Trails wherever they live and whatever they come to do. It also sets out a way of regenerating the area, turning users into curators and visitors into explorers. The Vision reflects the fact that to successfully restore the landscape more needs to be put back in than is taken out.

50. The framework guiding this strategy recognises there are four principal responses to managing and improving the network.<sup>8</sup> In summary these are:
- Increasing the durability of the Tracks & Trails and surrounding landscape;
  - Increasing the supply of the Tracks & Trails or providing similar alternative leisure resources;
  - Reducing the impacts of use / users on the Tracks & Trails;
  - Limiting the use of the Tracks & Trails by, for example, season or user type.
51. There are various management measures that can be employed in relation to these responses including improving and hardening routes, seeking voluntary restraints from particular types of users, placing legal restrictions on routes, limiting numbers over time or in certain locations. These and other measures are all appropriate for certain circumstances and this Strategy gives some direction on how these issues can be considered further.
52. A fundamental principle of this plan is to work collaboratively with all interested parties, user associations and others to develop solutions that can work well for the majority while also ensuring due regard is paid to the need to reverse the decline in biodiversity, reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions and meet other core criteria, notably encouraging least restrictive access. We note also the importance of the local community in terms of the contribution from residents to the upkeep of the Tracks & Trails and this Strategy sets out ways in which current issues raised by residents can be resolved.
53. The Wye Valley already welcomes significant numbers of visitors and this plan supports and develops a more regenerative form of tourism that can ensure visitors have the opportunity to discover new opportunities and give something back, rather than simply arriving, enjoying and departing. Allied to this notion of a new form of tourism is the theme of responsibility, another important aspect applicable to all users, the surrounding businesses, residents and agencies involved in delivery. To take forward these foundations the plan needs robust partnerships, built on mutual trust, not to mention adequate resources to deliver the priorities in a timely manner.
54. In general terms this plan sees a significant change and innovation in the way the Tracks & Trails are looked after. This does not mean that current policy or management activity has been wrong, but rather that the plan offers the opportunity for a major reset rather than just an update – reflecting contemporary and foreseeable policy, taking into account the needs and views of users and the people that live locally, driving innovation through technology, and drawing on and developing contemporary management practices.

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Robert Manning (2017) Managing Outdoor Recreation 2nd Edition CABI

## Case Study – Managing User Conflict

Cannock Chase National Landscape in Staffordshire, is a popular recreation area attracting many different types of visitors. The forest, heathland and lakes provide a picturesque setting for various outdoor activities, including walking, cycling, horse riding and wildlife observation. However, increasing number of visitors led to a rise in user conflicts, pitting different interest groups against each other. The area experienced a 15% surge in visitors over 4 years, drawn by its natural beauty, diverse ecosystems, and recreational opportunities. (This was prior to the COVID pandemic). The rise resulted in heightened competition for space and resources among different user groups.

User Groups include Mountain Bikers, Walkers, Horse Riders and Conservationists and conflicts manifested in various incidents included near misses between mountain bikers and pedestrians, disputes over trail usage and damage to sensitive habitats caused by off-trail activities. Local authorities recorded a rise in complaints related to noise, trail erosion and perceived territorial disputes among user groups.

The following measures were agreed by local authorities to resolve these issues:

1. **Trail Management Plans:** The AONB Partnership collaborated with local councils and user groups to develop Trail Management Plans. These aimed to designate specific trails for different activities, minimising overlap and reducing user conflicts.
2. **Education and Outreach Programmes:** Initiatives were launched to educate visitors about responsible recreation and the importance of respecting designated areas. This included investment in signage, information campaigns and workshops.
3. **Community Engagement:** Stakeholder meetings involving representatives from different user groups were organised to foster dialogue and find common ground. This approach aimed to include diverse perspectives in decision-making processes.

55. All the evidence gathered is pointing to the inescapable conclusion that in the context of the nature and climate emergency there needs to be greater efforts made in the way this extraordinary landscape is valued, looked after and enjoyed in the future. The primary purpose of the National Landscape, to conserve and enhance natural beauty, is embedded in this Strategy which will harness the resources and efforts of volunteers, visitors and stakeholders to improve biodiversity, reduce invasive species and aid habitat recovery.

56. All this needs to happen within a context where the optimal number of users can enjoy the widest possible number of activities, while also protecting the social fabric of the place, its communities and businesses.

## Objectives

57. We propose five objectives. These work together, provide the foundations for a range of activities explained below and identified and prioritised in greater detail in the associated Action Plan. The first three are core priorities, with points four and five focussed on enabling and supporting delivery:

1. Boosting Awareness
2. Wye for All
3. Robust Management
4. Better Data
5. Making it Happen

58. There is an existing plan for the development of the countryside access network in the county. Monmouthshire's Countryside Access (Rights of Way) Improvement Plan (CAIP) published in 2020 sets out a clear approach to managing access and maintaining the county's public rights of way and countryside access network. This Strategy is focussed on a relatively small part of the county and is justified because it is one of the most significant landscapes in lowland Britain with a range of specific challenges that need focus and resolution. A number of the priorities outlined below will be taken forward in close collaboration with the Council's countryside access and highways teams and with support from other partners. Both sets of activity will be coordinated with the activity set out here being additional.

59. The Strategy reflects and will assist the delivery of the current Wye Valley AONB Management Plan which outlines the following recreation and access objectives:

- Encouraging recreational pursuits and responsible access;
- Assisting the resolution of conflicts between recreation, conservation and local interests;
- Support appropriate levels of design, repair, signage and maintenance on public rights of way, recreational trails and sites to conserve and enhance character and natural beauty;
- Assist in identifying gaps in access and recreational provision, including for under-represented and minority groups.

60. The Strategy will be led by the Wye Valley National Landscape Partnership and the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum, with the support of Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales, and the local Community Councils through the Wye Valley Villages Delivery Group. All stakeholder groups with an interest, such as residents, landowners and other relevant partners will be encouraged to be involved. Funding bids will need to be developed to deliver much of this Strategy and Action Plan. The Wye Valley National Landscape Team and Monmouthshire County Council have considerable experience in securing strategic funding. Based on the success of this Strategy a strong case can and will be made to attract funding and roll-out of this approach across the border into England.

## Boosting Information & Awareness

61. There are gaps in the understanding and knowledge of users about the network; what can be done where, how to behave responsibly and how to react when encountering other users. Walkers do not necessarily perceive the different circumstances or perspectives of motorcycle riders, for example, and in some cases, behaviour can be (or perceived to be) intimidating. Dog walkers may not give cyclists enough room, while large 4x4 vehicles and horses do not mix well on narrow lanes. Nature can take a back seat with all these visitors and routes can become eroded, more susceptible to run off and flooding, with the consequence that the understory and terrain are damaged and biodiversity reduced. This is typically a vicious cycle that diminishes natural resources over time.
62. So, the fragility of the landscape is not always valued, individual rights and responsibilities are not always fully understood, nor are the rights of different groups of users on parts of the network always appreciated. Signage and other trail 'furniture' such as gates and stiles may be in need of investment and will not necessarily show the route designation. The consultation revealed differing views on the extent to which the network should support users with information and advice. There are also differing views on the extent to which the landscape should be maintained or 'left alone' and the type of measures that are most appropriate.
63. The Strategy adopts the principle of *Least Restrictive Access*, explained below, as a guide underpinning the management and maintenance of the area.

### *Types of Information*

64. Users can benefit from information on a variety of topics and typically content includes:
- What to see and do;
  - The ecology, landscape and heritage and why it is special;
  - Tracks & Trails maps, routes and directions;
  - Tracks & Trails etiquette, how to behave and react when meeting others;
  - User specific information to encourage and provide confidence for different groups of visitors to the area.
65. The list above is in ascending order, with information on 1 and 2 widely available, information on point 3 harder to find and little to be found relating to points 4 and 5. Knowledge of the Countryside Code for visitors and the version for landowners may be patchy and other codes, such as the Dog Walking Code, may not be widely known. In general the consultation revealed that there is a strong case for looking closely at the type and availability of information to raise the awareness of responsible use by different user groups, particularly those using wheeled vehicles, as their effect and impact locally can be higher than other users.

66. Growing the general awareness of the area's Tracks & Trails and encouraging their responsible use by all types of visitors and residents can be assisted by a marketing plan that delivers targeted messages to key users. This is not just the responsibility of the Wye Valley National Landscape team but should be shared across a range of agencies and departments including Monmouthshire County Council, Visit Monmouthshire, Visit Wye Valley & Forest of Dean, Natural Resources Wales, the business sector, user groups and residents' groups. Coordination across a range of partners is vital to ensure that the right messages are developed and to ensure that they can be delivered effectively. It is recommended that key stakeholders collaborate to audit what is currently communicated and look at how it can be improved, recognising the twin objectives to enable a more diverse audience to access the landscape and help people understand their individual responsibilities.
67. The current offer could be better integrated and positioned. This arises because the base resources are considered differently, some elements defined as PROW, others defined as Highways, swathes of publicly accessible land, principally part of the Welsh Government Woodland estate dedicated as Access Land, while other important areas are historic parks and gardens and historic landscape. These latter categories make up 30% of the land areas of the Lower Wye Valley. Typically, some of the resources and channels that could be developed to bring the whole area together include:
- The integration and common branding of UCRs, unsealed roads and public rights of way with consistent branding and signage across the network;
  - Publication of *Wye Etiquette* – a code of practice which could include maps and other links;
  - Greater integration of the local bus routes through the area between Monmouth and Chepstow (the 65 via Trellech and 69 via Tintern) as a way of experiencing and connecting to the Tracks & Trails across a wider geography and providing a more diverse range of experiences for visitors;
  - Volunteer Ranger services to offer support and advice to users;
  - A website incorporating the entire area for users and associated Web App for directions and updates to existing software to make it easier to report issues;
  - Ways to help get people around – *Trampers* and e-bike hire facilities for example – as part of a renewed offer;
  - Reinvestment in the offer, through new signage, visitor information and common branding across the network.

## Wye for All

68. This Strategy provides a blueprint to encourage greater access. The Wye Valley National Landscape is for everyone and previous work to widen access opportunities and encourage more people from different backgrounds to visit should be refreshed with further investment made. Studies have consistently shown that underrepresented groups to the countryside include older people, members of black, Asian and minority ethnic populations and residents living in deprived areas.<sup>9</sup>
69. We will learn from previous initiatives, such as the MOSAIC project in the Peak District, to attract and offer a warm welcome to different groups of people that can gain transformative personal benefit by spending time in one of the UK's finest lowland landscapes.
70. These opportunities will draw on best practice already produced by NRW in collaboration with the Sensory Trust, notably *By All Reasonable Means* where the aim should be for everyone to have an equally high-quality experience, but recognising that universal access to all experiences is not always possible. The principle of *Least Restrictive Access* underpins this Strategy and the related action plan.<sup>10</sup> The existing promoted routes are a useful asset but should be reviewed and rationalised where necessary to further enhance their accessibility to a wider audience.

### Green Social Prescribing

71. This Strategy will encourage green and blue social prescribing, 'connecting citizens to community support to better manage their health and well-being' developing clear pathways that link GPs and charities to group-based leisure and recreation providers to benefit the health and wellbeing of individuals who might be unwell, recovering, have less means, need a new start or are suffering from concerns like eco-anxiety, something that increasing numbers of young people are reporting.<sup>11</sup> Increases in life expectancy reversed in 2010 with obesity on the rise and poor diet, lack of exercise and deprivation all contributory factors. The ONS calculates that recreation in Wales has an asset value of £22.6 bn in health benefits alone.<sup>12</sup> The therapeutic effects of a programme that immerses individuals in a National Landscape can undoubtedly help reverse poor health outcomes.

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<sup>9</sup> For example see Natural England (2019) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment available at this [link](#)

<sup>10</sup> The principle of Least Restrictive Access requires that all work meets the highest possible access standards for that piece of work. It is an approach that helps raise the overall standard of access of a site, route or facility over time. See NRW (2017) [By All Reasonable Means](#).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the importance of this approach see the Public Health Wales link [here](#)

<sup>12</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) UK natural capital accounts – [Asset Values](#)

72. The Marsden Review recommended that *the National Landscapes of Wales undertake more health and well-being related experiments in developing and reaching challenged urban and rural communities and sections of the population. These could be delivered jointly with local health boards.* The related funding will be sought as part of the implementation of the Action Plan.
73. Opening up access to less involved visitor groups is not without its challenges and the work required is resource and partnership intensive. The Traverse Review, looking at *Increasing Children's Engagement with Protected Landscapes*, identified eight key issues which are set out in Annex IV.<sup>13</sup> Work to address this will need considered planning, the application of long-term and multi-year revenue funding and strong partnerships with the appropriate charities and agencies. Projects like *Generation Green* led by the YHA, inspired more than 115,000 young people to connect to nature and reveals the scale of the opportunity.
74. Work on social prescribing, such as that previously undertaken in Caerphilly, has shown that translating the concept into successful delivery needs the support of a range of non-countryside partners. The Gwent Public Service Board will be an ideal partner to help identify the opportunities and challenges. The current countryside partners do not have the resources to carry such a project forward on their own but an early action will begin to map out the optimum partners and resources needed and look at other examples of current practice.
75. Such a focus on health will be in addition to continuing a range of work to encourage access for people with impairments and health conditions: for example, by using Trampers to provide fuller access to the Tracks & Trails and encouraging neighbouring tourism attractions to become more accessible. This activity could include provision for sensory and quiet trails for those with visual impairments or neurodiverse conditions.

### Volunteering

76. It is recommended that a plan is developed that can encourage visitors to get more deeply involved in the management of the Tracks & Trails network. This could draw on a network of willing volunteers from different backgrounds contributing to the upkeep of the place and supporting the National Landscape and Council teams with vital conservation, maintenance and educational work. This longer-term aim would complement a revitalised local volunteer network, covered later.

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<sup>13</sup> Traverse (2022) Increasing children's engagement with protected landscapes - BE0181 Available from this [link](#)



77. A Wye for All programme would also consider opportunities for group leisure in some areas that are off the beaten track, like the NRW managed woodland which could unlock new experiences for new visitors including a night under the stars, wildlife watching or cultural and arts events, perhaps linked to the Wye Valley River Festival.<sup>14</sup> The educational and youth markets represent a strong growth opportunity and this may justify investment in new facilities to tie into updates to the Curriculum for Wales which may stimulate the frequency of school trips.
78. A new online portal, 'Tirlun' being delivered by Wales designated landscapes,<sup>15</sup> will provide educational resources for Wales and will be an important element linked to the new Curriculum for Wales. The site will provide free resources for teachers and families to encourage access to the outdoors with packaged learning activities. These and other opportunities will also bring further benefits for both the partners and the area's tourism businesses.
79. It is recommended that management measures be considered to help spread the volume of visitors away from Tintern towards other less visited areas where carrying capacity allows. Such a dispersal strategy should be developed as part of the Action Plan. The Tracks & Trails represent an important resource to spread the load with an offer that will have appeal to many different visitor segments from both the UK and further afield. The network represents a unique canvas which can be sensitively interpreted and developed to provide an innovative set of natural experiences to cater for different and growing market segments.
80. Research undertaken for this project indicates there is the potential for the visitor economy to contribute greater economic impact to the area, particularly if investment in serviced hotels can be encouraged in neighbouring towns, local supply chains are developed and quirky small accommodation businesses are supported. Alongside this plan, a set of Tracks & Trails experiences should be developed. Examples could include digitising popular existing walks, such as the Tread and Trot series to work on mobile devices, linkage with public transport routes (65 and 69 buses), Nordic walking experience, hire e-bikes, a trials motorcycle challenge, tramper tracks for less mobile visitors and climbing experiences. To ensure that the primary purpose of the National Landscape is upheld, the opportunity to develop the visitor economy should not be 'just left to happen'. Ideally opportunities should be subject to concept development, evaluation of carrying capacity and master-planning in close collaboration with local businesses and communities, led by the partnership delivering this Strategy.

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<sup>14</sup> 'A night under the stars for every child' was a recommendation made by Julian Glover in his Landscapes Review to Government. Most of the Lower Wye Valley has the darkest skies available in Wales.

<sup>15</sup> Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) is a partnership of the eight designated landscapes of Wales that supports structured joint working to unlock the potential of designated landscapes to deliver for climate, nature and people.

81. There is an opportunity for the Lower Wye valley to be an exemplar for both responsible recreation and regenerative tourism. This includes ensuring local businesses are supported to step up to the net zero challenge, setting measurable goals to minimise impact, involving local people, having visitors contribute financially to conservation efforts, developing opportunities for visitors to learn about the place and its history, and to contribute to its upkeep. Such activities can create a strong and meaningful bond between visitors, the landscape and the people that live there, creating authentic and longer lasting experiences of benefit to both hosts and guests, nature and culture.

## Case Study – Volunteering

The Cairngorms National Park has implemented volunteering schemes to engage local communities and enthusiasts in the preservation of this unique natural area. Objectives typically include Biodiversity Conservation; Community Engagement; and Education & Awareness.

- The Cairngorms Connect Volunteering Programme is a collaboration between landowners and conservation organisations, offers a volunteering programme that focuses on habitat restoration and monitoring. Volunteers actively contribute to rewilding by planting native trees, removing invasive species, and collecting valuable data on wildlife populations.
- The Mountain Bothies Association organises regular maintenance to care for bothies (shelters). Volunteers ensure that these remote shelters are in good condition, supporting sustainable recreational use while minimising environmental impact.

These programmes have resulted in:

- Enhanced resilience of the ecosystem: particularly via habitat restoration increasing resilience to environmental changes and the re-establishment of native species.
- Empowered communities: A network of individuals passionate about the park's conservation. This has led to increased vigilance against illegal activities and a stronger commitment to sustainable practices.
- Clear Educational Outcomes: The educational component of volunteering has resulted in a more informed and environmentally conscious community. This awareness has translated into greater public support for conservation initiatives and policies.

Challenges include limited funding and ensuring that the programmes can be accessible for a wider range of participants including and reflecting the wider population. Other typical volunteering programmes include trail maintenance and wildlife monitoring.

## Robust Management

82. A range of issues around the current management of the Tracks & Trails were identified by consultees and discussed further at Drop-in sessions. Overall, the need to encourage responsible behaviour among all users and discourage undesirable behaviour was identified as a priority for this Strategy, seen as important by 89% of all respondents. Allied to this view, 86% of respondents said it was important that groups of users are able to harmoniously enjoy the Lower Wye Valley by creating an environment supported and enhanced through resources, facilities and education.
83. Such widespread agreement provides a strong basis for a revised approach to the management of the area and its assets. It also reflects a major issue - user/resident conflict. Currently such issues often remain unresolved, exacerbated by the complexity of the network, the differing legal status of the various Tracks & Trails, their topography and remote location, ignorance on the part of many users, and a lack of wayfinding and enforcement resources 'on the ground'. These factors then combine with illegal use, anti-social behaviour, fractured management, limited communications and relatively few resources. Against such a background it is not surprising that complex problems go unresolved. Some of these issues will need engagement of other agencies such as Gwent Police. A new approach is needed.

*By far the most common issue raised during the consultation was the topic of trail / enduro motorcycles using the Tracks & Trails and creating problems for other users and residents, and damaging the landscape. The number of off-road motorcycle riders has increased significantly over the past decade with reportedly, on some trails, groups of up to ten motorcycles at a frequency of six times a day. Impacts can include noise pollution, air pollution, erosion on routes, damage to nature, conflicts with other users / residents, illegal use of the PROW, development of route spurs from legal routes, and reportedly, aggressive or intimidatory behaviour to other users and residents.*

### A New Approach

84. The new approach sees a greater sophistication in the management of the asset base and users. It is evident that the issues that were widely reported in the consultation only affect a very small number of routes where a mixture of active management, voluntary zoning, route modification and other measures can play a part in addressing concerns. Unsealed roads, where most of these issues occur, represent 21 kilometres of a network that totals over 550 kilometres, so less than 4% of the network. On the basis of all the evidence submitted it is proposed that five of these routes could be subject to more robust management measures. It should be noted that all these routes are suffering from environmental degradation due to current usage, exacerbated by climate change, and need investment to stem these issues. See Annex V for a map showing these routes.

## Case Study – Reducing Illegal Use

One of the objectives set out in the Yorkshire Dales National Park Management Plan is to maintain the area's Green Lanes, or unsealed routes. This policy is set out in *Special Qualities, Special Experiences*, the Recreation & Tourism strategy, one of six thematic strategies that also cover biodiversity, woodland, historic environment, volunteering and learning and engagement.

The management of the Dales' Green Lanes has been formally set out in a framework which considers relevant legislation and a range of factors that are applied. These include ecological sensitivity; heritage and landscape features; the durability and surface of the route; its current condition; the degree of conflict; and concerns from local residents or landowners. In evaluating the impact of recreational motor vehicles, detailed consideration of these factors ensures an evidence-based approach. On the basis of the evidence, a range of management options are considered including in summary:

- Do nothing;
- Repair the route;
- Maintain the route;
- Seek voluntary restraint on use of the route from specified users; and
- Place legal restriction (Traffic Regulation Order – TRO) on use of route from specified users.

Management solutions may include:

- Limit the use of particular unsealed routes to a specified number of users each month (a permit system such as used at [Gatescarth Pass](#) in the Lake District National Park);
- Seasonal restriction preventing use at specified times of year (such as the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order agreed for the Ridgeway National Trail in Wiltshire);
- Other partial restriction (for example, preventing use for certain number of days or at certain times of day);
- All year-round restriction on use;
- Working with all different users and their representative associations.

The methodological underpinning is a Sensitivity Assessment which uses four 'Trigger Factors': Nature Conservation, Heritage, Route Surface and Tranquillity scored as either Green, Amber or Red. This produces an assessment of overall sensitivity which can then be subject to the management solutions above.

85. The case study from the Yorkshire Dales recognises the over-riding importance of securing a more resilient ecosystem using a structured and transparent process. It is recommended that all the problematic Tracks & Trails be assessed against an agreed set of Trigger Factors with a view that some are likely to need safeguards to ensure biodiversity net gain, heritage value, local flood risk and other relevant local criteria. Elements of both the public rights of way and the highways network are likely to be the subject of this review.
86. This review should be undertaken in two stages – an examination of routes’ natural and cultural resources, along with an analysis of the extent and nature of usage, and its impact on the ecosystem and its heritage value. This work will provide robust and objective evidence based on the impact of current usage and, subject to the evidence, may present the case for ‘carefully targeted local action to protect sensitive areas.’<sup>16</sup> It is likely that the review will prioritise unsealed roads, the BOAT and bridleways shown in Annex V as these routes are generally subject to a greater level of impact given the wheeled traffic that use them.
87. A range of options will then need to be developed and subject to consultation, with potential changes ranging from voluntary agreements, trail management plans or other measures including modifications to designations or experimental Traffic Regulation Orders. The process of stopping up any highway as a result will be subject to a further statutory process. Short term operations will also be considered, such as enforcement action in partnership with Gwent Police.
88. It should be noted that the stopping up of any unsealed road will not necessarily result in compliance and may also have the effect of moving demand to other unsealed roads nearby. The widespread availability of maps online, which show detailed (sometimes incorrect) routes around the area’s unsealed roads / BOAT network and can be download to mobile phones, has transformed the visibility and ‘rideability’ of this sub-set of the Tracks & Trails.
89. Over the last decade, this has resulted in additional pressures on the natural landscape of a completely different magnitude to those seen previously, because of the additional numbers of riders/drivers, other unauthorised off-trail activity and the size of groups. While technological change, such as electric motorcycles and 4x4s, will reduce the noise and air pollution elements in due course, their extra weight will mean potentially even greater impact on the Tracks & Trails. This is not just an issue with motorised vehicles as high numbers of mountain bikes, feet and hooves can also create impact, especially with wetter winters and dryer summers due to climate change. There is also a significant management challenge to reduce irresponsible ‘off-path’ trail building by some mountain bikers.

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<sup>16</sup> See HM Government Response to Q14-17 (2023) Implementing the Landscapes Review available at this [link](#)

90. A variety of solutions, working in close partnership with associations such as the Trails Riders Federation, Green Lanes Association, The Ramblers and British Mountain Bike Orienteering should be part of this Strategy's early work. These groups could be invited into formal partnerships to help align purposes and priorities. A range of innovations could be trialled – for example, a system of voucher ticketing to regulate frequency of motorised use with agreed quotas for all groups emanating from outside the local area.
91. Other options may include:
- the promotion of less ecologically vulnerable unsealed roads nearby;
  - partnerships with other alternative sites within 50 miles of the project area such as Walters Arena in Neath or Taff's Well in Caerphilly; and
  - the examination of self-contained sites such as quarries near the Lower Wye Valley that could be developed into a managed facility.
92. The consultation also identified the separate issue of anti-social behaviour that occurs on relatively few Tracks & Trails but is a live issue for focus due to impacts on residents. Instances of illegal trespass with enduro motorcycles in areas adjacent to unsealed roads also threaten the natural capital of the area. Better understanding of the extent and nature of trespass and anti-social behaviour will need to be sought with multi-agency collaboration. Subsequent action could include enforcement options such as public space protection orders that can include restrictions to the highway by installation of barriers for the duration of the order.<sup>17</sup>
93. Another important management aspect remains path erosion and surface degradation, control of water run-off and risks of flooding. The topography of the valley and the historic nature of many of the Tracks & Trails means it is important to provide ongoing resources to address the issue of flooding, using natural flood management techniques such as those piloted in Chapel Hill Road. Unsealed roads affected include Horse Way, Robins Way (both Whitebrook), Tintern Road and Glynwood Road. The options include the development of cross-drains, bunds, tree felling and path reconstruction or resurfacing.

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<sup>17</sup> HM Government (2014) Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act – [Section 64, 7-9](#)

## Better Data & Insight

94. Monmouthshire County Council's Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) has a structured approach to managing and maintaining the County's entire PROW network. This Strategy reflects the themes of CAIP and will not affect the way that maintenance across the wider network is prioritised. It aims to add value to the CAIP with actions that can be regarded as a test-bed for new ideas to be considered and possibly rolled out across the wider area in due course.
95. To successfully boost awareness, increase accessibility and create greater accountability, the partnership needs to know significantly more about the value of the asset base, understand what is happening on the ground and measure the effectiveness of management measures. This work can only be achieved with significant increases in resources and improvements in data to provide a comprehensive evidence base on ecological value; user types, trends, visitor volumes and impacts.
96. There is a need for a much more forensic understanding of what is happening on the ground, the impact on landscape, ecology and heritage of different users and the ways in which user groups, landowners and individuals can be nudged, encouraged and influenced to modify behaviour. It is recommended that surveys of the heritage assets be undertaken, potentially by local volunteers, along with the roll-out of counters to monitor user numbers on specific routes. Other technologies may be worth investigating such as soundscape monitoring and camera-traps. This could be advanced through linkages with local universities.
97. As well as a greater understanding of the asset base, it is as important to have a better understanding of how different visitors may currently be impeded from visiting. New partnerships should be developed and a suite of tactics pursued that can help marginalised groups enjoy the landscape. The reasons why some people are unable to visit the countryside are complex and varied and depend on individual circumstances and, to some on extent, wider cultural factors such as a perceived lack of welcome. This objective will seek to build the evidence and utilise good practice from other areas to enable a positive and considered approach to attracting different types of visitors and users to the Lower Wye Valley.
98. There is a complementary need to be more innovative in the use of this data and modify existing technologies and build new solutions to transform collection and analysis across the visitor journey, ensure that existing systems such as Monmouthshire Council's Countryside Access Management System and Fix My Street apps are upgraded to offer greater functionality for visitors and residents and provide the usable data that practitioners need to monitor and evaluate delivery.

99. Qualitative data will be needed, for example, to support evaluation of habitat degradation and assess flood risk mitigation, with quantitative data gathered on user volumes, trends, state of the network and user incidents. Mapping and other systems need to be developed to express the results and produce regular status reports on defined areas for review by the Steering Group.
100. Gathering research and insight will need to be an early priority to provide the evidence and baseline data for funding bids and to delivery key projects. This will include:
- Assessment of Tracks & Trails against ecological criteria;
  - Assessment of heritage features along Tracks & Trails and their condition and any impacts of route usage;
  - Collation and audit of self-guided / promoted routes and promotional literature & information on the area, including websites and on-line material;
  - Condition survey of current state of priority unsealed roads;
  - Analysis of legal processes and management options;
  - Development of the evidence base to support hard to reach visitors;
  - Review of visitor & user monitoring systems, including counters and other technologies;
  - Assessment of requirements for a visitor survey, along with methodologies and questionnaire formats, for funding bids and subsequent implementation;
  - Assessment of technologies to improve management practice;
  - Mapping and identification of freeholders / leaseholders and access agreements (voluntary and/or statutory).



# Making it Happen

## *Asset Management*

101. The Tracks & Trails of the Lower Wye Valley are rooted in the historic infrastructure of Tintern Abbey and its Granges followed by the industrial revolution that began over 450 years ago. After the dissolution of the monasteries, the Company of Mineral and Battery Works was established in 1566 and chose the Angidy Valley in Tintern to produce wire and build what became the largest business in Wales. The Tracks & Trails, along with the abundant charcoal from local woodlands, water power from the steep tributaries and the River Wye as the main transport corridor, were the means by which this industry was developed. By the time that the industry declined in the late 19th century, overtaken by coal power and railways, enclosure acts and farming had created a further network of other routes across the Lower Wye Valley. Some of these then became public highways and Public Rights of Way, others part of the national forestry estate.
102. It is no surprise then that the management of the Tracks & Trails is somewhat piecemeal today with multiple designations and different departments and agencies responsible for various parts. All these Tracks & Trails however hold an appeal for the local community and visitors, who do not generally perceive any practical difference between, for example, an unsealed road and a bridleway. In addition, there are large tracts of land under public ownership that can be enjoyed off the beaten track.
103. It would be strategically very beneficial to be able to consider all the Tracks & Trails as one set of assets - as this would allow for more robust assessment, management, development, maintenance and ultimately collaborative branding and promotion. This could also include the Tracks & Trails in nearby open access land. While the different routes would remain legally distinct, they would be connected in management terms which would underpin and improve their long-term stewardship. The audit suggested in Section 4 above would help provide the management information to facilitate this collaborative and strategic approach. Taking account of the lessons learnt through this approach in Wales, a similar approach could be followed in the English part of the National Landscape.

## *Leadership*

104. This Strategy seeks to integrate a range of actions and consider them in a systems-based manner. It combines measures to support biodiversity, improve the landscape, encourage responsible recreation, manage tourism growth and open access to a wider variety of people who would not normally visit. It closely relates to Wales Government legislation including the Environment Act 2016, the Well-Being Future Generations Act 2015 and the Equality Act 2010. It closely aligns to and delivers Goal 10 of the UK Government's 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan.

105. It is recommended that the Strategy be overseen by a small steering group constituted as a sub-group of Monmouthshire's Local Access Forum (LAF). The Steering Group should potentially have representatives from the LAF, the National Landscape team and other statutory agencies and key delivery partners.
106. The Wye Valley National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) should also have an overview of the Strategy and its implementation. Monmouthshire Councillors and the local Community Councils with the majority of the Tracks & Trails (Devauden, St Arvans, Trellech United & Wye Valley) should also be engaged through reports and feedback to the Wye Valley Villages Delivery Group.
107. The focus will be on implementation rather than policy development. It is recommended that a project officer post be secured to deliver the agreed priorities. Additional resources will need to be bid for to augment the existing resources from the Wye Valley National Landscape, Monmouthshire County Council, Natural Resources Wales as well as other partners, stakeholder organisations, user groups and the Community Councils.
108. It is recommended that regular communications be available to all partners and other interests and workshops and other events be held to advance discussions and activity relating to the Strategy. For example, an invitation could also be extended to a representative from Tirweddau Cymru Landscapes Wales (TCLW) to ensure that best practice can be exchanged from other National Landscapes and National Parks in Wales. Other UK wide volunteer groups should be engaged in this work such as [Trash Free Trails](#) and [Adventure Smart](#).
109. The current range of volunteer groups should be supported to a greater degree and, as resources become available, new volunteer groups could be established and work pursued to widen access to less involved audiences. The volunteer network will need both investment and leadership from members of the community. The local Pathcare volunteers and other groups supporting conservation and enhancement of the Tracks & Trails should connect to the work of the Strategy. Each Community Council could nominate a formal Tracks & Trails lead if they are not already engaged through Monmouthshire's Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) and/or the Wye Valley Villages Delivery Group.
110. This Strategy is ambitious in its aims and innovative in its delivery. As such it can be considered as a national prototype initiative, with the potential to inform the delivery of wider government plans. A priority short-term action will be to prepare funding proposals to aid its implementation and build the partnerships to enable its delivery.

# ACTION PLAN

*Actions, their prioritisation and matters related to implementation will be agreed by the Local Access Forum.*

1. Boosting Awareness	Implementation Activities
1.1a Undertake an audit of formal / official promotional material relating to use of the Tracks & Trails	A structured audit of official current and online information along with a survey of its use, promotion and distribution
1.1b Investigate and Audit other promotional and marketing material from private and third sector organisations	For example, check all online GPS derived routes of the Unsealed roads network. Seek updates from providers where inaccurate
1.1c Develop a coordinated promotional framework to inform the Visitor Management Plan (See Action 4.3)	To include various elements informed by Action 1.1a and 1.1b potentially to include presence on partners' websites, promotion of open access routes etc.
1.2 Prepare, write and publish the Wye Etiquette guide	A guide produced on the basis of broad consensus and made widely available in digital and print form that influences behaviours and includes insight from the marketing review
1.3a Review current Tracks & Trails signage and trial new options	Review state and nature of current signage. Learning from the NRW pilot project in Caerphilly, identify trials to inform users about the routes and permitted use. The Objective is to ultimately have an inclusive and standardised / Wye valley branded approach across all PROW and UCRs
1.3b Implement rebranded signage across the network	Subject to 1.1c and 4.3, seek investment over the period of the Strategy, prioritising those areas which are most in need on the basis of the audit, other ROWIP and Highways selection criteria, health and safety considerations etc.

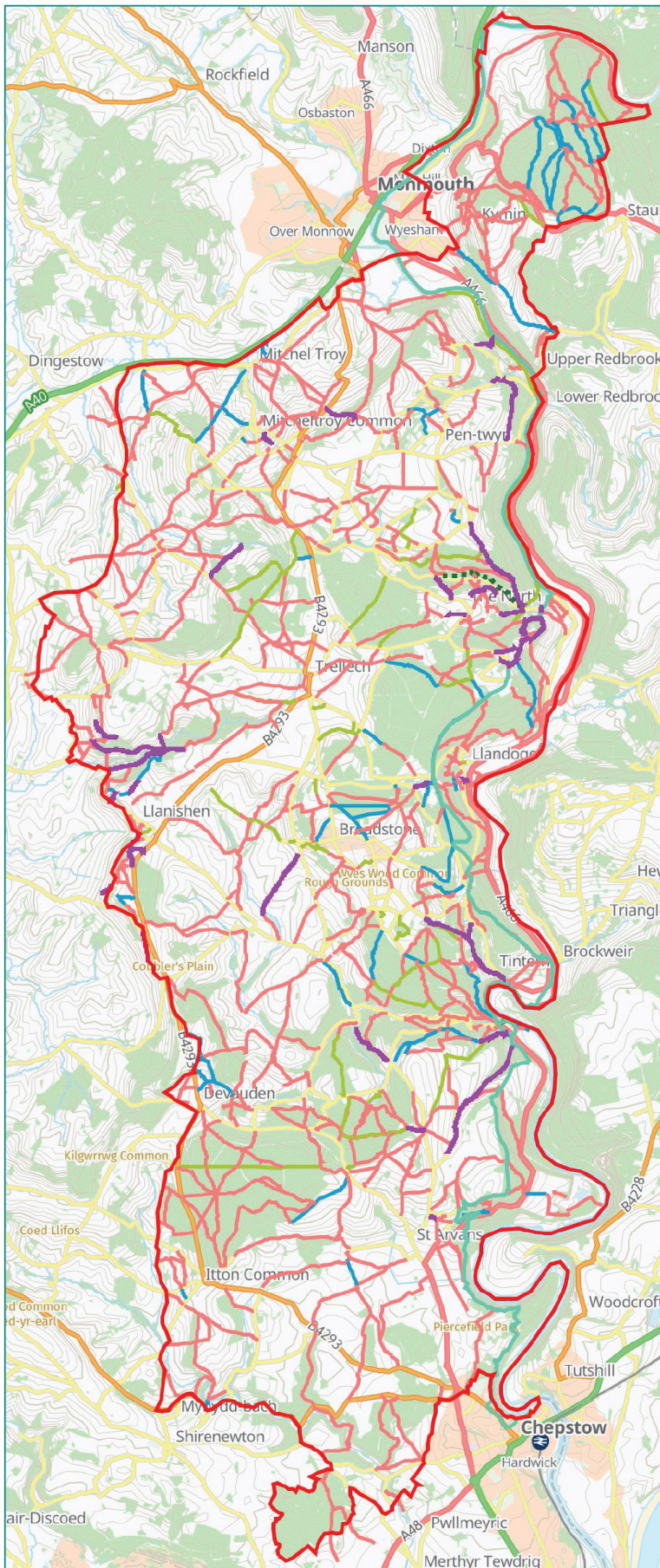
2. Wye For All	Implementation Activities
2.1a Desk research and assessment of current Green and Blue social prescribing models and current health inclusion projects	In-house activity would be usefully supported by specialist consultants in this field
2.1b Undertake best practice research on previous and current projects e.g. Peak District National Park MOSAIC project	Interview on the successes and challenges relating to Inclusion projects to examine the success of projects that aim to encourage more deprived audiences, BAME, school age children, young people 16-24 and ex-offenders
2.2 Review and report on current best practice on accessibility, potential funding sources, constraints and opportunities for the Lower Wye Valley	Develop appropriate proposals with a view to ensuring funding is secured for favoured options that are applicable are rolled out (linked to 2.5)
2.3 Review current local and national volunteer networks and develop a revised and enlarged volunteer programme	Examine operation, performance and best practice to support and potentially enlarge the volunteer base over the period of the Strategy. May include, for example, the development of the LANECARE concept with partners
2.4 Examine the scale and nature of NRW and other open access land in the area, and map the related Tracks & Trails and related resources	Undertake a condition audit of these routes and potential routes using the methodology developed in Action 3.1 below
2.5 With partners such as the Gwent Public Service Board, design and deliver a new generation Inclusion programme aimed at widening access	Using the research phase actions (2.1 and 2.2), design a programme aimed at widening access to the lower Wye Valley of non-typical user groups. Consider funding sources for a related proposal to the Welsh Government and/or Lottery
2.6 Meet with group operators in the educational sector with a view to encouraging trips from school age against the national curriculum	Connect to operators such as YHA and Rock UK who can advise on outdoor leisure concepts and may be interested in the development of partnerships to assist a collective mission such as a Generation Green project tailored to schools in Wales
2.7 Review the opportunity for new activities and events that draw on nature and landscape and encourage people to visit and enjoy the area	A selection of new events rooted in the special qualities of the place can raise the profile of the Tracks & Trails and shift perceptions of activities to be enjoyed. Identify and approach commercial, third sector or community interests to identify activities, venues, infrastructure and support requirements
2.8 Examine opportunities for new ways to increase inclusion including, for example trampers and electrically assisted pedal cycles, with potential investment and engagement by interested stakeholders	Consider securing grants and other incentives to enable partnerships with WVNL

3. Robust Management	Implementation Activities
<b>3.1a Develop a methodology to enable the structured assessment of the value of the Tracks &amp; Trails for landscape, ecology and heritage</b>	Assessment of historic context, type, condition, value, issues and also options for accessibility - with a link to the volunteer programmes envisaged in Action 2.3
<b>3.1b Pilot the assessment system developed at Action 3.1a on current routes that have identified management issues (Strategy Annex V)</b>	This will assess key routes with current management challenges and enable the grading of each route against its inherent value
<b>3.1c Using best practice developed elsewhere, examine the solutions for the management of the routes under particular pressure and prioritise</b>	This will include the examination of alternative sites both within the Lower Wye Valley and nearby
<b>3.2 Examine legal options of Tracks &amp; Trails for maintenance and management, working closely with landowners to identify hotspots</b>	Examine the options relating to the key Tracks & Trails including the impact of Welsh Government access reform measures
<b>3.3 Develop and undertake a user survey of key identified routes</b>	Design and deploy a survey that will identify user types, frequency, incidence of issues / conflicts etc. This should complement 3.1 and 3.2
<b>3.4 Run a high profile and jointly funded operation with partners, user associations, landowners and Gwent Police</b>	Subject to the evidence gathered in activity 3.1 run an (ideally) annual operation
<b>3.5 Assess the Chapel Hill Road NFM pilot, and seek funding to undertake other similar capital projects</b>	This type of investment will be important in other areas where Natural Flood Management can alleviate issues on other Tracks & Trails

4. Better Data & Insight	Implementation Activities
4.1 Review existing and if required develop a data sharing agreement between the core project partners including MCC and NRW and other partners	Strengthen mechanisms by which the partners can better share existing data, for example footfall and traffic counters. Other partners, such as Gwent Health Board, will be invited to share relevant data relating to Action 2.1
4.2 Drawing on Actions 1.2, 2.4 and 3.1, provide a map of the entire network including the identification of heritage feature, their condition and ownership	Include NRW Forest trails, permissive paths, open access land as well as PROW, UCRs and unsealed roads. Working with landowners, grade the importance of tangible / intangible heritage features
4.3 Develop a Visitor Management Plan to include dispersal and other strategies (informed by earlier actions)	This may include a visitor survey to help inform the development of management solutions and e.g. low carbon transport, dispersal to lesser used routes, flattening peaks via promotions, online vouchers to reduce use on overused paths etc.
4.4 Audit all current reporting tools designed for the wider public and consider how these tools work together in favour of the management of the LWV	Audit customer and professional usage of e.g. CAMS and Fix My Street etc. with a view to a collaborative user-friendly upgrade and increasing take-up as a reporting tool for all types of incidents

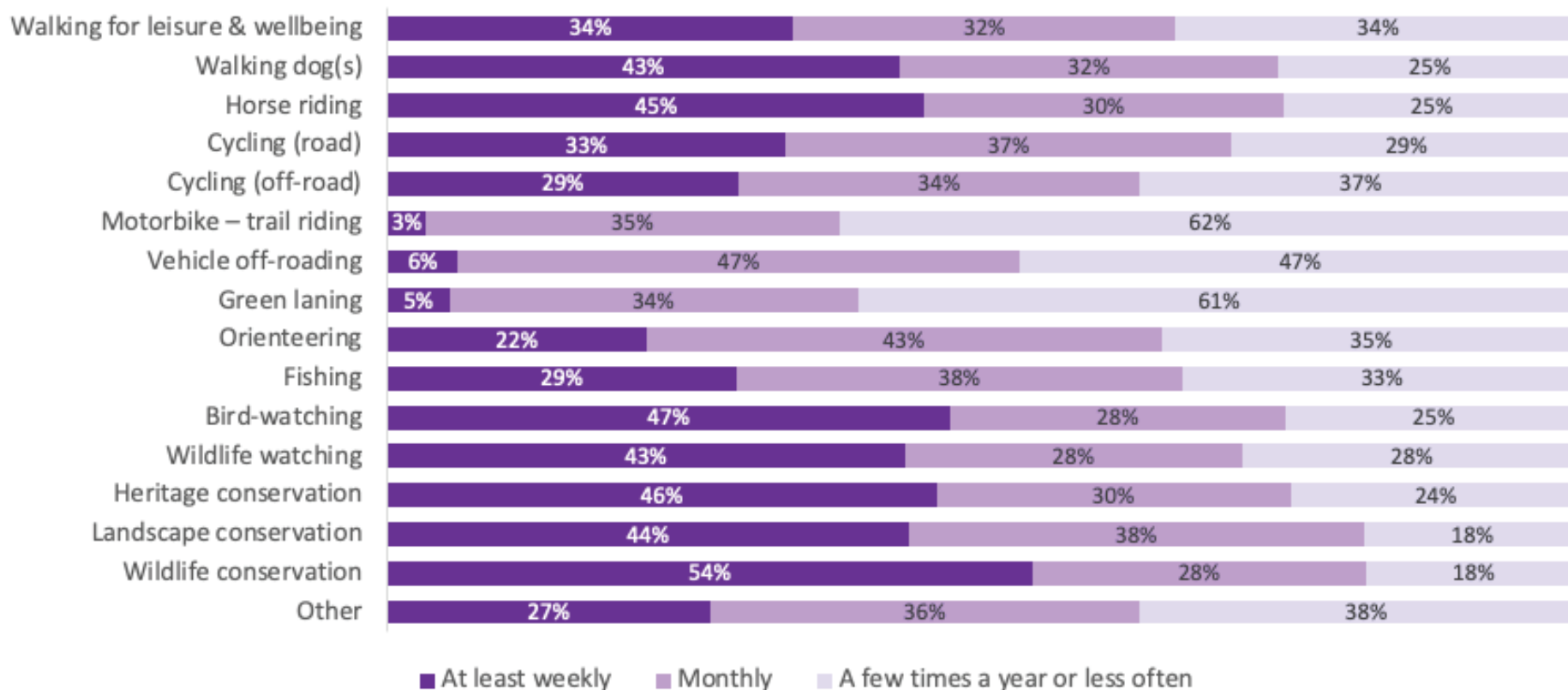
5. Making It Happen	Implementation Activities
5.1a Establish a cross-organisational team from the core partners to support the delivery of the Strategy and formalise partnerships with the Ramblers, GLASS, the TRF, BHS and other national user groups	Executive group will oversee delivery. These partnerships will be instrumental to enable the agreement of subsequent management plans for pressurised unsealed routes and the Byway Open to all traffic
5.1b Provide resources for the cross-organisational team	Bid for resources to appoint a project manager to enable the agreed actions to be advanced more rapidly and coherently
5.2 Integrate the management of all the different types of Tracks & Trails into one operation. Reflect these arrangements in the Visitor Management Plan	Identify how the entire network could be managed as one asset, branded as one area (and how best related departments and bodies can facilitate and benefit from such an integrated approach)
5.3 Develop organisational MoUs with key partners	MoUs to be agreed by core partners. This will include associations and other interest groups. Related to action 3.2
5.4 Stimulate collaboration and partnership through related workshops, seminars and other events	Hold regular sessions to advance discussion and delivery. These actions can be reviewed and revised over time by the LAF sub-group and JAC

# Annex I The Tracks & Trails



## Annex II Frequency of use by user type and locality

- The frequency of use data shows how those who walk, cycle and horse ride in the Lower Wye Valley tracks and trails, do so with much greater frequency than those who visit with vehicles (trail bikes and 4x4's). Those who engage with the environment (wildlife/bird watching and conservation) also do so with greater frequency.



**At least weekly** includes 'daily or almost daily' and 'several times a week'

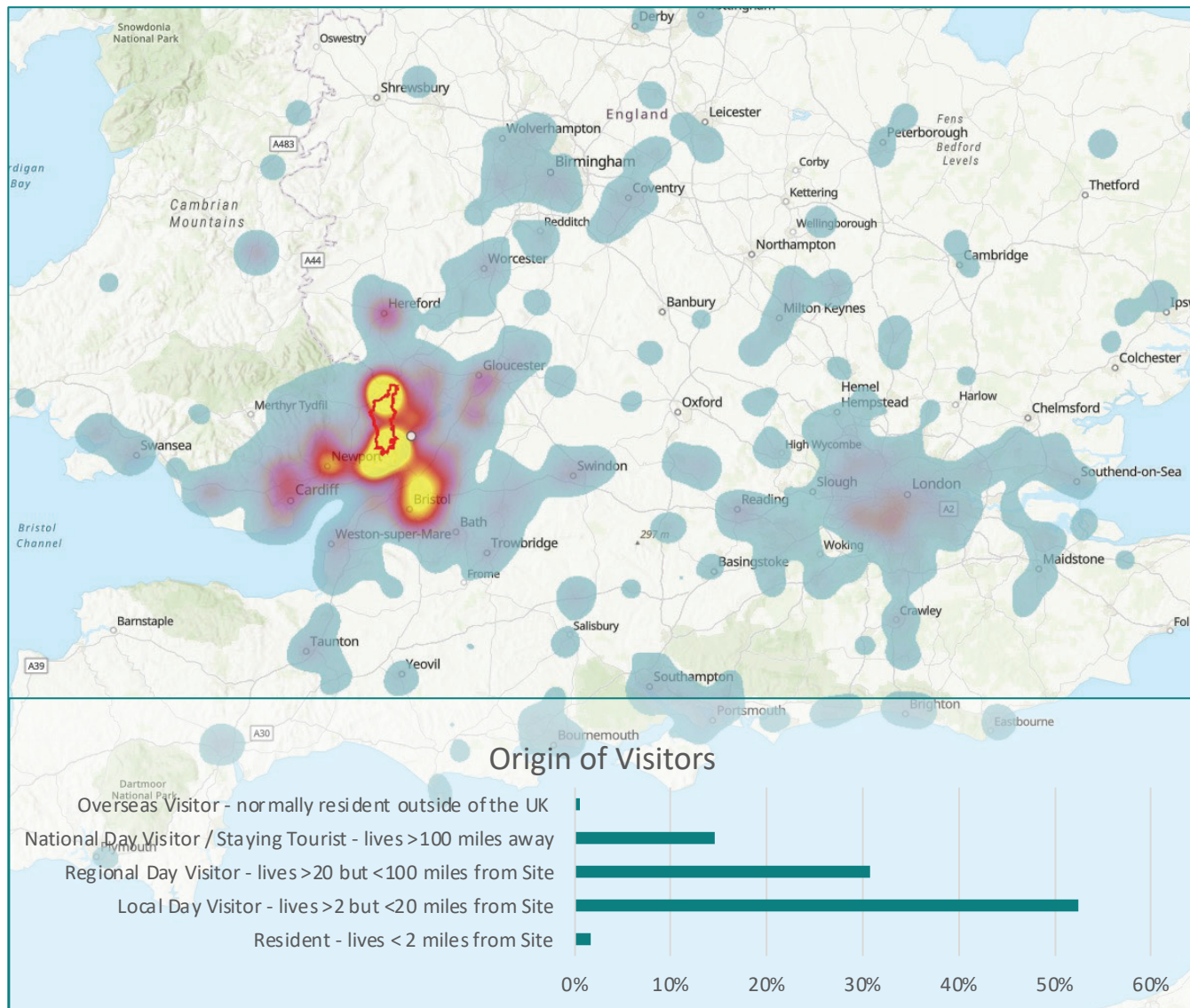
**Monthly** = 'several times a month'

**A few times a year or less often** includes 'a few times a year' and 'once a year or less often'

Base: 350 online responses



# Annex III Origin of Visitors



## Annex IV Increasing children's engagement with protected landscape

### *Key Findings*

1. Financial constraints present a significant barrier to engagement for families from underrepresented backgrounds as well as schools and other enabling organisations. Providing free or subsidised activities for families and schools is crucial, whilst increased sustainable funding options would help other organisations deliver their work more effectively.
2. Lack of facilities and accessibility can limit engagement, particularly for disabled children. Comprehensive information in advance as well as organisations providing equipment and trained staff can support families to engage.
3. Transport can be a key barrier to engagement for families and schools. This includes cost, travel distance and availability of transport in rural areas. Free or subsidised travel can help families and schools engage and funding for enabling organisations to provide transport is key.
4. Reaching underrepresented communities can be challenging, so partnerships with community organisations are important. Working via referral systems reduces bureaucratic barriers and can also help reach communities.
5. Children's engagement can be deeply affected by family and cultural factors like lack of experience or knowledge, or negative perceptions of nature. Stakeholders stressed the importance of accommodating different needs, which can help children and families feel supported to engage with protected landscapes.
6. Schools are a vital means through which to engage young people with protected landscapes. The curriculum can be a barrier to this; stakeholders felt that if the curriculum required engagement with protected landscapes, they would be more able to focus resources into delivering these activities.
7. Organisational partnerships that cut across stakeholder groups are key to ensuring that children can have a broad range of experiences, and this means that they are more likely to find the right activities and support.
8. The ability to engage with protected landscapes in a safe, inclusive space was important to young people and central to their enjoyment of activities.

# Annex V Unsealed Roads highlighted in the Consultation

