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MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting of Local Access Forum held
at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Thursday, 7th November, 2024 at 2.00 pm**

PRESENT: Philip Allsopp,
Bethany Handley,
Barbara Heys,
Shan Lewis,
Ian Mawdsley,
Terence Mead,
Phil Mundell,
Sally Roderick,
Jack Thurston,
Anne Underwood,
Kelvin Varney
Rhys Wynne-Jones
Plus Two Members of the Public

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Garner	Public Right of Way Officer
Dez Jones	Regional Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator, GGGP
Andy Powell	Field Officer, MCC
Richard Ray	Paralegal
Ruth Rourke	Countryside Access Manager

APOLOGIES:

County Councillor Sara Burch, R. Campbell. A. Fairey and H. Watkins

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from members John Askew, Anthea Fairey, Irene Brooke, County Councillor Sara Burch, Huw Watkins and from Bob Campbell Natural Resources Wales.

Welcome and Welsh Translations: LAF meeting opened with RG going through general housekeeping, a query was also put to the LAF as to any members requiring Welsh translation services or documents, no members required this service.

2. Declarations of Interest

None received

3. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum meeting of 23 July 2024.

The minutes of the meeting of 23rd July 2024 were accepted, (Proposed AU and seconded by BH)

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4. Actions arising from the previous meeting not on the agenda:

Subscription to 'Waymark' IPRoW Journal:
RG informed the LAF that once login details had been received these would be distributed to members.

ACTION: Send out login details once received – RG

Additional LAF member recruitment:
RG updated the LAF regarding contact emails sent out beginning of August to National Farmers Union (NFU), Farmers Union of Wales (FUW) & Country Land and Business Association (CLA), chaser sent start of October. As result of the FUW request a lady has put herself forward, we are currently waiting on her application for starting the process for membership of the forum. CLA has forwarded the information on, waiting to hear anything further.

ACTION: continue pursuing additional LAF membership - RG

5. Regional Wellbeing health project (Dez Jones, Regional Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator)

(Dez Jones, Regional Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator)

DJ made a presentation (attached) to the LAF on his role and work as part of the Gwent Green Grid project (GGGP) team, funded through the Shared prosperity fund (SPF) and Nature networks fund, he is employed out of Caerphilly council, but covers the five authorities of Gwent. DJ started with a brief overview of what the GGGP team undertakes, and on how his role fits in within this, seeking to support communities from a health and wellbeing perspective.

To undertake this with the limited time, resources and a large area to cover, he actively gathers intelligence and evidence using health data statistics to inform and target his work, such as identifying areas of deprivation for example. This has led to consulting with communities and groups, to find the issues that they encounter and how they see potential solutions to these. This may subsequently lead to further signposting to other organisations such as keep wales tidy (KWT), or groups without borders and extensive partnership working.

Where able to, some of the limited funding is being used to kick start projects that have a sustainable effect, examples include walking group leader training, Gilwern diversification-funding a number of raised beds and poly tunnel and into the woods project.

These projects vary from group to group, which can be difficult to balance.

Finally, he presented a video giving a brief intro to the GGGP health and wellbeing element and introduced the 'Into the woods' project.

Video link: [Back to the Woods Basecamp - Monmouthshire - Gwent Green Grid on Vimeo](#)

Questions received included.

What support could be provided for walking for health, and how to gain access to it? Subsequent discussion about having local authority designated officers working with the NHS via GP referral scheme, support needed to keep groups running long term, rather than just being left.

What aspects are you using to inform the targets? Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) score, -using local communities to highlight what they want/need, their stories.

For example, looking at the various health indices, highlighted that female life expectancy significantly lower in an area, and sparked an investigation to look deeper into why this is.

LAF involvement – a request to raise awareness and engage with community groups, DJ has also left his contact details.

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At conclusion the chair, on behalf of the LAF, thanked DJ for his informative presentation and contribution to the meeting.

6. Tracks and Trails project update (minutes attached) (Subgroup update)

BH gave an update to the LAF regarding the tracks and trails steering group meeting that had taken place on the 8th October 2024, for which she was elected as chair. Although unable to attend the meeting the draft minutes were provided to run through (attached), with others providing input that had attended. The minutes of the meeting are not yet available online, however these will be placed on the National landscape website.

One of the main actions from the sub-group is to implement a targeted survey of two pilot areas by consultants, the results of this to inform a fuller survey across most, if not all, of the relevant routes in the Wye valley national landscape areas. Subsequent meetings of the steering group are needed due to the scope of work, and the survey will also be used to inform their next steps.

Further discussion took place regarding consistent signage being a key part of this work, the continuing discussion around the suitability of the routes, both in terms of potential restrictions and improved accessibility and agreement that the membership of the LAF subgroup attending the steering group is to remain as current.

The next tracks and trails steering group meeting is due to take place on the 3rd of December 2024.

ACTION: Circulate minutes and website to the LAF- RG

ACTION: Update to next LAF meeting- BH/Subgroup

7. Natural Resources Wales update- (notes attached) (Sarah Tindal, Senior Officer People and Places, South East Wales)

(Sarah Tindal, Senior Officer People and Places, Southeast Wales)

SD went through and covered the attached update note from Bob Campbell and reported that the case for change work affecting NRW is ongoing and a presentation on the NRW recreation strategy and a fuller update will be given at the next LAF meeting.

Action: present NRW recreation strategy to next LAF – ST/BC

8. Monmouthshire Countryside Access update (Ruth Rourke, Countryside Access Manager & Andy Powell Countryside Access Management Officer)

RER ran through the attached update, highlighting; a grant application bid for £35,000 submitted for the Wales Coast Path Links and Loops project to improve three key routes, an appointed consultant will provide a consultation opportunity and a final report with all the necessary information to submit a further bid in new financial year.

A second grant bid has also been made to improve access for all, along stretches of the Wales Coast Path in Newport and Monmouthshire. A brief assessment was carried out by Experience Community (EC), in 2023/24 and this project looks at improving the scheme. A consultant will be asked to provide a costed and designed feasibility report. The grant will need to be completed by 31st March 2025. It again will provide the information to inform a further grant for implementation on the ground.

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Additionally, the Access Improvement Grant is in its final year, and has included the creation of training videos and seen significant volunteer efforts led by Tom Arnold, completing 63 task days.

RER also gave a brief update on bridges, including the Offa's dyke Treadam bridge and Inglis bridge in Monmouth, with a more detailed overview and presentation followed by AP.

RER also explained nationally Monmouthshire County Council is also involved with the Welsh Government and their aim of creating an All Wales Digital Map of public rights of way and access. The Welsh Government Geography Team (DataMapWales) are seeking to unify Public Rights of Way (PROW) digital mapping into a single digital map, managed by Data Map Wales.

Monmouthshire has already submitted most of the requested data as a pilot area (this information is already available at [access.monmouthshire](https://access.monmouthshire.gov.uk/)). LAF members queried the Data map Wales site, which was described as a central website for public open data, with a map element and was available to the public. Interest was expressed by forum members in receiving the data map Wales website link.

RER introduced one of the access teams Field officers, Andy Powell to present the ongoing work he has been involved with on bridges across the county.

AP presented a detailed overview of the current situation with bridges across the county, outlining the varying different types and lengths of structures across the 1362 bridges that can be found.

Their general condition, the challenges being faced in terms of inspection, repairs, closures and replacement.

In particular the process being used once a bridge has been closed, initial site visit, either after a report from a member of the public, or after a routine inspection, decision to close the bridge by notice (emergency notice lasts up to 24 days), then either programme in works to repair, if able to do so, or seek a closure order (lasting up to 6 months). To enable the bridge to remain closed whilst waiting for a replacement. Bridges in this position are added to a list and prioritised for replacement.

Once a bridge is to be replaced, funding needs to be sought, tenders are requested both to invite contractors to supply a bridge, remove the old one, prepare the ground and install the bridge, arrangements are also made with landowners to gain access, and the bridge installed. Several difficulties can arise during this process, such as the weather, water levels, landownership issues, bridge location, erosion etc. The recent Offa's dyke bridge was given as an example of where weather and water levels delayed installation and groundwork, and after installing the bridge, further storms meant that the new bridge needed a large tree removing from under neath it, further delaying the opening. Currently, although available, final works to the approaches are needed but this will need drier weather before this can occur.

Additionally, where some bridges that continue to be used, and barriers erected broken, despite the closure, a decision may be made to remove the bridge altogether until a replacement can be installed.

Finally, AP gave the current position of the asset management plan, and this year's bridge works that are hoped to be achieved, removing 10, replacing up to 15 and 4 with further assessments.

9. Future member submissions

The forum was asked whether they feel it would be worthwhile being able to send in written contributions, that could be circulated to the LAF, ahead of each meeting for noting. This was seen as a good idea and to be undertake from the next LAF.

ACTION: send out email requesting any written submissions. - RG

10. Date of next meeting 2.00pm on Wednesday 19th February (Venue to be confirmed)

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The meeting ended at 4.45 pm

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