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Monmouthshire
Local Access Forum
Annual Report



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Contents

Version Control	2
Chairman's Foreword	3
Secretary's Report.....	3
The Year reviewed	4
1. M4 Corridor around Newport	4
2. RoWIP Review	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3. Prioritisation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4. Projects and funding.....	5
Work Carried Out in 2016	6
Future Work Programme	6
Role of the Forum.....	7
Contacts	8
Appendix 1: Forum Membership.....	9
Appendix 2: Future Work Programme.....	10

Version Control

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Chairman's Foreword

This Report covers the third and final year of the current Forum to 11th November 2016.

I am the elected Chair and my Deputy is Anne Underwood. Our Secretary is Matthew Lewis, Green Infrastructure and Countryside Manager and meetings are attended by Ruth Rourke, Countryside Officer and Alan Clarke the Minute Secretary.

Details of our workload for the year are set out in the Review below. We have spent considerable time this year debating and commenting on a variety of issues including the M4 diversion proposals, access for responsible 4WD users and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan review. Anne and I have also worked closely with the National Representative for Welsh LAFs attending the National Chairs meeting and the National LAF Conference at Llanellwedd.

I will be standing down as a member of the Forum at the end of the term. I have served as Deputy Chair and then Chair for 10 years. It has been a rewarding experience and despite budgetary constraints I have seen progress in public access in Monmouthshire and throughout Wales. During the whole of this period I am particularly grateful to Matthew, Ruth and Alan for the very high level of professional support and enthusiasm they have provided.

I also very much appreciate the contribution made by all the members who have a wide range of knowledge and experience with thanks to those besides myself who are standing down at the end of the term. I am sure that those remaining and the new members will have a rewarding new LAF.

Richard Davies

Secretary's Report

This report marks the completion of the third year of the current LAF that runs until 11 November 2016. Despite our best efforts the forum's membership has continued under the statutory minimum. Given the limited period of office left the LAF resolved to concentrate efforts on recruiting a new LAF and I am pleased to that following a recruitment campaign say that the number of applicants has exceeded the statutory minimum.

The more formal approach to the LAF agenda's, reports and meetings has continued this year and has been successful in focussing the LAF activities.

During the past year the forum met on 26 January 2016 in Monmouth; 12 April 2016 in Magor; and 27 September 2016 in Monmouth. The first meetings of the new LAF are planned to take place in November /December 2016.

The LAF members continue to contribute to the resolution and development of countryside access issues and policy in Monmouthshire.

We are very grateful for their voluntary input and for the experience and advice they provide and I would like to particularly pay tribute to the retiring members of the current LAF for their long commitment to the work of the forum.

Matthew Lewis, Secretary

The Year reviewed

These are some of the issues where the LAF have advised and been consulted:-

1. M4 Corridor around Newport

Although only a small part of the proposed new route of the M4 is in Monmouthshire, it is very close to Magor and will potentially affect a number of rights of way. Member's views had previously informed the Council's response on rights of way matters and the forum made formal representations to Welsh Government. We are fortunate to have members who live locally whose local knowledge helped this process.

Subsequently in this period the forum has considered progress on the scheme and broadly welcomed the improvements to the treatment of rights of way which had resulted from the forum and the Council's detailed input. Further comments were made to Welsh Government in respect of changes to the scheme and in response to additional details, including in relation to the construction phase should the road proceed. The forum will wish to continue to monitor and comment as the public inquiry progresses and more detail, including of alternative proposals, becomes available. The Secretary will ensure the new LAF is suitably briefed and the forum will continue to work closely with the neighbouring Newport LAF as necessary.

2. RoWIP Review

The forum has considered the RoWIP Review on two occasions, the first in January to consider the potential approach to meeting the then draft guidance and secondly in September to consider the proposed detailed timescale and scope of the RoWIP review, including the relationship with the Brecon Beacons LAF.

Having a well prepared RoWIP has considerably helped obtain funding for a variety of projects since 2007 and the forum is of the view that a timely review of the RoWIP should be completed and that the review should involve as many interests as possible. The potential to hold drop-in consultation meetings again and to consider taking stands at local shows as well as advertising in local publications has been identified, as well as consultation with user groups and the production of an information pack which could be easily distributed.

The RoWIP review is likely to be the main focus of the new LAF's work over the coming months. The guidance suggests the involvement of the LAF should cover:

- Assisting with dialogue through contacts with national, regional and local organisations;
- Informing the data gathering exercise including the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- Advising on how the network could be improved for the public and where there are particular land management concerns;
- Advising on the related issue of access to open countryside especially where new linear routes may be desirable;
- Providing advice on prioritising implementation;
- Commenting on published draft plans; and

- Assisting in the resolution of conflicts between different representations when plans are issued for consultation.

The LAF Secretary will ensure the new LAF is appropriately briefed and involved, and will no doubt be assisted by those returning members from this LAF.

3. Prioritisation

The LAF has continued to receive information on numbers of outstanding issues and their prioritisation and agreed to look in more detail at the proportion of higher priorities dealt with or outstanding.

4. Projects and funding

We have received updates on the various funding streams and improvement projects being undertaken, including those being supported by the Wales Coastal Access Improvement Programme, the Rights of Way Improvement Plan Grant, National Trails Grant for Offa's Dyke Path, Active Travel Quick Wins Fund and the Council's own capital programme. We have also discussed the potential opportunities for additional funding as part of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership Scheme and the potential for Welsh Government grant for access improvements within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

We have continued to closely review progress on projects including the "Mon Lane Care" volunteering scheme and the implementation of the Active Travel Act.

Work Carried Out in 2016

No	Item	On Draft Plan or Additional	When Done
	Membership		
1.	Considered the recruitment of the new LAF	Additional	26 Jan 2016;
	Annual Report	Yes	26 Jan 2016; 27 Sept 2016
	Rights of Way Improvement Plan		
2	Considered the Review of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the proposed approach and the timescale	Yes	26 Jan 2016; 27 Sept 2016
	Considered the operation of the Prioritisation System and Performance Information	Yes	12 April 2016;
	Delegation agreement with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority	Additional	12 April 2016; 27 Sept 2016
	Consultations		
3.	None		
	Special Projects		
4.	Considered progress on "Mons Lane Care" initiative	Yes	26 Jan 2016;
	Active Travel	Yes	26 Jan 2016;
	Considered the new M4 proposals and their potential impact on public rights of way	Yes	12 April 2016; 27 Sept 2016
	Funding update	Yes	27 Sept 2016;
	Update from Natural Resources Wales	Yes	27 Sept 2016

Future Work Programme

The forum's future work programme will be set by the new LAF once appointed.

To be inserted

Role of the Forum

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities and National Parks, to establish Local Access Forums (LAFs). These forums advise Natural Resources Wales (NRW), local authorities and National Park authorities on ways in which local access can be improved.

The statutory purpose of LAFs is to advise on the improvement of public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment of the area in which they are established. LAF's must have regard to the needs of land management, natural beauty, flora, fauna, and geological and physiographical features.

The following bodies must have regard to any relevant advice given by the LAF: National Park authority, the highway authority, Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Government and, for matters relating to defence or security, the Secretary of State.

The forums must have a balance between:

- Users of access land and local rights of way; and
- Landowners and occupiers of access land and land with rights of way.

People with other interests especially relevant to the area will also be represented.

The Regulations specify there should be between 12 and 22 members, including the Chair and the Deputy. In addition the Chair may invite other individuals and organisations to observe and give advice.

Members are appointed by the Appointing Authority the local Highway Authority or National Park Authority. Monmouthshire County Council is the appointing authority for the Monmouthshire LAF which covers the administrative County of Monmouthshire outside the boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park. It includes the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Beauty within the county.

Within the area there are Registered Commons and 1657 Kilometres of registered Public Rights of Way. There is in addition a substantial length of County Unclassified Roads, the responsibility of the Highway Section, many of which are un-surfaced.

Monmouthshire County Council and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority have a Delegated Responsibility Agreement covering most aspects of the management of Public Rights of Way within the National Park.

Contacts

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LAF agendas, reports and minutes can be found on the Council's meetings calendar under the appropriate dates <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/home/local-democracy-and-councillors/council-meetings>

Appendix 1: Forum Membership

NAME	INTERESTS
John ASKEW	4x4 driving. Sustainable outdoor recreation. Promoting on and off road driving ethics and education. Proactive and volunteer repairs / maintenance to vehicular ROW. Map reading and advising other users and groups. Keeping green lanes open and usable. Survey works and ensuring information is readily available and updated.
Jenny BARRELL	As a keen walker, cyclist and horse rider, I firmly believe that there is no greater challenge than to ensure that future generations are able to enjoy our natural environment.
Pat BELSTEN	I am interested in the “wellbeing” of the countryside including the health benefits to all; also as a commoner am interested in commons.
Joanne BOLWELL	I have established a group of walkers and choose a monthly route to follow. I initiated a scheme at my son’s school to encourage pupils to walk in the countryside and eventually complete the Big Black Mountain Challenge.
Irene BROOKE	Farmer with local business and tourism interests. Enthusiastic walker in Monmouthshire and other areas of UK. Dog walker, horse rider and photographer. Flora and fauna of Angiddy Valley. Member of CLA, NFU and Monmouthshire Meadows Group.
Paul CAWLEY	Conservation/development of GWT’s Magor Marsh:- involved in the water vole project, a “wildlife warrior” youth group leader and countryside lecturer. Councillor for Magor with Undy Community Council serving on their parks and open spaces working group. Member of Gwent Levels Flood Defence Alliance campaigning to alleviate flood risk to the Gwent Levels. Conservation, wildfowling, game shooting.
Stella COLLARD	Volunteer and guide with Usk Civic Society, Usk Castle Friends and Usk Rural Life Museum. Co-editor Usk Town Trail. Smallholder with footpaths and local wildlife site who enjoys walking. Member Monmouthshire Meadows Group and Gwent Wildlife Trust.
Richard DAVIES (Chairman)	Many of my interests involve the use of rights of way and access land. This includes walking, cycling and running. I work with a group raising funds and awareness for Water Aid. Also improving my Welsh, my knowledge of mining history and following Welsh rugby.
Allen THOMAS (resigned 13 April 2016)	Country and hillwalking. Beekeeping. Cricket and rugby (as spectator). Sailing.
Anne UNDERWOOD (Deputy Chairman)	A horse rider for most of my life, a volunteer with the British Horse Society to promote and improve access provision for equestrians. A keen walker and explorer of the countryside. Local history, health promotion, yoga.
Ann WEBB	Councillor for Tintern. Appointed as the County Council’s representative.

Appendix 2: Future Work Programme

Item	Background	Reporting Arrangements
Standard Items:		
<i>Performance Measures</i>		<i>Regular report to LAF</i>
<i>Funding</i>		<i>Regular report to LAF</i>
<i>Consultations</i>		<i>Report to LAF</i>
Working Groups:		
<i>To be decided by the new LAF</i>		
Work Programme Items		
<i>Training</i>		
<i>Green Paper – Legislation Programme</i>		
<i>Production of Annual Report</i>		
<i>Highway Records and Claims</i>		
<i>Prioritisation System</i>		
<i>Volunteering</i>		
<i>Natural Resources Wales</i>		
<i>Active Travel</i>		
<i>New M4</i>		
<i>Walking Product & Websites</i>		
<i>Rights of Way Improvement Plan</i>		