

Monmouthshire Local Access Forum



Monmouthshire
Local Access Forum
Annual Report
23/24



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Version Control

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Chair's Foreword

This Report covers the third and last year of the previous Forum from 3 May 2023 to November 2023.

I was the elected Chair, and my Deputy was Irene Brookes. Our Secretary is Matthew Lewis, Environment and Culture Manager, MonLife and meetings were attended by relevant County Council officers and observers from Natural Resources Wales.

Details of our workload for the year are set out in the Review below.

It is pleasing to see very good attendance of members at our meetings, and I very much appreciate the contribution made by all the members and their wide range of knowledge and experience.

Anne Underwood, Chair

Secretary's Report

This report marks the completion of the third year of the previous LAF from its meeting on 3 May 2023 to its last meeting on 9 November 2023 and the agreed forward work programme for the new forum.

The forum has continued to operate with membership above the statutory minimum. The appointing authority's representative changed as a result of changes to the Council's cabinet in Autumn 2023. Councillor Sara Burch replaced Councillor Ben Callard as the authority's nominated representative on the forum.

Meetings were held face to face in accordance with the local access forum regulations

Meetings were held on 3 May 2023, 11 July 2023 and 9 November 2023, with public agendas available on the Council's web site. The 3-year period of appointment expired at the end of November and the Council started to make arrangements for the appointment of a new forum leading to the appointment of new members on 29 February 2024.

The LAF members continued 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 their commitment to the work of the forum.

The forum has been supported through the continuing commitment of officers from Natural Resource Wales, and across countryside access, highway, and legal teams with Monmouthshire County Council.

Matthew Lewis, Secretary

The Year reviewed

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

1. Countryside Access Improvement Plan

The forum has received updates on progress in implementing the Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) including partnership arrangements, grant / project delivery and community engagement. The LAF received an update on the proposed changes to display various legal registers and temporary closures within CAMS / the public interactive mapping system.

The forum discussed and received presentations on the Lower Wye Valley Tracks and Trails project (previously referred to as the Lower Wye Valley Integrated Recreational Access Strategy). The Strategy considers ways both to better manage the natural resources of the National Landscape (AONB) and also those that enjoy it, responding to the opportunity to support the tracks and trails network to address issues regarding the use and condition of the countryside access network with the National Landscape. Members supported the need to address these issues

2. Natural Resources Wales

Natural Resources Wales have provided regular updates on land management and forestry operations of interest to the forum and any changes in recreational policy. The forum has appreciated this approach and the information provided and questions answered.

3. Consultations

The forum members considered the consultation on the draft Public Space Protection Orders on Dog Controls in Monmouthshire. Members raised questions around the proposed order including how they related to unfenced sports pitches and play areas and a concern restriction could result in forcing more dog walking out into the surrounding countryside.

Members discussed the proposed revision of the local access forum regulations which had been included in the topics at the LAF Chairs meeting. The suggestion that members should be limited to one 3-year term of office, had proved controversial and was opposed by the Chair's meeting. Members continue to be in favour of practical changes to the administration and holding of future meetings, including allowing hybrid meetings, electronic communication etc.

Members received an update on Active Travel proposals including the proposals at Castle Meadows Abergavenny.

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Work Carried Out in 2023/24

No	Item	On work programme or additional	When Done
	Membership		
1.	Recruitment of new forum	Additional	11 July 2023 & 9 Nov 2023
	Countryside Access Improvement Plan		
2	Countryside Access improvement Grant projects and update	Yes	3 May 2023 & 9 Nov 2023
	Lower Wye Valley Integrated Recreational Access Strategy (Lower Wye Tracks and Trails)	Yes	3 May 2023, 11 July 2023 & 9 Nov 2023
	Consultations		
3.	Draft Public Space Protection Orders on Dog Controls in Monmouthshire (Monmouthshire County Council)	Additional	9 Nov 2023
	Local Access Forum Regulations proposed changes	Additional	9 Nov 2023
	Other matters		
4.	Annual Report 22/23	Yes	3 May 2023
	Active Travel Update	Additional	11 July 2023
	Natural Resources Wales land management, forest operations and recreational policy updates	Yes	3 May 2023, 11 July 2023 & 9 Nov 2023

Future Work Programme

The future work programme for the new forum was discussed and agreed at the 11 June 2024 meeting and is appended (Appendix 2).

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 National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural 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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More details on the Monmouthshire LAF are available at [Countryside Access - Monlife](#)

This includes link to the LAF agendas, reports and minutes on the Council's meetings calendar under the appropriate dates [Committee details - Local Access Forum \(monmouthshire.gov.uk\)](#) If not available please contact the Secretary.

Appendix 1: Forum Membership

a) Membership (to 24 November 2023)

NAME	INTERESTS
Anne Underwood – (Chair)	Walking and horse-riding
Irene Brooke – (Deputy chair)	Landowner and business representative
John Askew	Vehicular and motorised users
Councillor Sara Burch (from Nov 23)	Monmouthshire County Council representative
Councillor Ben Callard (to July 23)	Monmouthshire County Council representative
Jenny Cockitt	Landowner, natural environment
Anthea Fairey	Chair of Friends of Castle Meadows
Sylvia Fowles	Disabled Riding, conservation & history
Sheila Hampshire	Farming, wildlife and countryside access
Tracy Hook	Walking and horse-riding
Shan Lewis	Walking and healthy lifestyles
Phil Mundell	Walking user and volunteer
David Smith	Walking & climbing user, volunteer leader healthy walking group
Mark Storey	Cycling, climbing & walker
Martin Sweeney	Outdoor pursuits

Appendix 2: Future Work Programme

Item	Background	Reporting Arrangements	Progress / Plans
Standard Items:			
Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP)	Progress in implementing the approved CAIP	Regular report	Future Meetings via regular MCC operational update
Performance Measures	MonLife Delivery Plan performance measures of CAMS issues	Regular report	Future Meetings via regular MCC operational update
Funding	Progress on and opportunities for external funded & MCC capital funded countryside access projects programmes	Regular report	Future Meetings via regular MCC operational update
Consultations	Consultations to the LAF on relevant matters as required	Report to LAF	As required
Natural Resource Wales (NRW) updates	Update on forestry operations and access related issues	Regular report	Future Meetings via regular NRW operational update
Working Groups:			
Improvement subgroup (Proposed)	To be established to support working with local communities to identify future improvements, initially focussed on Chepstow Park Wood and then Wentwood Forest, subject to re-establishment of liaison arrangements with land managers and Newport City Council.	Regular report	Model TOR and agreement to establish LAF 11 June 2024; Update future meetings
Lower Wye Valley Tracks and Trails subgroup (Proposed)	To be established to act as the Tracks and Trails project steering group	Regular report	Model TOR and agreement to establish LAF 11 June 2024; Update future meetings
Gwent Access Group	To participate in the regional access group as required (currently dormant)	Report as required	As required
Work Programme Items			
Review of the existing	To review the operation of the prioritisation system	Report to future meeting	Future Meeting within 24/25

prioritisation system for maintenance, enforcement and legal orders (including DMMO claims)			
Bridges	To consider the asset management plan & capital programme	Report to future meeting	Future Meeting
Community Engagement and Volunteering	To consider the volunteering and community engagement programme	Report to future meeting	Future Meeting
Welsh Government Access Reform	To receive any updates on progress on the access reforms	Report as required	Updates as received