



Monmouthshire
Local Access Forum
Annual Report
20/21



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Version Control

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Chair's Foreword

This Report covers the first year of the current Forum from 24 November 2020.

I am the elected Chair, and my Deputy is Irene Brookes. Our Secretary is Matthew Lewis, Environment and Culture Manager, MonLife and meetings are attended by Ruth Rourke, Countryside Access Manager, Paul Keeble, Group Engineer Highways and Flood Management and observers from Natural Resources Wales.

Details of our workload for the year are set out in the Review below. This year activities have been challenged by the prevailing Covid 19 pandemic, initially delaying the first meetings of the forum and then requiring the forum to meet online under the temporary regulations to allow such meetings. Despite everyone's best efforts this has inevitably had an impact on the forum's work and members look forward to resuming face to face meetings.

It is pleasing to see the increased number of members 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 first year of the current LAF from its first meeting on 24 November 2020. It was pleasing that following a recruitment exercise carried out in 2019/20 there were sufficient applications to allow the forum to operate above the statutory minimum members. 15 members initially appointed. One further member has also joined the forum in this period to add to its range of expertise.

The commencement of the new forum was delayed by the impact of Covid 19 and lockdown restrictions. However, the provisions of The Countryside Access (Local Access Forum) (Wales) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 allowed virtual meetings to commence and the forum was able to have its first meeting in November 2020.

Its subsequent meetings on 9 March 2021, 22 July 2021 and 6 Dec 2021 have all been held online, without, as the regulations allowed for, public attendance.

The LAF members continue to contribute to the resolution and development of countryside access issues and policy in Monmouthshire and look forward to resuming face to face meetings and site visits when conditions allow.

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.

Matthew Lewis, Secretary

The Year reviewed

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

1. Active Travel

The forum contributed to the updating of the Active Travel Network Map through response to the consultation on the revised map, required to improve Active Travel routes, and plan how routes will join up to form networks so that people can more easily get around by cycle or as a pedestrian.

2. Countryside Access Improvement Plan

The forum has received updates on progress in implementing the Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP) including staffing changes, partnership arrangements and grant / project delivery. The LAF considered and supported in principle the proposals to develop an inclusive user-strategy for all lower Wye unclassified county roads (UCRs), subject to receiving further details and pending sufficient resources being available to undertake a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

3. Consultations

The forum has contributed to National Resources Wales (NRW) planning of consultations relating to forest operation plans and responded to NRW/Welsh Government on the extension of the temporary LAF Regulations (although eventually these were not extended by Welsh Government). The forum has also been updated on the progress of the Access Reforms (via a NRW briefing note) and the outcomes of the LAF Chairs Meeting in December 2021. Members also responded to direct consultation on a woodland creation proposal at Devauden.

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Work Carried Out in 2020/21

No	Item	On work programme or additional	When Done
	Membership		
1.	Initial briefing by the Appointing Authority	As required by Regulations	24 November 2020
	Appointment of Chair and Deputy Chair	As required by Regulations	24 November 2020 9 March 2021
	Consideration of need for additional members	As required by Regulations	9 March 2021 6 December 2021
	<i>Countryside Access Improvement Plan</i>		
2	Countryside Access Improvement Plan Delivery Plan	Yes	22 July 2021
	Partnership working	Yes	6 December 2021
	(a) Gwent Green Grid Partnership		
	(b) Living Levels Partnership		
	(c) Wye Valley AONB		
	Staffing, CAIP delivery and issues	Yes	6 December 2021
	<i>Consultations</i>		
3.	Active Travel Consultation: Active Travel Network Map	Yes	22 July 2021
	Woodland creation proposal Devauden	Additional	By direct consultation with members Oct 2021
	Extension of temporary LAF regulations	Additional	6 December 2021
	NRW Forest Resource Plan – request to identify consultees	Additional	6 December 2021
	<i>Other matters</i>		
4.	Access Reform Briefing	Yes	6 December 2021
	LAF Chairs Meeting 2 December 2021	Yes	6 December 2021

Future Work Programme

The future work programme as discussed and agreed at the 26 April 2022 meeting is appended (Appendix 2).

As well as regular items it includes an intention to establish two subgroups; an Improvement subgroup to support working with local communities to identify future improvements; and to seek to re-establish liaison arrangements in respect of Wentwood (with forestry managers and Newport CC).

The LAF also intends to participate in the newly formed Gwent Regional Access Group to assist in preparing a strategic access improvement plan to encourage and enable collaborative working across the Gwent local authorities.

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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More details on the Monmouthshire LAF are available at [Monmouthshire Local Access Forum \(LAF\) - 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) 2020/21 Membership (to 24 November 2023)

NAME	INTERESTS
Anne Underwood – (Chair)	Walking and horse-riding
Irene Brooke – (Vice chair)	Landowner and business representative
John Askew	Vehicular and motorised users
Jenny Cockitt	Landowner, natural environment
Gordon Davies	Walking, education and young people's access
Anthea Fairey	Chair of Friends of Castle Meadows
David Farnsworth	Walking and local access (<i>resigned April 2022</i>)
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
Councillor Ann Webb	Monmouthshire County Council representative

Appendix 2: Future Work Programme

Item	Background	Reporting Arrangements
Standard Items:		
<i>Countryside Access Improvement Plan (CAIP)</i>	<i>Progress in implementing the approved CAIP</i>	<i>Regular report</i>
<i>Performance Measures</i>	<i>MonLife Delivery Plan performance measures of CAMS issues (all issues & High priority issues) Available quarterly</i>	<i>Regular report</i>
<i>Funding</i>	<i>Progress on and opportunities for external funded & MCC capital funded countryside access projects programmes</i>	<i>Regular report</i>
<i>Consultations</i>	<i>Consultations to the LAF on relevant matters as required</i>	<i>Report to LAF</i>
<i>Natural Resource Wales (NRW) updates</i>	<i>Update on forestry operations and access related issues</i>	<i>Regular report</i>
Working Groups:		
<i>Improvement subgroup (Proposed)</i>	<i>To be established to support working with local communities to identify future improvements</i>	<i>Regular report</i>
<i>Wentwood subgroup (Proposed)</i>	<i>To seek to re-establish liaison arrangements in respect of Wentwood (with forestry managers and Newport CC)</i>	<i>Report as required</i>
<i>Gwent Access Group</i>	<i>To participate in the regional access group</i>	<i>Report as required</i>
Work Programme Items		
<i>Definitive Map Modification Order (DDMO) Claims</i>	<i>To review the number of claims and their prioritisation</i>	<i>Report to future meeting</i>
<i>Welsh Government Access Reform</i>	<i>To receive any updates on progress on the access reforms</i>	<i>Report as required</i>
<i>Wye Valley Unclassified County Roads (UCRs)</i>	<i>To consider the development of an inclusive user-strategy for all lower Wye unclassified county roads and related countryside access network</i>	<i>Report to future meeting</i>
<i>Forest Resource Plans</i>	<i>To participate in the consultation on Natural Resource Wales (NRW) Wye Valley South Forest Resource Plan</i>	<i>Report to future meeting</i>