

Monmouthshire Local Access Forum



Monmouthshire Local Access Forum Annual Report

January 2016



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Version Control

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Chairman's Foreword

This report covers the second year of the current forum, 12 months from 11th November 2014.

I am the elected Chair and my Deputy is Anne Underwood. During the year Andrew James resigned his membership. He had made a considerable contribution particularly relating to disabled access. Details of current LAF members are set out in Appendix 1.

Our Secretary is Matthew Lewis Green Infrastructure and Countryside Manager and meetings are also attended by the Countryside Access Officer Ruth Rourke and Minute Secretary Alan Clarke. The LAF is very fortunate to have this level of support.

As you will see from the Review below, we have continued to debate, advise and comment on a variety of issues. We have a wide range of experience and knowledge among our members. Their interests include walking, cycling, horse riding and motorised access. All agree on the many health benefits of access to the open air and to the countryside. The views of landowners are also strongly represented.

Anne and I attended the 16th Annual Chairs meeting in February and Anne, Stella and I the annual Local Access Forum Conference, both at Llanelwedd.

The term of the current LAF expires in November 2016. Members are determined to contribute strongly during this period and we hope to make more people in Monmouthshire aware of the work of the LAF and aware of the opportunities to enjoy access to the open air which is so important to the future wellbeing of our country.

Richard Davies
Chair

Secretary's Report

This report marks the completion of the second year of the current LAF that runs until 11 November 2016. The resignation of Andrew James returned the LAF membership to under the statutory minimum. Approaches were made to Town and Community Councils to seek further nominations but these did not result in any enquiries. Given the limited period of office left the LAF has recently resolved to ask me to start the process of recruiting a new LAF in the New Year, to try and ensure there is a continuity of LAF meetings.

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 11 December 2014 in Caldicot; 28 April 2015 at County Hall, Usk; 9 June 2015 at Magor; 9 September 2015 and 17 November 2015, both at County Hall Usk. In addition some LAF members attended site visits to inspect works at

Blackrock on the Wales Coast Path, in connection with the proposed Mons Lane Care Scheme near Usk and on the proposed alignment of the new M4 at Magor.

It is intended that the forum will continue to meet roughly quarterly as business demands and a rolling programme of work items is in place.

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.

Matthew Lewis
Secretary

The Year reviewed

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

1. Mons Lane Care Scheme

We have continued to carefully discuss the joint scheme between the County and TreadLightly, who represent responsible four wheeled drive (4WD) and motorcycle users in the countryside. The LAF were asked to consider a number of potential routes that can be opened up with the help of TreadLightly volunteers. These are all route with historic highway rights but bearing in mind the controversy that can surround 4WD use, we have asked that a pilot project of 5 routes is carried out first. This is subject to prior discussion with community councils and affected landowners. Members visited some of the routes and will closely monitor the pilot.

2. M4 diversion around Newport

Although only a small part of the proposed route is in Monmouthshire, it is very close to Magor and will potentially affect a number of rights of way. Members spend a day discussing the details and walking the route. We then made formal representations to the Welsh Government. We will continue to monitor and comment as the detailed scheme develops and work closely with the neighbouring Newport LAF. We are fortunate to have the knowledge of members who live locally and we were joined for the day by one of the local councillors Jessica Crook.

3. A.465 Gilwern to Brynmawr

The County has worked very hard with neighbouring local authorities to minimise the effect of the improvements on public access along the route. Although part of the land is within Monmouthshire, it forms part of the Brecon Beacons LAF and they have kept us advised at all stages.

4. Green Paper Improving opportunities for access to the outdoors for responsible recreation

This has been a significant exercise with consultees asked to consider a wide range of potential models for access ranging from the status quo to unrestricted access along the lines that exist in Scotland and Scandinavia. The LAF held a meeting specifically to consider the implications and the Chair submitted a response reflecting the views and comments of the members. We did not want to see a radical change to the existing system but did support ways of streamlining legal processes and reducing costs. We were very ably advised by Matthew and Ruth and the LAF supported the County's clear and comprehensive response.

5. Active Travel Act 2013

The County have published maps required under the Act showing existing routes within communities in Monmouthshire with a population over 2000 suitable for active travel. Because of the short period for consultation, the LAF has not submitted a County wide response. Instead, members with knowledge of the designated communities have provided comments on the existing routes and potential new ones.

6. ROWIP Review

We have considered the Guidance given to local authorities by NRW for the review of the current ROWIPs that end in 2017. Members support the County's view that the process of renewal should not be so lengthy as to leave us without a document in 2017. Having a well prepared ROWIP has considerably helped obtain funding for a variety of projects since 2007. The view of Members is that the new plan should set out a clear picture of core principles with a detailed rolling programme of work. There is concern that including land within the National Park in the plan will lead to duplication and lengthy discussion with the other 8 authorities also forming the area of the Park. A brief response to the NRW consultation was made by the Chair.

7. Prioritisation

We have reviewed the operation of the County's rights of way prioritisation scheme and examined the impact on the backlog of rights of way issues. We noted the difficult choices that prioritising limited resources bring and particularly noted the impact of "lower" priority issues on local community routes. Members were of the view that that Community Councils and local people should be encouraged to become more pro-active. Members recognised the good examples of this in parts of the County and agreed it was important to try and spread this message more widely. The LAF will continue to receive information on numbers of outstanding issues and their prioritisation.

8. 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 and the Council's own capital programme.

Work Carried Out in 2015

No	Item	On Draft Plan or Additional	When Done
	Membership		
1.	Considered membership vacancies	Additional	28 April 2015; 9 Sept 2015; 17 Nov 2015
	Annual Report	Yes	11 Dec 2014
	Rights of Way Improvement Plan		
2	Considered the operation of the Prioritisation System	Yes	11 Dec 2014; 28 April 2015
	Considered projects / funding including the ROWIP grant	Yes	11 Dec 2014; 28 April 2015; 9 June 2015; 9 Sept 2015
	Consultations		
3.	Considered response to Welsh Government consultation on Improving Opportunities to Access the Outdoors for Responsible Recreation;	Yes	9 Sept 2015
	Responded to NRW consultation on Draft Guidance for Rights of Way Improvement Plans;	Yes	17 Nov 2015
	Special Projects		
4.	Received updates on Local Transport Plan and Active Travel Consultation	Yes	28 April 2015; 17 Nov 2015
	Considered "Mons Lane Care" proposal	Yes	11 Dec 2014; 28 April 2015; 17 Nov 2015
	Considered the A465 Dualling	Yes	11 Dec 2014
	Considered the new M4 proposals and their potential impact on public rights of way	Yes	9 June 2015; 9 Sept 2015; 17 Nov 2015

Future Work Programme

The forum's future work programme as due to be considered at its meeting on 26 January 2016 is attached at 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 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.
Andrew JAMES (resigned membership April 2015)	Disabled and general countryside matters.
Allen THOMAS	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:		
Performance Measures	Include in “updates” report	Regular report to LAF
Funding	Include in “updates” report	Regular report to LAF
Consultations	Responses to NRW, MCC and other consultations as required	Report to LAF
Working Groups:		
Tir Gofal / Glastir Permissive routes	Report as required	Sub Group / Report to LAF
Development/External Funding/Active Travel	Report as required	Sub Group / Report to LAF
Work Programme Items		
Training	Initial training session held 23 June 2014 at Shire Hall, Monmouth. Second session, for those unable to attend, to be agreed	Training sessions
Green Paper – Legislation Programme	Awaiting response to Green Paper consultation from Welsh Government	Future report to LAF
Production of Annual Report	Final Report of Current LAF due in November 2016	
Highway Records and Claims	Considering progress being made on reviewing procedures, protocols and records, including Definitive Map Modification Order, List of Street, Highway Records and Definitive Map Records	Background addressed in training / Future report to LAF
Prioritisation System	Reviewed LAF 11 December 2014 and 28 April 2015 and LAF will maintain an overall review of the operation of the prioritisation system	Future report to LAF
Volunteering	Update / review	Future report to LAF
Natural Resources Wales	Natural Resources Wales Update	Future report to LAF
Active Travel	Results of Consultation on existing network map	Future report to LAF

New M4	Consideration of Draft Orders due to be published 10 March 2016 (To include consideration of sub group if required with Newport LAF)	Future report to LAF
Walking Product & Websites	Consideration and review of current position	Future report to LAF
Rights of Way Improvement Plan	Procedures and timescale for its review	Future report to LAF