

# Monmouthshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) October 2007



This document is available in alternative formats such as large print.

The final Monmouthshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan was approved on 3 October 2007. This document has been prepared with the assistance of Monmouthshire's Local Access Forum and informed by various public consultation events and responses from a wide range of organisations and individuals.

### Contents

	<b>Page</b>
1. Introduction	2
2. Our Countryside Access Assets: Network Assessment	5
3. Health Benefits of Countryside Access	10
4. Economic Development and Tourism	14
5. Transport	18
6. Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights of Way	23
7. Maintenance and Enforcement of PROW	27
8. The needs of the Blind or partially sighted people and others with mobility problems	32
9. Publicity and Promotion	37
10. Links to other plans and strategies	42
11. Resources	47
12. Monitoring	50

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### VISION FOR MONMOUTHSHIRE

1. To recognise the economic, social and heritage value of our public rights of way network as an important investment in the future for the residents and visitors of Monmouthshire.
2. To maintain and improve local rights of way in order to promote and encourage their use and enjoyment for the physical and mental well being of all of Monmouthshire's residents and visitors.
3. To sustain the quality and diversity of Monmouthshire's countryside and to promote responsible countryside access for all.

## 1. Introduction

### Background

The 471kms of Rights of Way in Monmouthshire, which fall within the boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park, do not form part of this Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). This part of the network has been assessed by

the National Park who will be including this area within their own ROWIP.

A safe, well maintained and attractive public rights of way (PROW) network should perform many functions, which include, but stretch beyond leisure and recreation alone. The network is part of the local transport infrastructure, providing paths away from busy roads, from people's homes to the local countryside. It provides communities with opportunities to sustain and improve their health and well-being. They provide the principal means by which the special landscape and biodiversity of Monmouthshire can be appreciated and enjoyed. It sustains tourism and provides opportunities for economic regeneration.



The Government recognises that to achieve the above there is a need for local authorities to take a proactive role in managing their public rights of way networks, rather than directing resources towards problems as and when they occur.

This ROWIP is the means by which Monmouthshire County Council will identify, prioritise and plan for improvements to the current access available in the County. The plan will set out the priorities and objectives for countryside access in Monmouthshire and will last ten years before it will have to be reviewed. Importantly it will provide the basis of all rights of way work in Monmouthshire for the next ten years.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires all highway authorities to produce a ROWIP by November 2007. The Welsh Assembly Government has provided guidance that states that in drawing up the ROWIP, authorities are required to make an assessment of:

- ↗ the extent to which local rights of way meet the **present and likely future needs** of the public.
- ↗ the opportunities provided by **local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and enjoyment.**

## RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- ⇒ the accessibility of local rights of way to **blind or partially sighted persons** and others with **mobility problems**.

These assessments were carried out from 2004 to 2006 and a detailed Assessment Report has been prepared separately from this report.

**This ROWIP contains the key findings of the assessments together with a statement of action proposed for the management of local rights of way and for securing an improved network of local rights of way, with particular regard to the matters dealt with in the assessments.**

Guidance defines “local rights of way” as “footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. Cycle tracks with or without a right of way on foot (other than those in or by the side of a highway consisting or comprising a made up carriageway) also come under the scope of ROWIP’s.”

This means that the ROWIP encompasses all PROW recorded on the Definitive map and Statement together with all routes and means of access which have PROW over them, but are not recorded. We must also take into account cycle tracks, permissive routes, routes

across open access land, or other routes which are known and used locally and which potentially could be recorded. Throughout this document, the term “countryside access network” is used in preference to “rights of way network” for this reason, unless specifically relevant to public rights of way only.

### How is this document structured?

The next section of the ROWIP examines our countryside access network and looks at the range of opportunities that exist for accessing the countryside. The analysis reveals where provision is particularly poor, or in need of development. It also looks at latent demand, health and economic benefits of access.

Then themed chapters examine the key conclusions in respect of transport; the Definitive Map and legal changes to rights of way; maintenance and enforcement of public rights of way; the accessibility of rights of way for those who are blind, partially sighted or have mobility problems; promotion; and resources and monitoring of the plan.

At the end of each chapter there are statements of action that the authority will take in order to resolve the key issues that have arisen from the assessments.

These will form the basis of an annual business plan for countryside access.

It is important to note that the statements of action will only be possible to achieve if additional funding and resources are found. Furthermore they cover a ten-year period and therefore the projected timelines, identified funding and statements will be subject to change in the future and are only our best estimates at the time of going to print. It is hard to give precise figures for future activity. The symbol £ is used when it is felt that the activity will require resources of less than £5,000; **££** between £5,000 and £50,000; **£££** of more than £50,000. Where extra staff resources will be required these have been identified where possible.

The ROWIP will be supported by a 3-year rolling business plan to provide more details of the short and medium term actions and anticipated resources (see sections 11 and 12)

## Ways Recorded on the Definitive Map and Statement: -

**Public Footpaths** = rights of access for pedestrians with a “usual accompaniment” (e.g. dog, pushchair, invalid carriage).



An example of a public footpath. Note many paths still have stiles but a growing number now have gates and are more accessible to those with disabilities or pushchairs.

**Byways** = (open to all traffic) rights of access for pedestrians, horse riders, cyclists and motor vehicles (properly taxed and licensed).

**Restricted Byways** = rights of access for walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers to use, but the rights of motor vehicle users (where they exist) will be unrecorded and exercising those rights might be more difficult.



An example of a Restricted Byway. It is worth noting that not all paths are surfaced and the width varies from path to path.

**Public Bridleways** = rights of access for pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists. Cyclists must give way to other users. You may also lead a horse on a bridleway.



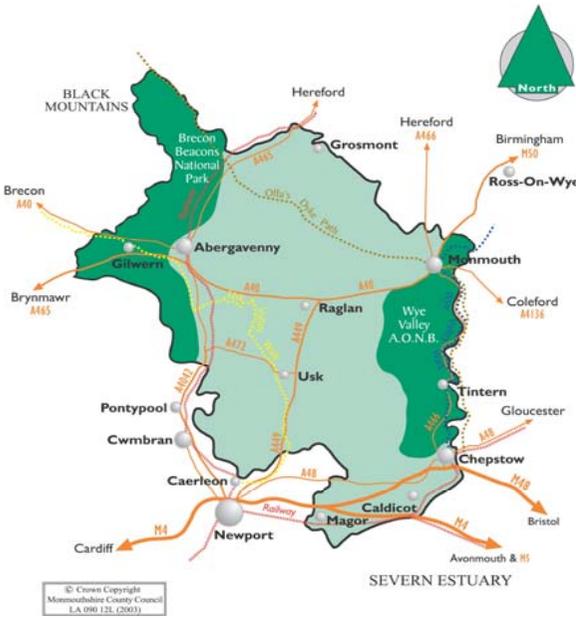
An example of a bridleway.

**RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

**2. Our Countryside access assets; network assessments**

**What is Monmouthshire like?**

Monmouthshire lies in the south east corner of Wales, sharing its border with England to the east. It is a large rural county, covering 850 square kilometres with a growing population of 84,979, half of whom live in the main towns of Abergavenny, Monmouth, Usk, Caldicot and Chepstow.



Monmouthshire has a beautiful and varied landscape, including the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding National Beauty in the east and a World Heritage Site, which is located in the north west of the county in the Brecon Beacons National Park. Much of Monmouthshire outside the AONB is designated a “Special Landscape Area” which recognises the high quality of the landscape in terms of its visual, scenic, historical, natural and cultural characteristics.

Farming, forestry and service industries are the most significant areas of employment with many jobs being seasonal.

Monmouthshire is easily accessible from England and the rest of Wales and is therefore ideally placed to attract a large number of tourists.

**What access have we got?**

This section describes and assesses the opportunities available to Monmouthshire’s residents and visitors for accessing the countryside. The areas of deficiency identified through this process will help to target improvements described in the statement of action.

The following table shows the extent of rights of way that are present in Monmouthshire.

**Table 1. Extent of PROw network**

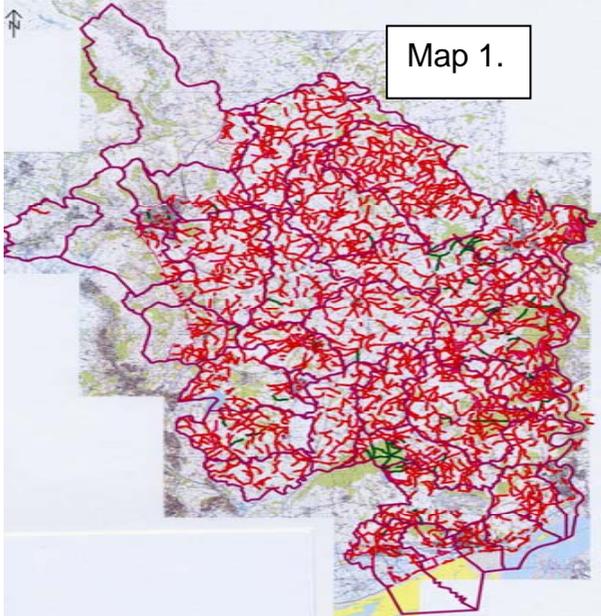
Status of Path	% of network	Total KM
Bridleway	4%	71
Footpath	91%	1,499
Restricted Byways	5%	84.5
Byway	0%	1.5
Total km of PROw in Monmouthshire (excluding BBNP)		1,656 km
Total km of PROw in Wales		33,200 km

One immediate conclusion which can be drawn just from looking at these figures is that there are not many routes available to horse riders and cyclists, compared with the network available for pedestrians. The situation is bleaker still for the driver of a horse drawn carriage or recreational motor vehicle.

**What have we got for walking?**

Map 1 shows the entire recorded public rights of way network outside of the Brecon Beacon National Park. Walkers are the only type of user who may use the entire recorded network. Although there is localised fragmentation, there is generally a high density and good coverage for walking in the county.

**RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**



Map 1.

(Key: Red are footpaths, green are bridleways)

Map 1 also shows the density of all recorded public rights of way. Generally there is good network of footpaths all over Monmouthshire but there are gaps in provision where there are Ministry of Defence Sites (such as in Caerwent) and in areas of privately owned estates such as The Hendre in Monmouth and along the coast.

There is also an identified need for a path around Llandegfedd Reservoir and there are problems for users all along the A40/A449, that has few suitable road crossings.

There are numerous promoted circular walks and 4 long distance trails (Wye Valley Walk, The Three Castles Way, The Usk Valley Walk and the Monnow Valley Walk), not including the Offa's Dyke Path, which is a national trail.

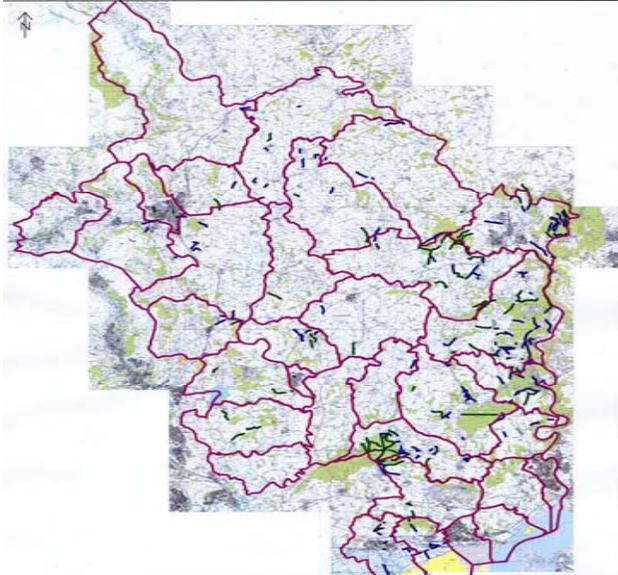
**What have we got for horse riding and cycling?**

Map 2 shows the path network that is available for off road horse riding and off road cycling. It consists of Bridleways, 2 Byways and Restricted Byways. The map reveals a highly fragmented network, with little chance of connectivity possible without including the highways network, which raises a number of road safety issues.

There is currently no map available to show all the existing cycle ways in Monmouthshire. Consultation results suggest that apart from a few National routes there is little provision for cyclists in Monmouthshire.

There is currently only one promoted bridleway circuit in Monmouthshire and little information for cyclists.

Map 2. Network for off road cyclists and horse riders.



(Key: Blue are Restricted Byways, Green = Bridleways)

**What have we got for carriage driving and recreational motor vehicles?**

The network available for off-road carriage driving and off road vehicles is virtually non-existent. There are currently only 2 byways (open to all traffic) in the county and 84.5km of Restricted Byways (open to non motorised traffic and horse drawn carriages<sup>1</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> Except where it can be proved there is an exception as explained in the NERC Act.

Carriage drivers and motor vehicles may also use unsealed and unclassified county roads, of which there are a substantial number in Monmouthshire, but there appears to be some uncertainty with users over which routes may or may not be legally used and who is responsible for them. Improving information and signage to make it clear which routes carry vehicular status would be beneficial.



*Photo of "Access for All" Guided Walk Event*

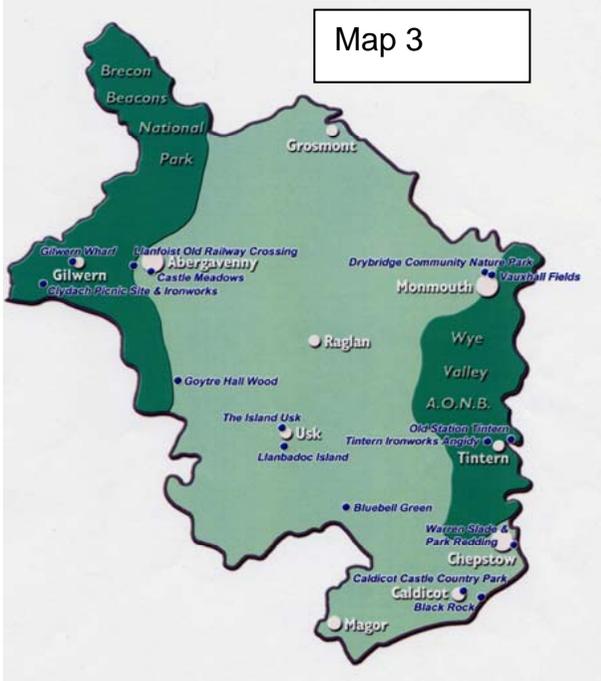
**How much of the network is accessible for people with mobility or visual impairments?**

Details regarding levels of access available to mobility or visually impaired users are not available. The Countryside Council for Wales Condition Survey in 2002 estimated that 2.4% of the network in Monmouthshire was accessible for all. Since 2004 Monmouthshire has had a "Least Restrictive" access policy that is known to have improved many paths. This will have increased upon the 2.4% in 2002 but it is not known at the present time by how much. The Statements of Action (in chapters 3 & 8) identify our proposed actions for improving and increasing access for people with mobility and visual impairments.

**What about Access Land, Country Parks and other types of access?**

Monmouthshire has one Country Park at Caldicot and 14 other Countryside Service sites that are spread around the county as shown in Map 3. These provide access for walking, running, kite flying, picnicking etc. Other County Council landholdings also allow further countryside access opportunities.

In Monmouthshire there are about 150 hectares of mainly rural commons, which are designated as "Open Access" sites. In addition Forestry Commission Wales has dedicated 3,550ha of woodlands for access.



The right to use such access is on foot only to undertake activities such as climbing, running, bird watching and picnicking. Dogs must be kept on a lead between 1 March and 31 July and at all times near farm animals. Under bylaws they must be kept under control at all times in Forestry Commission woods including those registered as Open Access. Restrictions to access may be applied to open access land and are shown on the national access website: [www.ccw.gov.uk/countrysideaccesswales](http://www.ccw.gov.uk/countrysideaccesswales)

Public and voluntary bodies provide linear access and countryside sites such as the National Trust at The Kymin and Clytha Park Estate, the Woodland Trust at Wentwood, Abergavenny, Monmouth, Shirenewton and Llantillio Crossenny, Countryside Council for Wales on National Nature Reserves, Gwent Wildlife Trust at 18 reserves in the county, British Waterways Board and Dwr Cymru. A number of Community Council's also manage sites that contribute to countryside access.

Private landowners also provide permissive bridleways and footpaths. These are routes where the landowner has given permission to individuals to use their land on foot or horse, but they retain the right to stop this use at any time. With the exception of Tir Gofal these types of rights are not recorded, but it is known they are particularly useful to horse riders and large parts of the Usk Valley Walk and Wye Valley Walk rely on permissive access.

Monmouthshire is also served by Gwent Outdoor Centres and by private companies who offer opportunities to participate in climbing, caving, canoeing, kayaking, hill walking, camping, raft building, fishing and other adventure pursuits.

### **What currently limits or puts people off using paths in Monmouthshire**

The main things which limit or put people off using paths are overgrowth, path obstructions, lack of signposting (including waymarking) and lack of promotional material.

### **Latent Demand**

Walking, cycling and horse riding are on the increase, as evidenced by the growth in membership of relevant interest groups such as the Ramblers Association, British Horse Society, Cyclists Touring Club and the National Trust. There is also a predicted growth rate of 3.5% in the number of tourists visiting Wales.

The National Equestrian Statistics 1996 state that over 1 million people say they might like to try horse riding.

A Gallup Poll commissioned by the County Landowners Association in 1998 showed that 80% of respondents would like to see more access to the countryside, with 41% more likely to visit the countryside more often if there was increased access provision within 5 miles of home.

### **Why do people not use paths and trails in Monmouthshire?**

The main reasons given by the public who contributed to the assessment report were:

- Lack of suitable paths near home,
- Too dangerous/don't feel safe,
- Health reasons/disability
- Worried about getting lost or trespassing on private land
- Not enough information on where to go or how to get there
- Not interested/other hobbies
- Don't have enough time

For cyclists and horse riders there are perceived and real dangers of using countryside lanes for their activities. However a key issue common to both users and non-users is the feeling there is not enough information available on where to go or how to get there. It is possible that this, taken with the lack of waymarking and maintenance, may explain why people choose not use the paths and trails in Monmouthshire. If these issues are addressed 64% of those respondents who presently do not use public rights of way indicated they might then choose to use them.

There is clearly a need to improve information available about the network

and to continue to maintain and signpost all routes as well as possible. This suggests that the way forward should be to improve the condition and promotion of the present network. The cost of creating new routes is only justified where a substantial public benefit is likely, for example by linking existing routes or providing disabled access to an enjoyable landscape that can not be reached by existing paths.

### **New paths/ projects requested by the public.**

During the consultation process for this document various specific projects for new access was requested. The outline of these projects is listed below and they will be actioned only when additional resources and opportunities arise and in accordance with any maintenance hierarchy or other relevant policies.

- The adoption of the Monnow Valley Walk by the Highway Authority
- Upgrading of furniture and route improvements on the Wye Valley Walk by Piercefield House.
- The extension of the footpath from the floodgate in Chepstow to the Station.
- To improve the towpaths on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal.
- To liaise with British Waterways regarding new access opportunities

and path improvements at various sites i.e. Llanfoist, Llanellen and Marches Way.

- All routes stated in Policy M44 of the UDP (where they are not Urban routes).
- Tintern to Wentwood off road cycling route
- New footpath around Llandegfedd Reservoir
- Creation of Bridleways in Llanbadoc and Portskewett.
- Access along the Coast
- Footpath creation to Llangwm Church
- Creation of new long distance footpath linking Cwmbran to Monmouth (South Gwent Way)
- Creation of a route for the Cistercian Way
- New path to link Wye Valley Way and Usk Valley Way to create a long distance circular walk around Monmouthshire.

### **Key Conclusions**

- There is a shortage of off road countryside access provision for cyclists and horse riders. (see statement of action 3a, 4b, 5d, 5f)
- There are gaps in the provision of public rights of way where there

are Ministry of Defence sites, in areas of private estates and around Llandegfedd Reservoir and on the coast. (see Statements of Action 4c and the preceding section on this page)

- There is little information available for horse riders and cyclists. (see Statements of Action 3c, 6b, 8e, 9a, 9b)
- There is a need to improve information and signage to make it clear which routes carry vehicular status. (see Statements of Action 8c, 5f)
- There is a need to promote identify and increase the percentages of paths in Monmouthshire which are available for those with mobility or visual impairments. (see Statements of Action 3a, 3c, 8a to 8e)
- Overgrowth, path obstructions, lack of signposting and promotional material limit or put people off using paths in Monmouthshire. (see Statement of Action 7c, 7d, 9a to 9d)

### **3. Health Benefits of Countryside Access**

Access to the countryside has been highlighted as important for both physical and mental well being.

By encouraging more people to be active and utilise the public rights of way network we can dramatically improve the health and well being of Monmouthshire's residents and visitors.

The Welsh Health Survey, 2004, states that only 29% of adults in Wales meet the recommendation for physical activity (i.e. at least 5 x 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week) and 54% are classed as overweight or obese.

22% of boys and 27% of girls aged 2-15 in Wales are thought to be obese, according to the Wales Centre for Health. Childhood obesity is thought to be four times higher than 30 years ago and can cause complaints including type two diabetes, cardiovascular disease and psychological ill-health. Young people should be encouraged to make better use of the network for exercise (running, riding, walking and cycling). Encouraging walking and cycling to school also

increases the amount of exercise children take.

In recent years there has been a decline in the number of people wishing to use Monmouthshire County Council's Countryside Service long distance guided event walks. Increasingly the demand is for themed events and activities, which are always particularly well attended by families with children under the age of 16. This covers a particularly large demographic group in Monmouthshire and is an opportunity to encourage parents and their children to take regular exercise.

In Monmouthshire there are "walking the way to health" schemes in Abergavenny, Caldicot and Chepstow. Training is given to leaders to take out those with health problems, such as heart disease, on an hour's walk, once a week. The scheme is very popular and has direct implications for public rights of way, as it requires certain standards of surfacing and furniture. For instance the walks must be stile free, have no obstacles on them and have a good surface. This scheme promotes ten reasons to walk<sup>2</sup>:

1. It makes you feel good (gives you more energy, improves your mood, increases confidence and stamina).
2. Reduces stress, helping you to relax and sleep better
3. Improves your physical health. (Walking helps reduce the risk of heart disease, a stroke, becoming overweight, high blood pressure, certain cancers, particularly bowel cancer, diabetes that is not dependent on insulin, osteoporosis, and arthritis and can help patients recover from these conditions and in their management).
4. Provides the opportunity to meet other people and feel part of the community.
5. It can be done by almost anyone and needs no special kit.
6. It's free and can be done anywhere at anytime
7. It helps you to see more of your surroundings
8. Walking doesn't hurt
9. It saves you money
10. It helps the environment when you walk instead of taking the car.

Both the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum and many other users have called for an increasing relationship between health and countryside access. It is fair to

<sup>2</sup> 10 Reasons to Walk Leaflet [www.ww2h.org.uk](http://www.ww2h.org.uk)

**RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

assume that as the population becomes increasingly health conscious, demand for and use of the network within, between and on the fringe of urban areas will increase for walking and cycling. However for horse riding the demand is always likely to centre around available areas of livery, though this may also be on the urban fringe.

**Key Conclusions**

- There is a need to encourage more people to be active and utilise the public rights of way network, particularly children. (Statements of Action 3a to 3b, 4b, 5a, 5b, 8a, 9a to 9c)
- There is need to support Healthy Walking, cycling and horse riding initiatives. (Statements of Action 3a and 3c, 8a, 8b, 9c)
- There is a need to promote the health benefits of countryside access. (Statement of action 3c, 4b, 9a)

**Example of Footpath Improvement in Trellech Community**



Before Photo: A ladder stile on a public footpath leading into the Old Castle grounds.



With assistance from local Volunteers, the Ladder stile was replaced with a self-closing gate.



Photograph after Improvement Work

## Statements of Action for Health Benefits of Countryside Access

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**Objective:** To make it easier for people to incorporate walking, riding and cycling into their everyday lives

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council (Countryside Service, Sustainable development, Area Committees, Lifelong Learning and Leisure, Adult Services), Local Interest Groups, Monmouthshire Local Access Forum, Health Walk and Healthcare Providers, British Horse Society, Lower Wye Group Ramblers Association, U3A Groups, Sustrans, Age Concern, Disability Groups, Schools and Education Providers, Monmouthshire Local Health Alliance, Monmouthshire Local Health Board, Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales, Landowners/Occupiers, Volunteers, Landowners, Town and Community Council's.

**Strategic Links:** Monmouthshire County Council's Corporate Strategic Plan, Local Transport Plan, Unitary Development Plan, Safer Routes to School, Walking the Way to Health Initiatives, Health Social Care and Well Being Strategy, GP Referral Scheme, Monmouthshire Community Strategy, Climbing Higher, Walking and Cycling Strategy for Wales, Rising to Health Challenge Wales, Healthy and Active Lifestyles in Wales: A Framework for Action, Well Being in Wales, Securing Good Health for the Whole Population,

**Statement of Action 3a:** Assist local Partners in developing health programmes that support schemes such as the health walk initiatives to provide guided walks or rides for those with health or disability issues

Resources: Additional staff time will be required. Funding for information £, targeted route improvement costs to be identified £££

Targets:

- Consult with Health Walk providers and other User Groups to identify suitable countryside access routes for those with health or disability problems. (2008 ongoing)
- Establish a programme (in conjunction with the rights of way hierarchy) to target route improvements where health benefits most likely, including seeking funding for practical works. (2008 ongoing)
- Disseminate information to Health Walk leaders and local communities/doctors surgeries as routes become available (2008 ongoing).

**Statement of Action 3b:** We will identify partners in schools and colleges (starting with those with Travel Plans) to work to promote the health benefits of countryside access to pupils and students, testing innovative ideas when possible.

Resources: Extra staff time required, ££

Targets:

- Develop a learning pack to circulate to schools and colleges, identifying elements of the National Curricula where connections are strongest. (2010/2011)

- Develop a 5 year programme of guided walks for pupils and students, highlighting health benefits/wildlife/landscape/heritage features along the way (2010 –2016)
- Identify and foster opportunities for students in secondary and higher education to undertake voluntary work on the network (recognising that this can be more than manual work) (2008 to 2016)

**Statement of Action 3c:** We will work with partners/colleagues in the healthcare profession, Age Concern and Adult Services to target different groups, particularly older people, people with mental health difficulties and other disabilities to promote walking, riding and cycling as a good option for improving personal health.

Resources: Additional staff time required ££

**Targets:**

- Liaise with colleagues/partners to identify requirements for literature/material aimed at their service users. (2008 ongoing)
- Develop a series of recommended health walks leaflets/materials, highlighting health issues/wildlife/landscape/heritage features along the way, with targeted distribution. (2009/2010 ongoing)
- Link into existing newsletters and literature to communicate the health benefits of gentle exercise on the network and promote recommended routes (2008 ongoing)

## 4. Economic Development and Tourism Benefits of Countryside Access

Monmouthshire is in an ideal location, accessible from major centres of population, increasingly popular for short breaks, holidays and day trips. Tourism is of growing importance to the local economy and in Monmouthshire is valued at £117.9 million per annum.

It is predicted that with an annual growth rate of 3.5%, the value of walking tourism in Wales alone will grow from £550m to £700m by 2010. With this increase in demand and an improved rights of way network and countryside experience, rural incomes generated from tourism could increase significantly with the potential for job creation.

Horse riders and cyclists are very beneficial to the local economy of rural areas. In financial terms, the equine industry is now the second largest employer in the rural economy<sup>3</sup>. Its annual (UK) turnover is £2.5 billion.

Visitors in Wales took 800,000 riding occasions each year with an estimated expenditure of £18.55 million. Visit Wales (formerly Wales Tourist Board) state that *“horse ownership is rising in the UK and riding tourism is likely to be a growth activity sector. It is important that riding comprises a key strand to the total Wales activity offer.”*

Cyclists spend, on average, £35 per day per person on cycling holidays, going straight into the tills of local pubs, shops and bed and breakfasts – more than day-trippers who spend on average £6.70 each trip. Horse riders will spend the same amount as a cyclist on themselves, and more on their horses. The development of long distance and circular horse riding and cycling routes through Monmouthshire will therefore increase the amount of revenue entering into the rural economy and provide a sustainable tourism attraction in Monmouthshire.

The economic benefit and importance of access to the countryside on local businesses was especially highlighted in the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak when access to Monmouthshire’s countryside

was closed at a cost to the county’s economy of at least £2 billion<sup>4</sup>.



Offa’s Dyke Path at White Castle

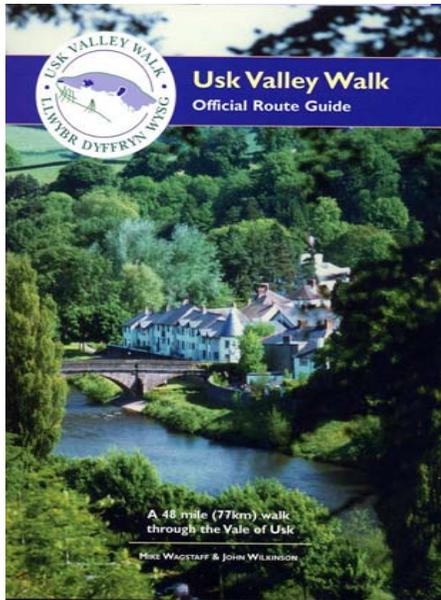
More recently (October 2005), the Countryside Council for Wales commissioned a report<sup>5</sup> on the economic benefits to local businesses of the three National Trails in Wales. The report concluded that *“National Trails are a marketable attraction offering an opportunity for economic development in rural areas where alternatives are limited, often acting as a catalyst for value added development. Over one third of visitors staying on or near to the Offa’s Dyke Path*

<sup>3</sup> Abbott V, (1995) “The Value of Small Business Marketing” Sheffield University

<sup>4</sup> Figures by MCC Economic Development office for loss to local businesses only.

<sup>5</sup> The Tourism Company March 2006, The Benefits to Business of the National Trails in Wales

are staying for 1 or 2 nights while walking the National trail, the highest proportion of the three national trails in Wales. Both service and accommodation enterprises along remoter parts of Offa's dyke path are particularly dependent on the trail for business."



Monmouthshire not only supports the Offa's Dyke Path but has three other long distance promoted paths, which are very popular (Three Castles Way, Usk Valley Walk and Wye Valley Walk). The proposed Wales Coastal Path will run from Chepstow along the coast. With the decline in the financial rewards of food

production these walks could provide essential opportunities for economic development.

The County Council receives some annual financial assistance (from the Countryside Council for Wales) towards its maintenance of the Offa's Dyke Path.

The County Council is also currently receiving financial assistance towards the improvement of coastal access in a 2km "coastal corridor" including the identification of a route for the Wales Coastal Path. It is envisaged this support from the Countryside Council for Wales, as part of the Wales Coastal Access Improvement Programme will continue to at least 2013.



Coastal View from Black Rock

## RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The public recognises the opportunities for economic development and tourism through countryside access. In particular they wanted a high priority assigned to the maintenance of attractive circular routes that link cafes/pubs/places of interest etc.

### Key Conclusions

- There is a need to highlight the economic benefits of countryside access in Monmouthshire. (Statements of Action 4a, 10a)
- There is a demand for off road long distance and circular bridleway routes, which would benefit both cyclists and horse riders. (Statements of Action 4b, 5d)
- There is a need to seek to maintain and support the National Trail and other long distance walks to provide essential opportunities for economic development. (Statement of action 4d)
- Priority should be given to attractive circular routes that link cafes/pubs/places of interest etc. to support the local economy and tourism. (Statement of Action 4b).

## Statements of Action for Economic Benefits

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**Objective:** To maximise the economic benefits of countryside access in Monmouthshire.

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council (Countryside, Economic Development and Tourism, Highways, Area Committees, Sustainability Unit), British Waterways, adventa, User Groups, Volunteers, British Horse Society, Sustrans, Severn Estuary Partnership, Countryside Council for Wales, Neighbouring County Council's, Community and Town Council's, local businesses, Wales National Farmers Union, Occupiers and Landowner's, CADW, Forestry Commission Wales, Visit Wales, Wye Valley AONB, Welsh Assembly Government.

**Strategic Links:** Monmouthshire County Council Corporate Strategic Plan, Local Agenda 21, Countryside Strategy, Community Strategy, Unitary Development Plan, Local Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan, Rural Development Plan, Strategy for the Severn Estuary, Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, Environment Strategy for Wales, Wales: A Better Country, A Winning Wales, Woodlands for Wales – The National Assembly for Wales Strategy for Trees and Woodlands, Moving Up A Gear – A Cycle Tourism Strategy for Wales, Best Foot Forward – A Walking Tourism Strategy for Wales 2002-2010. Waterways and Development Plans, Climbing Higher the Next Steps.

**Statement of Action 4a:** We will highlight the economic benefits of Countryside Access in Monmouthshire

Resources: ££

Targets (ongoing):

- Seek funding (via consultants or other means) to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the economic benefits of access to Monmouthshire

**Statement of Action 4b:** To identify and develop local circular routes around towns and villages linking to health, tourism and heritage initiatives and particularly seeking the creation of bridleways and cycleways.

Resources: £££. (Note this target is reliant on at least one new member of staff and voluntary support.)

Targets: 2008 onwards

- Seek funding for a project officer or for volunteer or other assistance
- Identify suitable routes in consultation with community councils, health-walking providers etc.
- Work with local businesses, landowners and access groups to agree works and routes.
- Carry out works with due regard for those with disabilities
- Agree and implement a system of local community/volunteer monitoring and maintenance of routes.
- Monitor use and promote the circular routes by appropriate methods

**Statement of Action 4c:** To secure improvements to the coastal access in line with the objectives of the Wales Coastal Access Improvement Programme. (2007 to 2013)

Resources: One new member of staff (in post) jointly with Newport City Council (£132,000 CCW grant in 2007/8), £££.

Targets:

- To prepare a full local access improvement programme informed by a consultation process
- To initiate and facilitate voluntary and community involvement in improvements to coast.
- To undertake improvements to and along the Wales Coastal Path.
- To seek to secure long term commitment to the maintenance of the Wales Coastal Path

**Statement of Action 4d:** To maximise economic opportunities by securing a permanent long distance trails budget and ensuring a quality of standard is applied and maintained on the National Trail and other long distance promoted routes in Monmouthshire.

Resources: £ to ££

Targets:

- Agree Welsh National Trail Quality Standards (April 2007) for Offa's Dyke Path.
- Develop Monmouthshire quality standard for long distance recreational trails and work with our Partners to achieve this. (2008 onwards)
- Produce detailed costed action plans for all recreational trails. Use these "action plans" to approach Partners and secure funding for the life of ROWIP and beyond. (2008 to 2010)
- Implement quality standards as furniture needs replacing or as additional funding becomes available. (ongoing)

### 5. Transport Benefits of Countryside Access

Public Rights of Way are highways and they can provide opportunities to increase the numbers of those who could walk or cycle instead of using a car.

The assessment report shows support for priority to be given to:

- Routes used in conjunction with public transport, allowing easy access to the countryside.
- Routes used for local journeys such as safe routes to schools, shops etc.
- Safer road crossing points

#### Walking and cycling

Walkers either walk from home to get to the countryside, or use a car or van to reach paths. The main reasons the public gave for hardly ever using public transport to access paths and trails for walking was the greater convenience of a car, or because there was no local bus or train service.

Cycling and walking are key elements of the Safer Routes to Schools projects undertaken in Monmouthshire. Projects seek to promote walking and cycling as healthy and environmentally sustainable

ways of travelling to and from school as well as reducing traffic congestion associated with the school run.

The Countryside Service has worked to improve footpaths to schools, which have been identified in the school travel plans as playing an important part in providing opportunities to walk to school.



The Chairman of Monmouthshire County Council opening the new footbridge to Shirenewton School in 1995.

Cyclists predominantly cycle to the countryside from home and do not appear to use public transport. Where they took their own car to access the countryside they did so because of difficulty of taking a bicycle on bus/train and the greater convenience of their own car.

In its Walking and Cycling Strategy the Welsh Assembly Government sets targets

for increasing the length of national cycling routes in Wales. There are over 950 miles of the network in Wales and Sustrans expects over 100 million trips made using the network each year. The existence of sections of the national cycling network is widely believed to contribute to increased utility cycling and walking trips within local authority areas (not just for leisure) and plays an important economic role in attracting visitors to the area. However there are very limited opportunities for off road cycling in Monmouthshire, particularly for families.

There is an identified need for a full survey of current cycling provision and promotion in Monmouthshire. This will assist with the identification of any shortcomings in provision and enable a strategy to be identified to secure funding and invest in improvements where they are most required.

Cyclists share the same needs as horse riders for the creation of routes based on quiet roads, byways and bridleways and it has been suggested that consideration be given to a project that brings together cycling and horse riders interests.

## RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

### Horse Riders

Although not contributing to the transport system, horses and their riders are a common sight on roads in Monmouthshire as there are few bridleways. As horse riding is increasing the potential of conflict on the roads and for accidents in Monmouthshire will increase.

There is a need for a safety education and publicity programme aimed at horse riders and vehicular drivers in the countryside, along with better road signage so that vehicular drivers are made aware of routes that are being used by horse riders.

Verges that act as safe refuges and links in the rights of way network should be protected and maintained for the safety of riders, their horses and the public.

### Carriage drivers and Vehicular Users

One of the main regular complaints and requests from the public is for something to be done to stop the illegal use of non vehicular paths by off-road vehicles. Monmouthshire County Council is not able to take enforcement action against individuals who use vehicles on footpaths and bridleways. However it can support the Police by providing good signage, information to users and where

appropriate may introduce Traffic Regulation Orders or a gating order.

There is very little legal off road access in Monmouthshire available to carriage drivers and motorised vehicles. This is an issue for some disabled motorists.

Some four wheeled drive groups expressed the wish to provide working parties to keep clear and maintain restricted byways, byways and unclassified roads for the benefit of not just themselves but other users.

There are a lot of initiatives and ideas that could be investigated for the regulation and management of “green lane” resources, with the aim of preserving the lanes themselves and the shared enjoyment of this resource by different groups of users.

Such initiatives could include the use of seasonal or weather related closures, speed limits and the use of good clear signage which indicates the status of a right of way and ensures that the user knows whether a path is legally open to vehicular users or not.

Vehicular Users appear to be growing in number and a way must be found to accommodate their legitimate use of the

countryside in a way that preserves the environment that they wish to use and enjoy.

Consultation and good clear signage are key to the improvement of the network for vehicular users.

### Key Conclusions

- There is a need to raise the profile of the contribution made by countryside access to purposeful journeys, such as those to school. (Statement of Action 5a)
- A high number of people are unable to use public transport because there are no suitable local bus or train services. This issue is outside the scope of this plan and will be addressed through the Local Transport Plan.
- There is a need for a safety education and publicity programme aimed at horse riders and vehicular users and improved road signage. (Statement of Action 5c)

- Verges need to be identified as safe refuges for vulnerable road users such as horse riders. (Statement of Action 5c)
- There is a shortage of off-road cycling facilities particularly for families and an identified need for a full survey of existing cycling provision and promotional material in Monmouthshire. There is also an identified scope for a project that brings together cycling and horse riding interests. (Statements of Action 4b, 5d & 5f)
- Priority should be given to safer road crossing points and routes used for local journeys as safe routes to school etc. (Statements of Action 5b & 5c)
- There is a need for accurate signage on Restricted Byways and Byways to reflect who can use the paths legally and consultation with vehicular groups regarding preserving lanes and providing a network they can use. (Statement of Action 5f & 7c)
- There is a demand for enforcement action where there is illegal vehicular usage on public rights of way that do not carry public vehicular rights of access. (Statement of Action 5f)

## Transport Benefits Statements of Action

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**Objective:** To promote and support the use of the rights of way network for purposeful journeys.

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council (Lifelong Learning and Leisure, Sustainable Development, Countryside Service, Planning and Highways), Wye Valley AONB, Neighbouring Authorities, Adventa, Local User Groups, British Horse Riding Society, LARA, GLASS and other recreational motorist groups, Gwent Police, Sustrans, Schools, Landowners, Welsh Assembly Government, Bus companies, Transport providers, Community and Town Council's, Developers, Countryside Council for Wales.

**Strategic Links:** Monmouthshire County Council's Corporate Strategic Plan, Local Transport Plan, Improvement Plan, Community Strategy, Unitary Development Plan, Walking the Way to Health Initiatives, Health Improvement Programmes, Walking and Cycling Strategies, Safe Routes to School Schemes, Walking and Cycling Strategy for Wales, Local Agenda 21, Environment Strategy for Wales, The Transport Framework for Wales, Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, Road Safety Strategy for Wales, Woodlands for Wales – The National Assembly for Wales Strategy for Trees and Woodlands, Transport and Rural Wales: A Policy Document.

**Statement of Action 5a:** We will work with County Council colleagues to raise the profile of the contribution of rights of way for purposeful journeys (ongoing – no additional resources required)

**Statement of Action 5b:** We will identify routes on the network for improvement to encourage pupils and students to walk or cycle to school  
Resources: ££ plus additional staff time

Target

- Assess, develop, identify potential funding and deliver improvements to routes for school journeys. (ongoing in conjunction with establishment of route hierarchy **Statement of Action 8a**).

**Statement of Action 5c:** Working with colleagues in the Highways Section and subject to the provision of additional funding, we will seek improved accommodation for vulnerable users where PROW link with the adopted highway network

Resources: Additional member of staff and volunteer support required, Physical work costs to be identified within projects.

Targets:

- Identify junctions of PROW with roads where dropped kerbs would improve user safety and work with colleagues to provide them (2008 onwards)
- Seek safe improved crossings and junctions of PROW with roads (2008 onwards)
- Hold training sessions on countryside access and in particular public rights of way, for developers and planning officers (2008/09)

- Seek to protect verges, which are valuable for horse riders, cyclists and walkers as safe refuges from vehicles on links between rights of way (reliant on volunteers to provide information 2009 onwards).
- Provide a safety education and publicity programme aimed at horse riders and vehicular users and seek to improve road signage for the safety of horse riders, where possible.

**Statement of Action 5d:** (see also **Statement of Action 4b**) [The County Council will continue to work with our partners to enhance and develop an off road long distance and circular bridleway/multi purpose network.](#)

Resources: **£££** including full time officer required per year.

Targets: 2008 onwards as resources become available

- Research the most economical viable place for a long distance bridleway/ multi purpose route.
- Seek additional resources for a project officer to liaise with landowners to establish agreement for new bridleways/multi purpose routes.
- To seek funding and implement the provision of routes on the ground and any necessary legislative orders.

**Statement of Action 5f:** [The County Council will work with interest groups and its partners to provide a quiet network of county unclassified roads for vehicular and other users and seek to prevent the illegal use of non-vehicular paths.](#)

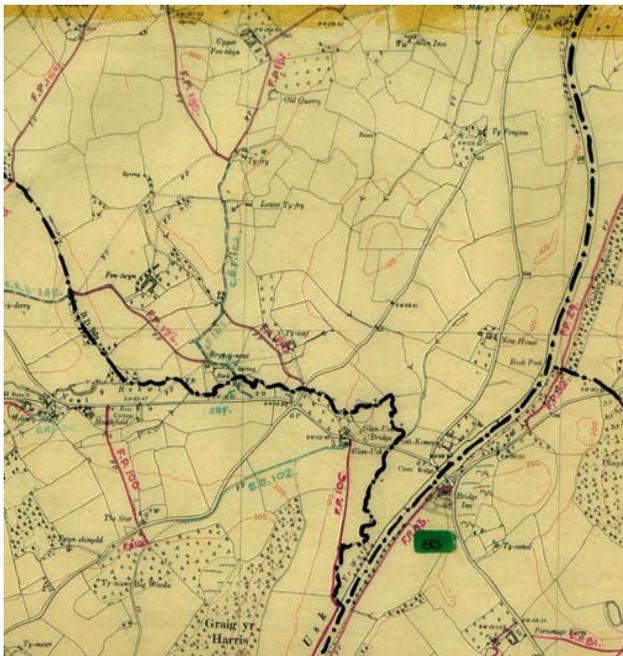
Resources: Additional staff time **££** per year

Targets: 2007 onwards

- To establish good communications with vehicular users in and around Monmouthshire.
- In conjunction with User Groups to establish a pilot project to research and compile a list of roads and paths that could form part of a quiet road network for all users and identify any necessary works and signage
- Seek the necessary funding for works, legal orders, educational and promotional material
- To work in Partnership with the Police, User Groups, neighbouring authorities and others to address any illegal use of the non-motorised network of public paths (footpaths and bridleways) by appropriate means for the individual path involved.

## 6. Definitive Map and Statement of Public Rights Of Way

The Definitive Map and Statement defines the legal status and alignment of public rights of way. Up to date, accessible Definitive Map data is a key element affecting people's enjoyment of the network because it is crucial to delivering improvements on the ground.



*Definitive Map of Public Rights of Way*  
(Not to scale)

The present Definitive Map and Statement has a relevant date of 1<sup>st</sup> July 1952. It is hand drawn and produced on the old imperial scale of six inches to one mile (1:10,560).

The map and statement are subject to an ongoing statutory review process, by which routes may be added, removed or altered based on evidence (Modification Orders) and a separate process whereby the public (or other interested parties) may apply to alter a route for other purposes (Public Path Orders). Under-resourcing of work to review the Definitive Map and Statement and to process Public Path Orders has been a consistent national problem. This has resulted in a backlog of modification and public path orders and a need to consolidate the records to reflect boundary changes and the many hundreds of orders that have been made over the years.

The statutory 12 month deadline for determining evidential modification orders (claims) is not currently being met. It is anticipated that any future Lost Way projects, by user groups, will result in many more modification applications being made. The current programme of review may then have to be revised to take into account those paths, which may be affected by the 2026 cut off date.

### PROGRAMME OF REVIEW

All Evidential Modification Orders will be dealt with in the date order that the completed application was received with the exception of those cases, which meet one or several of the criteria stated below.

1. Statutory Provision.
2. Planning Considerations.
3. Status Enquiries.
4. Matters of Financial Disadvantage.
5. Drafting Errors

The full details regarding the programme of review can be found on the Council's web site.

Applications for Public Path Orders are dealt with in order of receipt but this work may need prioritising to reflect enforcement and maintenance priorities in the future.

There has been a significant increase in the number of general enquiries regarding Definitive Map routes and in particular requests for information relating to planning applications.

There are approximately 100 paths in Monmouthshire where development has not taken into account public rights of way and have subsequently encroached upon

or obstructed them. All such paths now require enforcement action. Rights of way guidance is required to ensure planners and developers are aware of their responsibilities and the issues involved in developing on or near to a public path.

The Local Access Forum and others have said that the achievement of an up to date and accessible Definitive Map and Statement should be a high priority.

### Key Conclusions

- The County Council is failing in its duty to maintain and keep under continuous review the Definitive Map and Statement. Outstanding Legal Event Orders need to be completed in order that a new consolidated Definitive Map can be produced. (Statement of Action 6a)
- There is a need to provide the public with better information (particularly regarding status of routes) and a more accessible Definitive Map and Statement. There is also a new duty in law to produce a comprehensive public record, on the council's web site and on paper, of all current modification orders, public path

orders and recorded statutory declarations. (Statements of Action 6a and 6b).

- There is a backlog of Evidential Modification Orders and the Authority is unable to meet the statutory deadline for determining such applications within the statutory 12-month deadline. (Statement of Action 6c)
- There is no programme for processing public path orders applied for by landowners and others. This work may also need prioritising to reflect enforcement and maintenance priorities in the future. (Statement of Action 6d)
- There is an increasing number of planning applications and a large number of paths obstructed by development. (Statement of Action 6e)

## Statements of Action for the Definitive Map

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**Objective:** To achieve an up-to-date and accessible Definitive Map and Statement as a high priority.

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council (Countryside Service, Legal Services, Highways, ICT), Boundary Highway Authorities, Brecon Beacon National Park Authority, Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales, DEFRA, Statutory Consultee Organisations and Landowners.

**Strategic Links:** Monmouthshire County Council Corporate Strategic Plan, Improvement Plan, Local Transport Plan, Countryside Strategy, Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, Brecon Beacons National Park Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

**Statement of Action 6a:** We will clear the backlog of Legal Event Modification orders and thereafter produce regular orders to keep the Definitive Map and Statement up to date, in order that we can produce a new composite Definitive Map and Statement for the county of Monmouthshire.

Resources: This will require additional staff time, £££ (£80,500 in budget for replacement ROW system)

Targets:

- Install new integrated Rights of Way database/mapping system by 2008 and achieve quality assurance by 2009.
- Clear backlog of outstanding Legal Events by 2010.
- Produce regular Legal Events from 2010
- Produce consolidated Definitive Map and Statement by 2013.

**Statement of Action 6b:** We will investigate and provide better ways of promoting and making accessible the information held on the Definitive Map and Statement and the List of Streets.

Resources: additional staff time required

Targets:

- To provide a “working copy” of the Definitive Map on the Internet by 2017, with details of furniture.
- To produce and continually update a list of all recorded statutory declarations, public path and modification orders on the Internet by 2008.

**Statement of Action 6c:** We will continue to process claims according to the agreed review process. However we will seek additional resources to clear the backlog of applications, enabling the authority to comply with its statutory duties.

Resources: new staff and ££ per year

Targets:

- Seek additional resources or ways to clear the backlog of evidential modification orders.

**Statement of Action 6d:** Using examples of Best Practice from other authorities we will consider implementing a priority system for dealing with Public Path Order applications in conjunction with the route hierarchy.

Resources: Additional staff time required

Targets: (2007 – 2009 in conjunction with establishment of rights of way hierarchy. )

- Undertake research of best practice and consultation on a draft priority system for processing public path orders.

**Statement of Action 6e:** We will maintain communications with development control, development plans, developers and others involved in changes in land use to ensure that appropriate account is taken of public access when considering planning proposals.

Resources: Limited officer time plus £

Targets:

- Using examples of Best practice from other authorities we shall produce a rights of way planning guide for developers and planners in Monmouthshire by 2009
- Provide annual training for new development control staff from 2009
- Reprint as necessary and update 2010 to 2017

### 7. Maintenance and Enforcement of Public Rights of Way

#### What is the condition of the network?

A public rights of way condition survey carried out by volunteers has revealed that in some places the rights of way network is good, but that there are considerable problems to address in order to bring the total network into good order. It revealed that:

- 946 gates and stiles were in a poor condition
- 1030 fingerposts are missing
- 70 bridges are missing
- 10 bridges were dangerous
- there are 431 serious problems of which 200 are obstructions and require some form of enforcement.

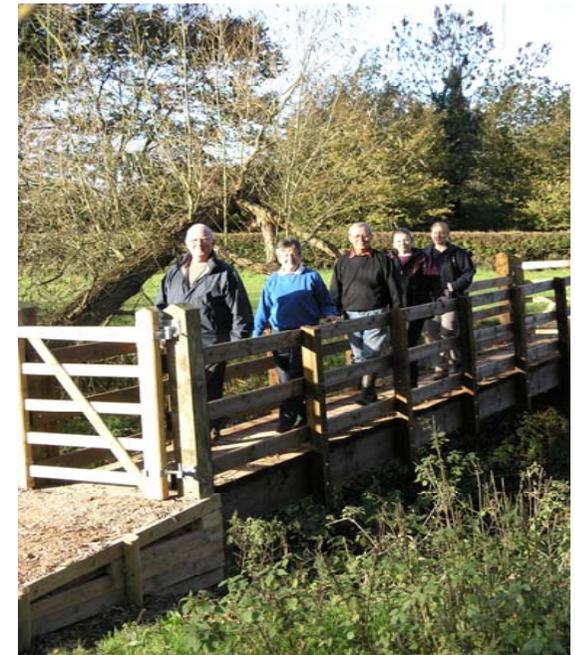
It is now known that there are approximately 6,000 stiles and gates, 800 bridges and 3000 fingerposts on the network. If the backlog of work was completed the Countryside Service would have to replace 364 fingerposts, 2 or 3 bridges per month and 8 stiles or gates per week. Currently only approximately 10 bridges, 80 – 100 stiles and gates and 100 fingerposts are installed per year.

The approach to public rights of way maintenance in recent years has been mainly reactive, driven by complaints and requests for action received from the public and user groups. Fingerpost, waymarking, stile maintenance and clearance issues form the largest numbers of issues reported by the public.

In order to be able to improve the network it will therefore be important to change the way in which maintenance is currently managed. This will involve identifying and prioritising routes for maintenance improvements, enabling additional sums of grant funding to be found and used for the greater public benefit particularly for those with health issues or disabilities.

The County Council is responsible for clearing the surface of paths that become overgrown and currently operates a system of small contracts on well-used and leafleted walks during the growing season. This amounts to less than 2% of the network. In addition to this there are 30 Pathcare Wardens who regularly survey and undertake minor maintenance such as clearance of stiles on (350 km/ 217miles) promoted routes. The Wye Valley Group of the Ramblers Association has its own maintenance team and the Countryside Wardens often take volunteers out on site.

However there are currently limited opportunities for volunteers to assist with maintenance due predominately to the lack of staff time to organise such works and health and safety regulations. The Countryside Service has recently obtained grant aid to employ a part time volunteer co-ordinator in order to look at ways in which more volunteers can be used to assist with maintenance.



The new Malley Brook Bridge, sponsored by the Lower Wye Group of the Ramblers Association in 2006.

## RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Overgrowth has become more of a problem on paths due to climate change. Where two cuts used to be adequate now vegetation grows all year round and some paths are requiring five or six cuts a year.

Overgrowth, path obstructions and lack of signposts (including waymarking) are three of the main things which limit or put people off using paths in Monmouthshire.

### Enforcement

Section 130 of the Highways Act 1980 makes it the responsibility of the Highway Authority 'to assert and protect the rights of the public to the use and enjoyment of the highway' and numerous sections of the act have vested various powers and duties on Highway Authorities. The Countryside Access Team is responsible for serving notice, carrying out work and charging for the costs involved or (with assistance from Legal Services) prosecuting individuals for offences.

Under the Highways Act 1980, section 56, the Authority can be taken to court if a public right of way is out of repair.

As a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the public can also serve notice on the Authority and subsequently make an application to

Magistrates Court when the Council does not enforce against obstructions within a specified time period.



Path reinstated after cropping

Monmouthshire County Council undertook its first successful prosecution for obstruction of a footpath in 2004. Prior to this there was little or no enforcement and consequently there is also a backlog of old enforcement cases. Most of these cases concern long standing obstructions.

To aid enforcement and to emphasise the landowners and councils responsibilities a guide was published in 2005 called "An A-Z of Problems, Policy and Protocols". This is issued free to all landowners (and others) on request and to those landowners who are participating in enforcement procedures. It is also

available to view and download on the Council's website.

Cereal crops, fencing/hedges, buildings and development make up the majority of the issues reported by the public for enforcement action.



Fencing obstructing a Restricted Byway.

User Groups still express concern over the time it takes to resolve cases and the large backlog of enforcement cases that need to be pursued. Another difficulty identified is that there is no public rights of way integrated database system to:

1. correctly record all enforcement and maintenance cases,
2. prioritise and
3. ensure that the complainant/other staff can be kept aware of the progress of the case and informed

of the result of the case when it is completed.

### What the public want

The public said a high priority should be given to maintenance and enforcement issues and that these should be prioritised and dealt with in a reasonable timeframe.

They also felt that both the landowner's responsibilities and the public's should be reinforced. Particular concern was raised regarding the behaviour of dogs off lead in the presence of livestock, dog fouling and the illegal use of footpaths and bridleways by motorised vehicles. These issues are addressed within Chapter 9, Publicity and Promotion Statement of Action.

### Key Conclusions

- There is a need for an integrated rights of way database to record and prioritise maintenance and enforcement issues to ensure that they are dealt with in a reasonable timeframe. (Statement of Action 6a)
- To improve the public rights of way network there is a need to identify and prioritise routes for

maintenance and enforcement. (Statement of Action 7a)

- The three main things which limit or put people off using paths in Monmouthshire are overgrowth, path obstructions and lack of signposts, including waymarkers. (Statement of Action 7c)
- There is a need to establish a way for volunteers to assist with maintenance improvements and keeping paths open. (Statement of Action 7d)
- Landowners and managers should be made more aware of their responsibilities and those of the County Council in respect of PROW, particularly with regards to maintaining stiles, gates and overhanging hedges. (Statement of Action 7b)
- There is a need to publicise more widely the effects of completed maintenance and enforcement work and a need to change the present reactive way in which maintenance occurs to a more proactive

solution. (Statements of Action 7a, 7d, 9b and 9c)

- Cereal Crops, fencing/hedges, buildings and development take up the majority of reported enforcement issues. (Statement of Action 7c, 7d).

## Maintenance and Enforcement Statements of Action

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**Objective:** To target improvements on rights of way to ensure greatest public benefit is obtained.

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council (Countryside Services, Highways, Local Agenda 21, Asset Management) Walking Way to Health Groups, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, British Trust for Conservation, The Lower Wye Group Ramblers Association, The Pontypool Ramblers Group, The Ramblers Association, British Horse Society, Local U3A Groups, Community and Town Council's, User Groups, Monmouthshire Local Access Forum, Volunteers, Landowners/Occupiers, National Farmers Union, Fountain Forestry, Forestry Commission Wales, Landowners and Occupiers, Groundwork Trust, Ministry of Defence, Railtrack, National Trust, Environment Agency Wales, Heritage Lottery Fund, Welsh European Funding Office, Countryside Council for Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and other neighbouring Highway Authorities,

**Strategic Links:** Monmouthshire County Council's Corporate Strategic Plan, Improvement Plan, Biodiversity Action Plan, Countryside Strategy, Local Transport Plan, Community Strategy, Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, Woodlands for Wales – The National Assembly for Wales Strategy for Trees and Woodlands, CCW Rights of Way Condition Survey 2003, Neighbouring Highway Authority Rights of Way Improvement Plans, Climbing Higher – The Next Steps.

**Statement of action 7a:** We will develop a hierarchy of routes to target priorities, working practices and resources to not only help meet existing responsibilities and develop proactive work programmes, but to ensure the greatest public benefit is obtained.

Resources: Additional staff time required

Targets:

- Using examples of Best Practice investigate and consult upon the introduction of a prioritised system of rights of way maintenance and improvement, taking account of identified demand and safety. (2008/09)
- Prioritise routes and identify annual work programmes in business plan. (2009 onwards)

**Statement of action 7b:** To continue to promote the Council's and Landowner/occupiers responsibilities and responsible countryside access use.

Resources: £ additional staff time

Targets:

- We will revise as necessary and promote the "A-Z of Policies, Problems of Protocols" to ensure everyone is aware of how the Authority will deal with enforcement issues and look for opportunities to promote landowners and the county's responsibilities

- To facilitate and provide accessible facilities and an education programme to promote responsible access to the countryside, including engaging with the formal education sector.

**Statement of action 7c:** To achieve 80% of Public Rights of Way network as open, easy to use and well signed by 2017

Resources: £££ per year including four additional staff.

Targets:

- Seek additional resources to deal with maintenance, signage and enforcement issues (2007 ongoing)
- Establish a programme of inspecting all bridge sites and urban public rights of way for Health and Safety reasons (2008/09).
- Establish a programme of bridge replacement in accordance with safety and rights of way hierarchy (2008 ongoing)
- Establish a programme for recording missing and damaged fingerposts and a programme of replacement. (2008 onwards)
- Expand Pathcare volunteer programme to establish a programme of training local volunteers to correctly waymark and maintain waymarkers in their communities (2008 ongoing).
- Ensure that all new Urban Estate paths have a Section 106 Agreement and are adequately provided to adoptable standards and are adopted by highways for recording on the list of streets.

**Statement of action 7d:** Secure an increase in the numbers of local volunteers involved in the maintenance of countryside access

Resources: ££ per year Reliant on additional staff time

Targets: (2007 – Ongoing)

- Seek on-going funding for Volunteer Coordinator
- Develop and expand the current Pathcare scheme to include community/group/individual involvement in PROW management and monitor results.
- Develop guidance, training and promotional material to attract volunteers.
- Seek innovative and new ways in which volunteers can assist with the surveying, maintenance and promotion of countryside access.

**8. The Needs of The Blind or Partially Sighted People and Others with Mobility Problems.**

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 specifically requires local highway authorities to assess the needs of blind or partially sighted people and others with mobility problems. People with mobility problems include older and disabled people, or those with young children and pushchairs. Family and friends who accompany people with mobility problems are also affected by the accessibility of the rights of way network and to countryside sites.

Monmouthshire County Council considered the needs of the disabled to the countryside in 2004 and approved a Least Restrictive Access Policy for Public Rights of Way. This policy has resulted in a large demand for self-closing gates. It is now very rare for new stiles to be erected on the network and the majority of maintenance work is predominantly the installation of self-closing gates, which is opening up the network to a far greater amount of the population and is particularly popular with the growing population of elderly walkers.

**ACCESS FOR ALL POLICY**

A simple stile can often prove to be a major obstacle for many people. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (section 69) and the Highways Act (section 147) require all highway authorities to have regard for those people who have mobility and sight problems. Highway Authorities also have a duty to regard the needs of disabled and blind when executing any works (Highways Act 1980 section 175A), and where restrictions to people with disabilities may be created (Disability Discrimination Act 1995).

The County Council operates a “minimum barrier” policy, with respect to Public Rights of Way. Wherever maintenance issues arise to replace, repair or install new items of furniture on Public Rights of Way the opportunity will be taken to place the least restrictive barrier possible on site. Each case will be individually assessed by the Rights of Way Field Warden and any necessary furniture installed taking into account

1. The paths status,
2. Current historical furniture on site,
3. Topography,
4. Nature of farming and land use and

5. What would be the least restrictive access in that particular location?
6. The landowner’s wishes.

Gaps are preferred to stiles unless farm animals need to be restricted, in which case either a gate, self closing gate, gates with boxes or kissing gates will be used in preference to stiles.

Stiles will only be installed where it has not been possible for Monmouthshire County Council to negotiate a change in structure or it is not possible to use an alternative barrier.

**What the public said they wanted.**

Consultations show extensive support for public rights of way and countryside sites to be made more accessible to those with disabilities.

There is a recognised need for a network of walks to be developed, with particular emphasis on accessible walks for ramblers with different physical difficulties. The Monmouth, Severnside and the Lower Wye Valley Community Strategy Action plans support this view with emphasis being placed on improving the health and well being of residents. Such a network would assist the Walking the Way to Health Groups to expand.

## RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Primarily the best way for improving access is seen as removing barriers such as stiles. The current least restrictive access policy of replacing stiles with gaps or gates should therefore remain and be more widely promoted.



Stile replaced with a self-closing gate on a footpath leading to Caldicot Country Park. This gate was purchased with the assistance of Caldicot U3A Group and was installed with the assistance of Pontypool Ramblers.

Disabled access must also be made available to horse riders. Riding can give some people a mobility that they would not normally enjoy. However it is important that gates are regularly maintained on such routes and that they are easy to open by one hand without the need for dismounting from the horse.

In order to use the countryside those with disabilities and their carers require information before they get there on what facilities are available such as toilets (including whether these are RADAR key locked), car parking, the availability of refreshments, surfacing, benches/seating, accommodation, means of travel, camber and structures on a route. Existing walk leaflets in general do not fulfil these criteria.

All information available should be presented in as wide a variety of formats as possible.



Guided Walk Event attended by those with a range of disabilities.

Opportunities, for those who have mobility or other disability problems, to go on guided walks would also be appreciated

as many such people do not have the confidence to go out on routes on their own and may not have partners or carers that wish to accompany them. There is a need however to provide short and long distance guided routes to cater for different abilities and to provide routes that begin from urban areas as this would alleviate the problem of relying on friends and family for transport.

For those with access to a car, a leaflet highlighting short walks – perhaps only a few hundred metres to a viewpoint etc. – as part of a circular car tour would alleviate the need for the availability of full facilities at every walk.

For some people access by vehicle is the only way in which they can gain access to the countryside. The recent change in legislation that restricts motorised vehicles from using Restricted Byways<sup>6</sup> will therefore reduce the amount of quiet countryside access available to those disabled people who rely on motor vehicles for access.

A desire was expressed for some routes to be surfaced to interesting places, for wheel chair users. Such routes would need to be prioritised in the maintenance

<sup>6</sup> There are some legal exceptions

workload and in general it was thought that due to the increasing availability of all terrain scooters/trampers then tarmac should generally be avoided in most of the countryside.

The Council's logo is seen as a sign of quality assurance. There is therefore a need to expand Pathcare to look after any new disability routes that may be created or those routes that with improvements could be accessible to all.

To help the blind or partially sighted it was suggested that volunteer guides and audio taped walk descriptions could be of use. The routing of destinations on gates and tactile information boards on public rights of way and countryside sites also help to make countryside access more enjoyable.

### **Key Issues for those with mobility or sight problems:**

- There is a need to identify routes for improvements in conjunction with Health Schemes, Community Councils, Disabled groups and other partners. (Statement of Action 8a)

- The current Least Restrictive Access Policy for Rights of Way should remain and be more widely promoted. (Statement of Action 8b)
- Continue to provide and look at ways to improve guided walks. (Statement of Action 8a)
- Provide enough information in a variety of formats to enable users to establish for themselves whether or not they can or want to use a route, or a countryside site. (Statements of Action 8e & 9a)
- Expand Pathcare to any new "Access For All Routes", to provide a measure of quality. (Statement of Action 8c)
- Review directional and other information along promoted walks. (Statements of Action 8d and 9a)
- Produce a guide on the installation of accessible furniture in Monmouthshire. This will enable the progressive removal of barriers by contractors,

landowners and others.  
(Statement of Action 8b)

## Statements Of Action For The Needs Of The Blind, Or Partially Sighted People And Others With Mobility Problems.

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**Objective:** To improve the accessibility of the rights of way network. (See also Statements of Action for Health)

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council (Countryside Service, Sustainable development, Area Committees, Lifelong Learning and Leisure, Social Services, Adult Services, Equalities and Access), Local Interest Groups, Local Businesses, Tourism and Accommodation providers, Monmouthshire Local Access Forum, Health Walk and Healthcare Providers, British Horse Society, Disabled Riding Groups, Lower Wye Group Ramblers Association, Fieldfare Trust, Disabled Ramblers, U3A Groups, Sustrans, Age Concern, , Disability Groups, Schools and Education Providers, Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales, Landowners/Occupiers, Volunteers, Town and Community Council's, Healthcare Trusts, Monmouthshire Local Health Board.

**Strategic Links:** Monmouthshire County Council's Corporate Strategic Plan, Community Strategy, Local Transport Plan, Unitary Development Plan, Safer Routes to School, Walking the Way to Health Initiatives, Health Social Care and Well Being Strategy, GP Referral Scheme, Climbing Higher, Walking and Cycling Strategy for Wales, Rising to Health Challenge Wales, Healthy and Active Lifestyles in Wales: A Framework for Action, Well Being in Wales, Securing Good Health for the Whole Population, Tackling congestion Road Safety Strategy, Accessibility and Quality of Life, Strategic Health Plan, Health Improvement Plans.

**Statement of Action 8a:** To Support health walk and riding initiatives and to provide guided walks for those with health or disability issues

Resources: ££ including additional staff resources

Targets: (2007 onwards)

- To consult with Health Walk providers and other User Groups to identify countryside access routes that are suitable or could be made suitable for those with health or disability issues.
- Provide information on accessible rural routes and targeted route improvements

**Statement of Action 8b:** To continue to take all reasonable steps to remove unnecessary barriers from public rights of way and Access Land by applying the principle of Least Restrictive Access and using the most accessible choice of furniture where ever possible

Resources: estimated ££ per year

Targets (ongoing):

- Actively promote the benefits of the Council's Policy particularly with landowners.
- Seek additional funding for appropriate furniture i.e. self-closing gates.
- Keep records of all furniture installed and monitor when improvements are made.

- Produce a guide on the installation of accessible furniture in Monmouthshire that can be used by contractors, landowners and others.

**Statement of Action 8c:** To expand the Pathcare system to all new “access for all” routes to provide a measure of quality on health and disability routes.

Resources: £ per year

Target (Ongoing):

- Assess routes and provide maps and appropriate paperwork for volunteers
- Actively promote volunteering opportunities and provide necessary training
- Monitor use and condition of “access for all route”.

**Statement of Action 8d:** We will review the directional and other information provided along promoted routes; particularly the Offa’s Dyke National Trail and seek to involve our partners in other long distance walks to consider producing information and maintaining such paths in a manner that will enable more users to enjoy the paths or parts of them (see also **Statement of Action 4d**)

Resources: ££ per year

Target (2007 to 2017): To produce a list of paths and work towards the gradual elimination of barriers along the path.

**Statement of Action 8e:** Continue to provide and improve accessibility information for all Countryside Service sites in a range of formats

Resources: ££

Targets (2009 ongoing):

- Assess and audit site information currently available, including public consultation.
- Consider range of information required and seek funding opportunities for providing them.
- In partnership with others, maintain, distribute and promote information.

## 9. Publicity and Promotion

### Current position

Multiple agencies are involved with the publicity of the public rights of way network. These include public, voluntary and private sector organisations, the Wye Valley AONB, adventa, other tourism promoters (particularly food trails), Community Councils etc.

The information currently provided to the public is of mixed quality and accessibility. Some information is linked to public transport, to community routes, to new interpretation (Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site), to activity and events programme. Many of the former Monmouthshire County Council and Gwent walks leaflets are now out of print. However they are still in use because some people keep these leaflets for many years.

Two years ago a commercial distributor was engaged to promote and distribute the main booklets published by Monmouthshire County Council and its partners. Such booklets are Tintern Trails, Wye Valley Walk, Three Castles Walk, and Usk Valley Way. This approach has been very successful and

the distributor is now funding a new edition of the Three Castles Way.

For the past two years, with funding from the Countryside Council for Wales, the Countryside Service has been checking circular routes and promoting them on its web site. The information is intended to be easier to update and to meet accessibility requirements. These routes are also linked to the Countryside Council for Wales expanded countryside access Wales website. The Wales Tourist Board has a Walking Wales site on the web. There is also a Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage web site, Offa's Dyke Path web site and various commercial and voluntary web sites.

There is no doubt that good publicity and promotion is an essential part of a visitors experience to the countryside. Without good information people will not visit, may not be confident of what they can do when they do visit and may not return.

The "Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site: Gateway Car Parks Visitor monitoring 2005" revealed the main concerns for visitors were:

- Lack of information
- Lack of signs
- Lack of interpretation

- Lack of integration between attractions

The Wye Valley AONB Visitor survey in 2004 found that 40% of visitors said walking was their main reason for visiting. 41% used pre trip information and 55% used or intended to use post arrival information:

### Information used during visit:

• Site information boards	48%
• Tourist Information Centres	38%
• Attractions information racks	34%
• Accommodation information racks	15%
• Other (internet, handhelds, guides)	14%
• Walking guides or maps	12%
• Advice at accommodation	6%
• No information used	5%
• Tourist Information points	1%

### Other information required:

- None 51%,
- Noticeboards 10%,
- Leaflets 8%,
- Maps 8%

Signposting at attractions and viewpoints and on roads in general have the lowest overall satisfaction ratings.

## RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

A survey in 2005 at the Old Station Tintern shows how visitors first found out about the Old Station:

- Always Known 36%
- Friend Relation 13%
- Leaflet 4%
- Website 0%
- Newspaper 1%
- Road signs 34%
- Local guide book or map 10%
- Tourist Information centre 2%
- 40% of visitors used on site information point and 50% used the exhibition.

### **What is Monmouthshire Countryside Service and Partners are currently planning?**

In the short term the Countryside Service will continue to use a web based method to provide information on short routes, in a simple format that can easily be downloaded or printed and made available in tourist information centres and other venues. In the longer term other technological solutions will be investigated to make this information more accessible.

Partnerships are being developed to deliver high quality, consistent and mutually reinforcing interpretation in the Lower Wye Valley, with Forestry Commission Wales and the Wye Valley

AONB; and in the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site and the Clydach Gorge with Torfaen County Borough Council, Brecon Beacons National Park and Sustrans. Adventa's Woodland Revival project has recently commissioned an interpretative strategy for Monmouthshire Woodlands and is now considering the potential to implement its recommendations, which include improved information and interpretation.

The Countryside Service and partners deliver activity and event programmes. These promote the use of the countryside and its events are well attended. An education programme has also been developed and is widely used throughout the schools in Monmouthshire to promote responsible use of the countryside.

A number of other organisations also deliver activity and event programmes across the County.

### **Where do people want to get information?**

The assessments from the questionnaires reveal that the main place the public would go for more information about Monmouthshire's paths and trails is the Tourist Information Centre. Interestingly the next most important place for information provision is libraries, which is

not a place where information has previously been identified.

Visitors (who want information) rely heavily on site information boards (48%), Tourism Information Centres (TICs) (38%), information at attractions (34%) and road signs

The lack of information is a significant under-current (but not main reason) for putting people off pursuing activities.

### **Promotion and Publicity Key Issues**

- Information provided about countryside access resources (particularly for cyclists, horse riders, disabled users, carriage drivers and motorists) is inadequate and prevents users from enjoying the countryside.
- Information is required:
  - In various formats
  - Through a variety of outlets
  - To improve dog walkers behaviour
  - To promote health benefits & circular routes
  - To improve communication with service users and volunteers

- To provide essential information to those with mobility issues or other disabilities (Statements of Action 3c, 7b, 8d, 8e, 9c, 9d)
- Information on circular routes is required with better links to towns and villages. (Statement of Action 9d)
- More on-site and other related interpretation is desired. (Statement of Action 9a)
- Signposting at sites, viewpoints and on roads in general needs improving. (Statements of Action 7c & 9a)
- Information to increase awareness of appropriate behaviour amongst dog walkers. (Statements of Action 7b & 9c)
- Improve information and communication with Community Councils and volunteers. (Statement of Action 9c)

## Publicity and Promotion Statements of Action

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**Objective:** To improve and increase the range of countryside access information

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council (Countryside Service, ICT, Economic Development – Tourism), Adventa, Wye Valley AONB, Wye Valley and Forest of Dean Tourism Association, Community and Town Council's, Local PROW Interest Groups, Countryside Council for Wales, other neighbouring authorities, Wye Valley AONB, Visit Wales, CADW, Sustrans, Forestry Commission Wales, Local Businesses, Volunteers, Private Sector Organisations.

**Strategic Links:** Monmouthshire County Council's Corporate Strategic Plan, Countryside Strategy, Community Strategy, Wye Valley AONB Management Plan, other neighbouring authorities Rights of Way Improvement Plans, Tourism Strategies, Climbing Higher – The Next Steps, Well Being in Wales, A Winning Wales, Woodlands for Wales – The National Assembly for Wales Strategy for Trees and Woodlands, Saddling Up For Success – A Riding Tourism Strategy for Wales.

**Statement of Action 9a:** To improve and increase the range of information on and about countryside access and its benefits (particularly for horse riders, cyclists, disabled users, carriage drivers and motorists).

Resources: additional staff required ££

Targets: (2008 onwards):

- Undertake a review of current information (including signposting at view points, roads etc) and develop an interpretative plan for Monmouthshire, ensuring that all promotional information is as accessible as possible and targeted to the relevant audience.
- Implement the interpretive plan including references to local businesses, services, health and public transport
- All leaflets and books should incorporate as standard information about the gradients and furniture to allow users to make informed decisions over their possible use of any trail.

**Statement of Action 9b:** To improve Countryside Services web presence

Resources: Additional staff time required – possible IT costs

Targets:

- Undertake a comprehensive review and update of the Countryside Services web site. Include a wider range of information for the public and establish direct links with associated websites. Make all free guides available to download from the website.
- Create an electronic database on the website so that details of closures, traffic regulation orders etc. in Monmouthshire are available to the public.

Also see **Statement of Action 3c**

**Statement of Action 9c:** To improve communication with Service Users, Volunteers, Community and Town Council's.

Resources: ££ plus some staff time

Target: (ongoing)

- We will seek to facilitate a revitalised programme of community and voluntary countryside action by improving information for volunteers, delivering training and promotional material and seeking to increase volunteer involvement.
- We will continue to provide and facilitate accessible activities and education programmes to promote awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the countryside through the countryside activity and events programme.

**Statement of Action 9d** (see also **Statement of Action 4b**): In conjunction with volunteers and partners, we will seek to review and re-promote Pathcare routes and any new circular/ other types of routes as they come into existence.

Resources: ££

Target: 2007 to 2017.

- To review, in 2007, those routes currently being pathcared and ensure that Volunteers are given appropriate training and that the route is recorded adequately on the Internet or by other means.
- Engage with partners, community groups and volunteers to review non-pathcared routes and seek appropriate funding and methods of re-promoting these routes plus any new circular community walks/rides.

## **10. Links to other Plans and Strategies**

This document is seen as a strategic business plan and a bidding document and will need to make links to a wide range of strategies in order to realise opportunities for funding and partnerships.

### **How does the ROWIP fit into other policies and plans?**

The ROWIP cannot stand alone, but must sit alongside a number of other strategies and plans at a national, regional and local level. These plans cover a wide area of subjects such as health, quality of life, citizenship, sustainable transport and economic development. However the following key documents are particularly important. These are:

#### **1. The Corporate Strategic Plan 2004 – 2009**

This corporate plan sets the Council's own priorities and forms the core for all Monmouthshire County Council strategies, ensuring that high level objectives are translated into visions for its services. The Countryside Service contributes to the Council's strategic objectives, by making Monmouthshire **cleaner and greener**, helping people to enjoy **healthier lifestyles** through

enhanced countryside access and understanding, **supporting strong local economies** by maintaining and developing tourism infrastructure, and **supporting safer and stronger communities** by improving access and citizen involvement in local environments.

**2. Annual Improvement Plan** – This plan explains the Council's achievements and performance against a range of indicators, (including improving access to the countryside), linked to the council's 6 main aims.

This plan will provide a monitoring link for the statements of action in this ROWIP.

**3. The Community Strategy for Monmouthshire.** This is a strategy that sets the context for all organisations and groups in Monmouthshire to "*work together to improve the quality of life for all people and communities in Monmouthshire*". This strategy is supported by many partnerships that have set tasks and outcomes to achieve:

1. An environment, which is valued and enhanced for future generations.
2. Working together with the community to improve the health and well being for all people living and working in Monmouthshire.

3. Accessible, high quality education and training for all is provided through informal learning opportunities and information services.
4. Prosperity and quality of life in Monmouthshire is raised by developing a more sustainable local economy. Using natural resources carefully and encouraging indigenous growth.
5. Monmouthshire is a place where people are able to contribute to their communities making their communities stronger and safer.

Countryside access has an important part to play in the achievement of the Community Strategy objectives.

**4. The Unitary Development Plan** – This has a substantial impact on public rights of way and can offer opportunities to enhance them. Policy SP9 states "*the plan will protect or enhance leisure and recreation facilities by the retention of open spaces and the development of new facilities, including play and sports provision in accessible and appropriate locations.*"

Policy Env 1 in the Environment Objectives states "*Development, including proposals for new buildings, extensions to*

*existing buildings and advertisements, should: (j) maintain and, where appropriate, improve and/or develop the existing public rights of way network; (k) make appropriate provision for access and use by all potential users including those with restricted mobility;”*

Policy MV4, Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycleways, provides detailed guidance for the improvement, development and protection of the rights of way network. It contains the policy that “proposals to improve or develop the byway, public footpath, bridleway, Restricted Byway and cycleway networks will be permitted where they give rise to no unacceptable landscape harm. Such proposals must be designed with the safety of users in mind and should also take into account the following considerations: convenience, access to the countryside, access to local transport facilities and the needs of those with limited mobility.”

**5. The Local Transport Plan 2000 –** This covers a wide range of sustainable transport issues of which rights of way form a major part. The plan cites there is considerable scope for expanding walking and cycling as sustainable forms of transport. It also contains the following policies that are particularly relevant to countryside access:

- The County Council will work towards giving all residents of Monmouthshire equal access to all services in the region, particularly health, leisure and education.
- The County Council will ensure that its transport policies and strategies have a positive impact on human health and the natural environment.
- The County Council will manage and improve the rights of way network and endeavour to integrate them with the highway network to facilitate increased opportunities for walking as a means of transport and recreation.
- The County Council will continue to work with the British Horse Society to enhance and develop horse-riding circuits.

**6. The Countryside Strategy** - This aims to “*sustain the quality and diversity of Monmouthshire’s countryside and provide opportunities for all sections of the community and visitors to gain greater understanding of access to the countryside*”. It also aims to “*maintain and promote public rights of way and access to green spaces*”.

### **7. Local Biodiversity Action Plan**

This aims to protect, conserve and where possible enhance biodiversity in Monmouthshire. It includes supplementary planning guidance relating to biodiversity and development, including consideration of designated sites and protected species.

### **8. Climbing Higher Next Steps**

The Climbing Higher Strategy is the Welsh Assembly Government’s twenty-year vision for sport and physical activity. It sets out objectives and targets dealing with health, economy, culture, society and environment. Particular objectives and targets that are relevant to the ROWIP are:

- The percentage of people in Wales using the Welsh natural environment for outdoor activities will increase from 36% to 60%
- 95% of people will have a footpath or cycle path within a 10 minute walk
- No one should live more than a 6 minute walk (300m) from their nearest green space.
- Encourage the integration of walking and cycling into everyday life and a means of recreation and transport
- Minimise the gaps related to gender, age, disability, ethnicity and deprivation

- By increasing participation in sustainable ways that ensure that the quality natural environment is maintained and enhanced.

Other key documents worth noting are the Walking and Cycling Strategy for Wales (WAG December 2003), Sweta, A Walking and Cycling Strategy for South East Wales 2006, Horse Industry Strategy for England and Wales (WAG), etc. Numerous other documents are also considered to have various links with the implementation of this ROWIP and these are listed in the Assessment report. It is important to note that this is not a definitive list as new strategies and policy documents are being issued continually which will have a bearing on the outcomes of countryside access provision within Monmouthshire.

### Key Conclusions

- There is a need to promote rights of way as a mechanism for helping to achieve other appropriate internal and external aims. (Statements of Action 10a and 10b)
- The Countryside Service needs to develop partnerships within the County Council and with other

organisations that can add value to the objectives of this plan and the rights of way network (Statements of Action 10b and 10c)

- The future development of the rights of way network needs to reflect other relevant policy aims. (Statement of Action 10c)

## Links to other Strategies and Plans Statement of Action

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**Objectives:** To promote the wider benefits of countryside access, improve and maintain partnerships and implement the aims of this plan.

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council (ALL sections), National Assembly Wales, Countryside Council of Wales, Other Highway Authorities and Welsh National Parks, Monmouthshire Local Access Forum, Sustrans, Town and Community Council's, regional and local organisations and groups.

**Strategic Links:** All relevant plans and strategies.

**Statement of Action 10a:** We will promote the rights of way network as a mechanism for helping to achieve other appropriate internal and external aims described elsewhere in this plan.

Resources: additional staff time required

Targets (ongoing):

- To promote the potential benefits of the rights of way network in increasing sustainable tourism in Monmouthshire
- To promote the potential benefits of the rights of way network in improving health, physical activity and social well being of users and potential users
- To promote the potential benefits of the rights of way network as an important resource for under represented groups to be able to visit the countryside.
- To promote the potential benefits of the rights of way network as an important mode of sustainable transport, increasing the numbers of local journeys that can be made on foot and bicycle.

**Statement of Action 10b:** To further develop appropriate partnerships with organisations and individuals that can contribute to the objectives of this plan and add value to the rights of way network

Resources: Additional staff required

Targets:

- To work with volunteers to help maintain, improve and promote the rights of way network
- To work with Community and Town Councils and Community Groups and other initiatives to help maintain, improve and promote the rights of way network

- To work with government and non-government agencies, voluntary and other organisations where it will assist to maintain. Improve and promote public rights of way and other forms of countryside access.

**Statement of Action 10c:** To work with internal and external partners to ensure the development of the rights of way network maximises its contribution to wider landscape biodiversity, visitor interpretation and educational objectives.

Resources: Existing staff resources as required.

Target: 2007 and ongoing.

- To continually promote the benefits of countryside access through existing and new partnerships
- To continue to review and respond to consultations on any new or revised policy/strategy document.
- To regularly update countryside access management procedures and undertake staff training to ensure the future development of the rights of way network needs reflect other relevant policy aims.

### 11. Resources

The total countryside access management budget in 2006/07 is £370,000 (staff costs £315,000). This is allocated between a team of nine full time members of staff, one part time Volunteer Co-ordinator and two 200-hour wardens. The team is additionally supported by one member of legal staff and administrative and project specific support from other countryside staff. Current annual expenditure on maintenance and infrastructure works varies but is approximately £84,000 per annum.

Using the figures supplied by the volunteer condition survey it is possible to begin to estimate the costs of completing the current backload of infrastructure work and an annual maintenance sum required to keep the infrastructure in good repair and available for use.

Based on standard unit costing (at today's prices) the figure of £385,000 (£233 km) would be required to rectify all the outstanding infrastructure issues on the rights of way network. Thereafter a figure of £270,000 would be required every year, (or £164/km) to maintain all the existing structures (bridges, gates, stiles, fingerposts) on the rights of way network.

However these figures exclude staff costs and the cost of surface management, particularly where related to the maintenance of restricted byways, byways and surfaced urban type footpaths. It is also based on a high percentage of self-closing gates rather than stiles being replaced and on all 70 missing bridges being only 7m long. All bridges will need to be surveyed, both existing bridges and the requirements for missing bridges, to establish a more accurate figure. Bridge costs rise significantly with larger structures, which may require a bespoke engineered solution, and therefore eventual cost estimates will be significantly higher.

It should also be remembered that Monmouthshire County Council is also ultimately responsible for the protection and maintenance of 471 kilometres of path in the Brecon Beacons National Park. Currently there is an agreement for maintenance to be carried out by the National Park at a cost of £8,000 per annum. However Monmouthshire County Council is still responsible for bridges over 8m in length. An example is Oldcastle Bridge, which is 35m in length and will cost in the region of £150,000 to replace.

Further estimation needs to be undertaken to assess the costs of

maintaining the surface of paths, particularly the hundreds of tarmaced paths in or near urban areas. The installation of the specialist rights of way database will enable this process to be carried out over time.

With the current rates of staffing and funding it is impossible to maintain the network of 1656 kilometres (1029. miles) and no real improvements can be made. Therefore it will be important to review priorities and look at innovative ways of managing and improving the network, including attracting much larger sources of funding and forming strategic partnerships to do so.

Further research is required to fully assess the full costs of meeting the backlog of rights of way infrastructure and to set this against the economic value of the PROW network to Monmouthshire, estimated by Visit Wales (formerly the Welsh Tourist Board) at £27.4m per annum for Wales.

## Key Conclusions

- All bridge sites, particularly those where there are missing bridges, require surveying. (Statement of Action 7c & 11a)
- There is a need to assess the costs of properly maintaining the surface of paths. (Statement of Action 11a)
- As indicated in Section 7, there is a need to review priorities and look at innovative ways of managing and improving the network, including attracting much larger sources of funding. (Statements of Action 7a & 11a)
- Further research is required to fully assess the full costs of addressing the backlog of infrastructure issues. (Statement of Action 11a)

## Resources Statement of Action

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**Objective:** To ensure adequate resources for the implementation of the objectives within this plan.

**Key Partners:** Monmouthshire County Council, Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales, Adjoining Local Highway Authorities and Brecon Beacons National Park, Adventa, Forestry Commission, Monmouthshire Local Access Forum, Sustrans, Town and Community Council's, relevant regional and local organisations and groups.

**Strategic Links:** All relevant plans and strategies

**Statement of Action 11a:** To secure additional resources from internal and appropriate external sources that help to make improvements both within and beyond our statutory duties

Resources: Existing staff resources to be used.

Targets: (ongoing)

- To seek grant aid from appropriate sources to deliver high quality access provision where it adds value to the rights of way network.
- To seek appropriate sponsorship opportunities in delivering high quality access provision where it adds value to the rights of way network.
- To research the full cost of addressing the backlog of infrastructure and surfacing issues (2009 – 2010).

## 12. Monitoring

This document is a working document that will inform an annual 3-year rolling business plan and associated work programmes. The progress of the Statements of Action will also be discussed at a meeting with Monmouthshire's Local Access Forum and within the Council's corporate annual Improvement Plan process.

Both capital and revenue funding will be required to put any improvements into practice and to ensure long-term maintenance. The Countryside Access Team will have to be very innovative in sourcing funds to support the improvements. We will consider seeking funds from lottery bodies, the local transport plan, European schemes, etc. subject to staff time being able to do so.

In order to be successful in developing these funding partnerships, we anticipate the need to demonstrate the extent to which improvements to the public rights of way network strongly contribute to realising much broader policy objectives,

such as health, reducing dependence on motor cars, tourism, economic development, safe routes to school or work and accessibility for those with limited or restricted mobility.

### **Involvement of Landowners in improvements to the network**

Any future improvements to the public rights of way network will require the support and understanding of local landowners over which these rights exist. Opportunities exist to talk to landowners through their representation on the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum and by other means.

