

## Lower Wye Tracks & Trails

*Working Together to create an Action Plan for Recreational Access in Monmouthshire's Wye Valley*

### An overview of the scope and topic areas

#### Scope

The new strategy will incorporate Monmouthshire County Council's statutory requirements as the Public Rights of Way and Highways Authority along with its duty of regard to the AONB and responsibilities under the Environment Act and Future Generations & Wellbeing Act. Thus, by considering the climate change, nature recovery, heritage, tourism and active travel agendas, it will have a broader scope than the statutory Highways requirements.

The strategy needs to consider the views of a broad range of users, including but not limited to:

- Local residents
- Visitors (regular and occasional)
- Leisure users
- Work users (farmers, foresters, commuters, local businesses (B&B, attractions etc.)
- Volunteers (ecology, heritage, Pathcare, Invasive species control etc.)
- Community and Interest groups (social, health, wildlife etc.)
- Walkers
- Runners
- Cyclists (e-bikers, mountain-bikers)
- Horse riders
- Carriage drivers
- Geo-cachers
- Orienteers
- Off-road vehicle riders/drivers (Quad bikes, motorbikes, 4x4s)
- Pushchair, wheelchair, buggy, mobility scooter etc. users
- Event organisers (walking festival, races/competitions)
- Emergency Services and volunteer rescue services

#### How it will be delivered

The Wye Valley AONB Unit along with Monmouthshire County Council and NRW will work together to develop the strategy and action plan and progress its adoption and implementation. Close collaboration with communities, users, landowners and interest groups will ensure delivery of the strategy is supported by those it is designed to help.

#### Core Principles

The strategy will be developed around a number of priorities. These will be developed based on what has already been learnt from existing work and community feedback and importantly, through the consultation process:

- Responding to the opportunity to support the tracks and trails network and reduce the impact of flooding and erosion.
- Encourage responsible behaviours among all users and discouraging any unwanted behaviours.
- Creating an environment, through resources, facilities and education that enable all user groups to harmoniously enjoy all that the Wye Valley AONB has to offer.

- Provide support to landowners and Highway Authority to maintain tracks and trails, and their environments, in a way that ensures both good access for users and protects the natural and heritage features of the area.

### **Active Management: ways in which the impact of humans on the natural environment and historic landscape can be minimised**

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There are many different ways in which actions can be targeted to enhance access and mitigate or reduce the impact human users have on the AONB's environment. Some of the ways being considered are:

- **Improving the surfaces of tracks and trails** to support their use and sustainability. This might include repairing existing surfaces, considering new options for resurfacing, managing the flow of water along and across the routes or other improvements so that they can be used more safely by people and to sustain the routes for future use.

- **Improve the durability of the landscape**, for example through new natural flood management schemes, changes to management of the surrounding land to hold back water and control flows, new or reinstated walls and hedges and tree planting, designed to mitigate the impact of use of the tracks and trails

- **Managing use**, for example by restricting/encouraging use to the times of year/weather conditions when the least damage is done or restricting the types of use. In this scenario it is easy to think simply of restricting access to motorised vehicles, but consideration must also be given to the impact of large events or groups of walkers or runners can have, or cyclists following the same wheel track, or horses cutting in to soft ground. There may be opportunities to manage use through voluntary agreements.

- **Providing information** to help users understand the challenges and encourage responsible behaviours. This maybe through more signage on tracks and trails including both way-finding and environment/heritage information, access to online resources, encouraging community involvement and volunteering opportunities.

### **Specific outcomes the strategy might deliver**

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When developing the strategy, the focus will be on the outcomes. That is the benefits that implementing the strategy will have on the community, the landscape, biodiversity and heritage. Some outcomes might include:

- Protecting the native wildlife and plants in the area, though careful landscape management, protection of natural habitats, prevention and control of Invasive Non-Native Species.

- Looking after the overall character of the area, by ensuring the countryside around the tracks and trails is maintained sympathetically.

- Addressing the challenge of increased risk of flooding; something that is affecting many areas of the country as both climate and land use changes impact.

- Maintaining the built heritage of the area so that it can be enjoyed by future generations.

- Providing support (funding, training) to local communities so they can improve or maintain their local tracks and trails.

- Encouraging responsible use by visitors, who support the local economy through their spend in the area (accommodation, food and drink, visiting attractions etc.).

**Some of these principles, management actions and outcomes may be more important to you than others and this is something to consider when responding to this consultation.**