Lower Wye Tracks and Trails Steering Group Meeting – 3rd December 2024

A sub-group of the Monmouthshire Local Access Forum [LAF]

Notes of hybrid meeting held at Wye Valley National Landscape Office & on Microsoft Teams

Present:

Barbara Heys [LAF] (Chair)
Sallie Roderick [LAF]
Kelvin Varney [LAF]
Irene Brooke [LAF]
Anne Underwood [LAF]
Ian Mawdsley [LAF / Wye Valley Villages Delivery Group]
Andrew Blake [Wye Valley National Landscape Manager]
Ruth Waycott [Wye Valley National Landscape Infromation Officer]
Gareth Freeman [Monmouthshire County Council (MCC), Highways]

Apologies:

John Askew (LAF)
Graham Kinsella (MCC Highways)
Ruth Rourke (MCC PRoW)
Celyn Davies (Wye Valley National Landscape team)

Meeting Purpose

Tracks and Trails Steering Group meeting to discuss project progress, public engagement, surveys, monitoring, and next steps.

Key Takeaways

- Agreed to invite local council members as observers to receive meeting papers but not have voting rights
- Will proceed with commissioning professional survey of unsealed UCRs
- Exploring options for monitoring usage, including acoustic monitoring technology
- Need to design custom bilingual signage that is legally compliant and branded
- Will produce public information update on project progress early in new year

2. Confirm notes of previous meeting – 8th October

Barbara's apologies not listed.

3. Membership and Public Engagement

Agreed to invite local MCC Ward Members, Cllr Ann Webb, Cllr Richard John and Cllr Jayne McKenna, as observers.

Will share meeting notes with local Community Councils once finalised, ideally within 2 weeks of meetings. Meeting notes will also then be uploaded to National Landscape webpage https://www.wyevalley-nl.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/lowerwyetracksandtrails/

Discussed need for better public communication and engagement, but no public meetings planned yet while development of initial actions still underway. Agreed better to hold meeting(s) when there are distinct proposals and progress to report.

4. Site Visit debrief

Attendees agreed it was a useful and informative trip, that gave a broad demonstration of the issues and examples of some solutions. Recent complaints from locals about noise pollution, safety and the impact of 4x4s and motorbikes on the UCRs was discussed. It was observed that the culvert 'cattlegrid' at the bottom probably made the route inaccessible for horses. Queries were raised on the various impacts of and on adjacent land uses, including coppice and ancient woodland, hedgerow management, maintenance regimes for stream and water bars.

5. Draft Consultant's Brief for Survey of UCRs

The rationale for the focus on unsealed UCRs and their immediate surroundings was discussed and agreed. Public Rights of Way already have significant data; however, information regarding unsealed UCRs is required to inform any future actions. Need to emphasise health & safety concerns and reference back to Tracks & Trails Strategy, with clear purpose. Tender proceedings will lead to commissioning of survey, which is intended to give systematic and consistent professional assessment of: current conditions, usage, ecological impacts, and options for potential interventions. Some concerns raised about cost vs. benefit, but agreed necessary to gather objective data.

6. Monitoring Usage

Technological options are being explored including:

- Manual counting (labour-intensive, least effective)
- Automated counters (can't differentiate vehicles well)
- CCTV (expensive, logistical challenges)
- Acoustic monitoring (promising but untested for this use)

Currently enquiring of other National Landscapes & National Parks on any similar monitoring approaches. Aim to monitor 2-3 routes initially, subject to costs.

7. Signage

Need to design custom bilingual signs that are legally compliant. Discussed pros/cons of detailed vs. simple signage. Agreed symbols/pictorial representations were preferable to complex bilingual signs. Will need to ensure MCC Highways, and potentially the Polic, support design and placement. Noted previous recognition that enforcement action can only be effective with correct signage. Briefly discussed difference between Civil and Criminal damage, and respective responsibilities and enforcement. Agreed some clarification would be helpful to all concerned.

8. Next Steps

- Invite local Ward Members as observers to Group, to receive papers.
- Circulate meeting notes to group for approval before public posting
- Refine and distribute survey brief to potential contractors
- Continue research on usage monitoring technologies
- Begin designing custom signage options
- Produce public information update on project progress for early 2025, one year after end of public consultation
- Schedule February or March site visit to Whitebrook area
- Request legal brief on Tracks & Trails usage rights and responsibilities from MCC legal team

9. Any other business

Noted that noise of vehicles was a significant problem. Modified exhausts are recognised factor among some groups. Apparently France is introducing acoustic monitoring and enforcement of vehicles.

Common Sense and the Right of Public Access leaflet from Sweden was shared.

10. Date of next meeting

Coordinate with chair on available dates, then set up poll for next meeting date in February, ideally before next LAF on 19th Feb.