

## **THE NARTH AND DISTRICT FOOTPATH PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT OCTOBER 2022 TO SEPTEMBER 2023**

### Surveys

We completed the first full round of surveys of Public Rights of Way over all of our project area between 2015 and 2019. The surveys covered around 25 miles of paths that we now maintain. We commenced a second round of surveys in 2022, covering about half of the routes so far and, in contrast to the earlier surveys, have identified only a small amount of work required.

### Rights of Way Work Programme and Working Groups with Monmouthshire CC

We use the findings of the surveys and reports from users to update our work programme. This aims to keep the routes in a condition where residents and visitors can safely enjoy using them.

After completing the backlog of infrastructure work with MCC in 2022, we have not needed to run joint working groups with them this year and only a few replacements of waymarks have been required

### Regular Working Group

Working as official MCC volunteers on Public Rights of Way, our very successful regular monthly half-day working group has had eleven energetic and enthusiastic members. We have met nine times during the year, clearing encroaching vegetation and keeping stiles and gateways open along our public footpaths and bridleways.

### Conservation Tasks

As well as our footpath work, we have diversified our activity to include nature conservation tasks. Our biggest achievement continues to be working with the Wye Valley AONB, NRW and local landowners to eradicate Himalayan Balsam (HB) from the Manor Brook Catchment. This year, we again found only very small numbers of plants around and above the village compared to when we started in 2019 and most sites are now clear. With support from NRW's contractors we have now continued work in the lower part of Manor Wood and between us removed many thousands of plants to prevent seeding this year.

We have begun discussions with landowners in Whitebrook with the intention of commencing HB removal from the lower part of Manor Brook in 2024. Through our partnership with the Wye Valley AONB, we received an Award from the Council for the Protection of Rural England in recognition of our work on HB removal.

### Participation

In the last year, a total of 17 volunteers have taken part in our footpath and conservation work, either on survey or practical tasks. Their input added up to 210 hours (previous 12 months = 367 hours). This is a significant amount of work and very many thanks are due to all who have given their time to help improve our village footpaths and bridleways, and our natural environment. Our thanks go to Monmouthshire County Council who have

again been a great supporter of our work.

### Working with Other Organisations

We have continued our close working relationship with the Wye Valley AONB and are able to undertake a wide range of work on NRW land under their permission and insurance arrangements.

We have kept in close touch with Natural Resources Wales, the principal landowner around the village. They have continued to promptly remove fallen trees for us. We work together to monitor and maintain the waymarked walks in Manor Wood and on Beacon Hill. They replaced the Manor Wood Mapboard.

We are grateful to Trellech United Community Council for providing Public Liability Insurance cover to enable the Group to work off Public Rights of Way. The Community Council continue to take forward their longstanding applications to MCC for a number of important long-established paths around the village to be designated as Public Rights of Way. We understand there has been some recent action, but progress remains slow.

### Village Walks

The Footpath Project is ultimately about people getting out and about using our local paths – as regular informal daily exercise or on an organized event. We led a walk to explore our local woodlands and interesting trees as part of the Chepstow Walking Festival in April 2023. A Village Walk is planned for October 2023.

### The Life of Manor Wood

We commenced our ambitious project to explore aspects of this ancient woodland that lies at the heart of our village and we were grateful to receive financial support from the National Lottery Communities Fund.

We organised a Drop-in Event and a Discovery Day to give the community the opportunity to become involved and share their knowledge and anecdotes. We organised two “Bugs, Beetles and Biscuits” events for the younger members of the village and were bowled over by their enthusiastic response.

### Looking Ahead

For 2023/24, we will continue our monthly vegetation management work to keep our paths in good, walkable condition, continue our re-survey and work with MCC and NRW to undertake any major tasks identified. We will work towards completion of the “Life of Manor Wood Project”. We hope to organise at least one Village Walk in spring/early summer. We will continue to encourage people to take the opportunity to combine their walks with use of the 65 Bus.

I hope that this update is useful for you. I would be happy to receive any comments and ideas that you may have and will aim to continue to keep everyone in touch.

**Brian Mahony**  
**30th September 2023**