

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 18 th July 2023
Report Subject	Access Barrier Review – Wales Coast Path
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy
Report Author	Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Flintshire County Council appointed a consultant to undertake a review of the existing access control measures in place on a section of the Wales Coast Path (WCP) between Chester and Queensferry.

The access control barriers are in place to protect users of the WCP against the risks posed by illegal vehicle access to the path, however, the existing barriers can cause access issues to users of some mobility scooters & unconventional cycles. The study reviews the background context, legislations, barrier dimensions and user constraints in order to put forward recommendations for all 14 access points from Chester to Deeside. Recommendations to improve access are balanced against any impact of such amendments on illegal vehicle accessibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Members note the findings of the review and support the recommendations for improved accessibility.
---	--

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE ACCESS BARRIER REVIEW
1.01	<p>The area under review has long been an active route for walking and cycling journeys, however the path has also in the past experienced issues as a result of illegal vehicle types (such as motorcycles / dirt bikes) gaining access to the path and thereby posing a safety risk to legitimate pedestrian and cycle users.</p>
1.02	<p>As a result of this, several access control measures were installed along the path to restrict access to the path for illegal users such as motorcycles, to ensure the safety of legitimate users of the path, and in order to maintain the attractiveness of the route as a walking and cycling facility.</p>
1.03	<p>A series of A-Frame and Chicane barriers were installed in 2006 as part of the Wales Coast Path development programme, and the barriers have been effective at reducing instances of illegal ingress (although such instances have not been prevented entirely).</p>
1.04	<p>The barriers are designed to be passable by as many legitimate user types as possible (including Class 2 mobility scooters), whilst prohibiting access to larger vehicles.</p>
1.05	<p>Disabled access to the countryside has increased over the last few years, partly due to the availability of mobility aids suited to off road environments. Often the size of these aids are larger than the standard classes of mobility scooter and concerns have been raised by user groups relating to the current access control measures along the coast.</p>
1.06	<p>The Equality Act 2010 provides legal protection to people from discrimination based on a range of characteristics including disability, age, race, sexual orientation.</p> <p>The Act requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled persons so as they are not disadvantaged either directly or indirectly from using services and facilities when compared to those without disabilities.</p>
1.07	<p>It is important to note that improving access for all legitimate users of the path will necessitate the widening of existing openings at access control locations, which in turn reduces the effectiveness of the access control measure in preventing illegal access.</p> <p>As such, it will not be possible for access for all legitimate users to be improved entirely whilst still retaining the same level of access control to prevent use for vehicles such as cars & motorcycles.</p>
1.08	<p>The review identifies the various types of vehicle that may be used (legitimately or otherwise) by those wishing to access the WCP and</p>

	identifies the existing access control barrier types in place, providing an initial analysis of their strengths and limitations.
1.9	<p>Several potential alternative solutions have been considered,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staggered gates (modified chicane feature); • Width Adjustable A Frame Barriers; • Gated A Frame Barriers; • Bollards; and, • The complete removal of access control.
1.10	<p>The review carried out 14 individual appraisals of each barrier within the study area.</p> <p>For each barrier, an assessment of fit against the key policy and guidance has been undertaken and the accessibility of each barrier by various modes has also been considered. Where alternative solutions offer the potential to improve the existing provision they have been considered, and recommendations have been made for each barrier regarding any potential improvements.</p>
1.11	<p>In summary, there are two main proposed recommendations:</p> <p>A frame - upgrade this barrier to a Radar Lock Gated A Frame Barrier. This would offer a cost-effective solution with the potential for improved accessibility by legitimate users holding a radar key (which are readily available online) whilst still maintaining an effective deterrent to illegal vehicle ingress.</p> <p>Chicane - It is recommended that the existing chicane barriers are replaced by a staggered gates solution. This would retain the existing level of permeability for legitimate users (which could be enhanced should the gates be fitted with radar locks which could be opened as required), and would retain the existing level of deterrent to illegal vehicle access.</p>
1.12	<p>On 11th July the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Flintshire's Local Access Forum (LAF) both supported the work to provide improved access to the WCP and recommended that further consultation with specific user groups would be advantageous. It is proposed that as a design is drawn up at each specific access point, then the plan will be shared and feedback invited from the North Wales Police Design-out Crime Officer, cycling and disability groups. Implementation would then follow.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The Review was funded by Natural Resources Wales WCP grant fund.

2.02	An application for funding from Natural Resources Wales WCP grant has been made to implement recommendations (subject to Cabinet approval) within this pilot area.
------	--

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
-------------	---

3.01	<p>North Wales Police were consulted as part of this work and their views have fed into the recommendations and are supportive of the approach.</p> <p>The Design Out Crime Officer has also offered additional assistance in any implementation.</p>
3.02	Natural Resources Wales (NRW) have also undertaken a pilot study in Gwynedd on WCP accessibility and have fed into this review. NRW Officers (inc. WCP Team) are supportive of these recommendations.
3.03	The study has been shared with individual members of the disability community who have expressed an interest or concern in accessing the WCP.
3.04	The Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed the report 11 th July 2023. The Committee supported the recommendations in principle subject to further consultation with appropriate user groups.
3.05	Flintshire Local Access Forum (LAF) also discussed the report 11 th July 2023. The LAF recognised the difficult issue facing the Authority and welcomed the comprehensive report to try to improve access for all to the WCP. The LAF heard representation from individuals from the disability community. The LAF supported the move to try to increase accessibility and recommended that further work was undertaken to consult with user groups from the cycling and disability communities.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
-------------	------------------------

4.01	If Flintshire County Council did not consider the issue that access control barriers prevent certain groups of users from accessing the path, then there is a risk to be in contravention of the Equalities Act (2010).
4.02	If Flintshire County Council remove or widen the access to the path there may be an increase in illegal motorbike incursion and it may lead to an increase in crime associated with County Lines.

5.00	APPENDICES
-------------	-------------------

5.01	Appendix 1 – Consultant’s report – ‘Wales Coast Path Barrier Review’
------	--

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Contact Officer: Tom Woodall, Access & Natural Environment Manager Telephone: 01352 703902 E-mail: tom.woodall@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Wales Coast Path: National walking route covering 870miles of the Welsh Coast.</p> <p>Natural Resources Wales: Natural Resources Wales is the largest Welsh Government Sponsored Body, formed in April 2013, largely taking over the functions of the Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission Wales and the Environment Agency in Wales.</p> <p>Local Access Forum (LAF): The Local Access Forum is a statutory, independent advisory body of 12-20 volunteers, giving informed strategic advice to the Rights of Way and Countryside Service. The primary objective is to improve access and open air recreation to the countryside for everyone.</p>