



# Access and Recreation Plan



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in collaboration with Elan Links Partners

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# 1 Introduction

This Access and Recreation Plan has been developed during the Heritage Lottery funded Elan Links: People, Nature & Water Landscape Partnership development year. Access and recreation has been identified as both a threat to Elan's heritage and an opportunity. Therefore detailed consideration has been given to the range of issues associated with recreation and access at Elan. Since many of these issues are of a long-term nature the plan takes a strategic approach and is intended to inform the recreation and access provision well beyond the lifespan of the Elan Links Programme.

This plan details and affirms the principles of the Partnership towards access and recreation whilst preparing recommendations for the long and short term based on an evaluation of current threats and opportunities. The purpose of this plan is to ascertain and implement strategic principles that then inform and support identification of the actions needed to provide sustainable access and recreational usage of Elan for the public, beginning with the Elan Links programme.

The development of this access and recreation plan has been led by the Elan Links Partnership Board with input from a range of stakeholders and individuals with an interest in access and recreation at Elan. The plan has been agreed by a meeting of the Access and Recreation stakeholder group on May 23rd 2017. It forms a key component of the Elan Links application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sitting alongside the Landscape Conservation Action Plan and other supporting documents.



Figure 1: Elan Links Area

## 2 Methodology

Detailed below are the key stages showing how the access and recreation plan has been developed:

1. Review of the legislative, policy and historic context for access and recreation provision in the Elan Links area.
2. Consultation with stakeholders, including (but not limited to) project partners and gateway communities.
3. Identification of access and recreation strategic principles with partners and informed by stakeholders.
4. Evaluation of current interpretation provision including web-based and literature.
5. Evaluation of current provision on the ground, including the walking of key routes and visits to key locations.
6. Development of draft proposals for access and recreation programme of works:
  - a) in the five years of Elan Links Delivery Phase,
  - b) beyond Elan Links, as a legacy, both for review by partners and stakeholders.
7. Development of the Elan Links (5 year) principle projects and actions.

### 3 Review of Legislative, Policy and Historic Context

The Elan Links area has a unique management history and legislative context that has shaped past and current access. This context needs to be understood in order to inform future developments. Partner organisations have therefore reviewed the legislative, policy and historic context for access and recreation in the Elan Links area, detailed below:

#### 3.1 Legislative context – open access

The Elan Links area owes much to its compulsory purchase under the Birmingham Corporation Water Act 1892 (the 'Act'), which dammed the Elan and Claerwen valleys to provide clean drinking water to the growing city of Birmingham. This Act meant that the wider landscape / water catchment area was under a single management regime, plus this Act gave certain privileges. Almost uniquely, much of the Elan area has been available for public access for well over 100 years, following the passing of the 1892 Act. Section 53 of the Act stated, *“the public shall be entitled to a privilege at all times of enjoying air, exercise and recreation on such parts of any common or unenclosed land acquired by the Corporation...”*. This antedates by over a century, the “right to roam” provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Further to the 1892 Act, due to its water catchment obligations Elan has a further recreational responsibility under The Water Resources Act 1991, Section 16.2(a) for Water Companies to *“have regard to the desirability of preserving for the public freedom of access to areas of woodland, mountains, moor, heath, down, cliff and foreshore and other places of natural beauty”*. Furthermore Section 16.2(b) states there must be *“regard to the desirability of maintaining the availability to the public of any facility for visiting or inspecting any building, site or object of archaeological, architectural or historical interest”*.

The Elan Links area mainly comprises of Elan's main water catchment area and Cwmdauddwr Common and these two areas have a different legislative context. However, importantly in the context of recreation and access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Regulation Act 2000 open public access to the common is similarly available.

#### 3.2 Legislative context: Rights of Way (ROW)

In addition to the open access hill country, there are 43 statutory rights of way (ROW) either wholly or partly contained within the Elan's boundary. These consist of footpaths, bridleways, byways open to all traffic (BOAT), and an unclassified road. The ROW cover three districts; Radnorshire, Brecknock (both under Powys County Council) and Ceredigion (under Ceredigion County Council). The following table demonstrates the breakdown of route lengths and locality.

**Table 1: Current Routes:**

	Footpaths	Bridleways	BOATs	Unclassified Roads	<b>Total No. ROWs</b>	<b>Total Km</b>
Radnorshire	10	12	3	0	<b>25</b>	
Brecknock	2	8	1	0	<b>13</b>	

Ceredigion	0	2	0	1	3	
<b>Total ROWs</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>43</b>	
<b>Total Km</b>	<b>15.25</b>	<b>52.75</b>		<b>4.00</b>		

This table has not taken into account any prohibiting regulation orders. Currently one routeway, referred to as "The Monks Trod", is subject to a Permanent Traffic Regulation Order prohibiting use by 4-wheeled motorised vehicles and a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order prohibiting use by 2-wheeled motorised vehicles. Motorised access on Elan is discussed more fully in Paragraph 7.9.

### 3.3 Permissive routes

To complement the rights of way network, the Elan Estate affords permissive access. These routes are to be currently found in woodlands, near dams and along old railway lines. The routes both link with the rights of way network or are part of described/ promoted walks. In partnership, Powys County Council and DŵrCymru Welsh Water added a new tarmac section of permissive cycle and footpath between the Visitor Centre and the Elan Valley Trail.

### 3.4 Statutory Designations

To fully understand the access provision it is also important to recognise the significance of the Elan Links area for nature. The **Elenydd Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**, comprising some 22,770 hectares covers much of the Elan area. This SSSI was notified in 1986 and re-notified in 1992 because it is "*one of the most important areas of hill land in Wales for nature conservation, being of special interest for its bird and plant life*". In addition, there are several other SSSIs principally notified for their upland grassland, hay meadow habitats and ancient woodlands.

Elan also forms part of the **Elenydd/Mallaen Special Protection Area (SPA)**, designated under the European Wild Birds Directive (EC Directive 79/409). Designated in 1996, it is described as "*one of the most ornithologically important area of hill land in Wales*". Similarly, the areas blanket bog habitat is considered to be one of the best examples in the UK, as is much of the sessile oak woodland. This is recognised under European legislation by the **Elenydd Special Area of Conservation (SAC)** designation and the **Elan Valley Woodlands SAC**. Access provision therefore needs to recognise the needs of the SAC, SPA and SSSI designations, including the need to obtain the necessary consents prior to the commencement of any works within these designated areas.

### 3.5 Current Management

The principle Partners in control of access and recreation provision in Elan are DŵrCymru Welsh Water (DCWW) and Welsh Water Elan Trust, informally Elan Valley Trust (EVT). DCWW take responsibility for the Elan Valley Visitors Centre, reservoirs, woodlands and easily accessible areas such as the Elan Valley Trail. The Trust, which was initially setup by DCWW in 1989 as a registered charity, has management of the wider landscape (under a 999 year lease), amounting to approximately 20,000 hectares including most of the open hill land and farmed areas, many of the public facilities and amenities, as well as holiday and residential cottages. Importantly, in



addition to promoting nature conservation the Trust's charitable objects include: *'the facilitation and encouragement of access to and the study of the Valley and its animals and plant life.'*

Today, The Trust and DCWW work closely to promote a 'joined-up' approach to access and recreation provision and are the principal partners to this plan (and the Elan Links Scheme).

### 3.6 Elan Links: People Nature and Water

In 2016, the Elan Links Partnership submitted an application to the HLF for a comprehensive and strategic programme of works to secure the natural, cultural and built heritage of the area while promoting improved outcomes for people and communities. As stated in the Stage 1 application, "Elan Links: People, Nature, Water" was developed with an ambitious vision – 'to generate a step-change increase in beneficial outcomes from this special place –for people, for communities and for heritage.' To achieve this the Partnership had developed a strategic programme of investment to safeguard our heritage and to increase enjoyment, education, training, and recreation for the benefit of all.' The outcomes from Elan Links envisaged by the Partnership in the Stage 1 application can be summarised as:

#### 3.6.1 Heritage Outcomes:

- 🏡 The resilience of Elan is strengthened for the future;
- 🏡 The heritage of Elan is better interpreted and explained to a wider audience of people in an interactive way; and
- 🏡 Children will have engaged with the heritage of Elan.

#### 3.6.2 People Outcomes:

- 🏡 Families will have engaged with Elan;
- 🏡 People of all ages will have had an enjoyable experience in Elan;
- 🏡 Children will have enjoyed themselves and promotes better health and wellbeing from increased exercise and time outdoors;
- 🏡 More and a greater range of people, will have enjoyed time in Elan's wonderful outdoors and experienced Elan's natural heritage; and
- 🏡 Access to Elan's heritage sites is increased making the areas more open and accessible and easier for the community to access the different strands of heritage on offer.

#### 3.6.3 Community Outcomes:

- 🏡 With increased economic wealth, the area will be a better place to live, work and visit;
- 🏡 Communities will have a better knowledge of Elan as a destination for enjoyment and the importance of safeguarding it and this will in turn reduce the risks for future harm through irresponsible access behaviour, land management activities or neglect;
- 🏡 Elan will become more widely known as an area with good open access and recreation facilities and this will help to build the reputation of Elan as a tourism destination ;
- 🏡 Our local economy will be boosted as a result of additional visitors spending longer in the area as there is more on offer to interest them; and
- 🏡 The resilience of Elan is strengthened for the future.

This Plan is being compiled as part of the Stage 2 application to the HLF with the aim of further ensuring the proposed programme of work is appropriate, fit-for-purpose and achievable. Consultation and works completed on behalf of the Elan Links Partnership during the development phase has identified the threat posed by uncoordinated access and recreation provision. With an emphasis on safeguarding Elan's heritage for the future the development of the Access and










Recreation Plan has been seen by the Partnership as an opportunity to establish a sustainable and flourishing future for access and recreation provision in the Elan Links area.

## 4 Summary of consultations framework:

As part of the HLF development phase consultation work has been undertaken on and around the Elan Valley, Rhayader and Birmingham. The principle consultation events which have informed the access and recreation provisions are:

- 03/02/2016:** Access and Recreation Sub-group meeting, CARAD.
- 29/04/2016:** Access and Recreation consultation drop-in at Elan Valley.
- 24/10/2016:** Consultation event, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham.
- 26/10/2016:** Consultation event, Elan Valley Visitor Centre
- 26/10/2016:** Consultation event, Aberystwyth
- 18/02/2016:** Consultation event, Rhayader
- 22/05/2017:** Stakeholder meeting – review of Elan Valley Access Plan

In addition to these there has been discussions with stakeholders and individual enthusiasts (recorded in our community engagement log, please refer to LCAP appendix 9) along with discussions at partnership board meetings. The following stakeholder groups have been consulted with:

-  British Horse Society Powys;
-  Powys Ramblers;
-  Tread Lightly & Green Lane Association;
-  National Trail Riders Federation;
-  Local constituted mountain bike and road cycling groups;
-  Rhayader Walking Group;
-  Cambrian Way Society;
-  Elenydd Wilderness Trust; and
-  Mountain Both Association.

Along with above groups, consultation has taken place as part of the wider community engagement activities with a number of individuals, residents and visitors. The individual comments are detailed in the community engagement log. A survey in relation to access and recreation at Elan was also undertaken and a total of 55 residents and 65 visitors contributed. In addition to this further specific consultation was undertaken in February on the draft project proposals where a total of 60 visitors & 13 locals were consulted. The draft project proposals have also featured extensively on the Elan Links facebook page. Feedback has been positive and the detail can also be found in the community engagement log, which is appended to the LCAP.

Specific activity and route feedback has been fed into our evaluation of the current provision (Chapter 7). The current chapter is intended to provide a more general overview of activities undertaken at Elan and the types of activities that people are interested in.

### 4.1 How do people enjoy Elan?

The following figures demonstrate which recreational activities locals and visitors currently enjoy at Elan:

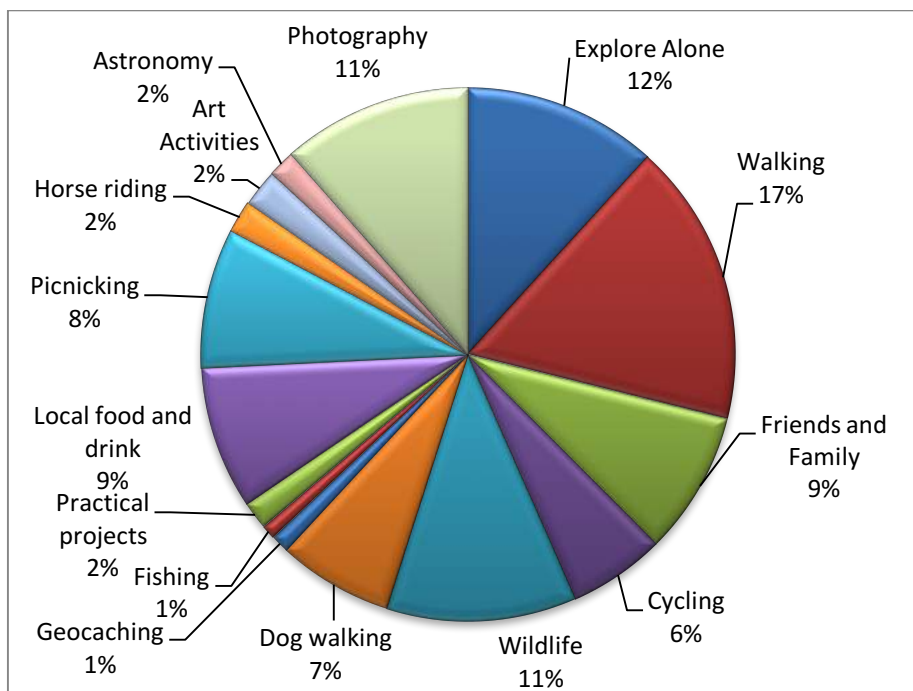


Figure 2: Recreational activities undertaken by 55 residents of the Elan Links area.

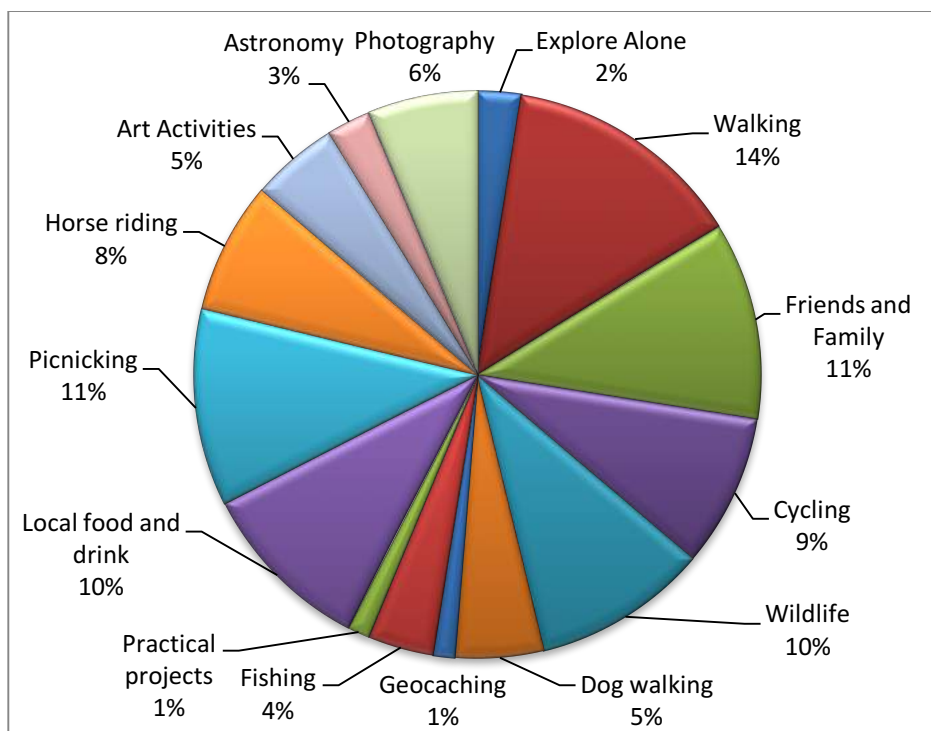


Figure 3: Recreational activities undertaken by 65 visitors to the Elan Links area.

While the responses are generally similar it is noticeable that residents favour exploring alone and photography to a greater degree than visitors, this maybe because they have the confidence to do so having become accustomed to the area. It is understood and known there are other users of Elan, but the above graphs show the make-up of the people who have engaged in the public consultations and we appreciate the limitations of this data.

## 4.2 What do people want to be able to do?

Consultation has also identified that there are activities that people aren't able to enjoy at Elan, either because they aren't aware of them or because they aren't currently available. The following figures demonstrate the type of activities visitors and residents have identified as the ones that they can't participate in within the Elan Links area.

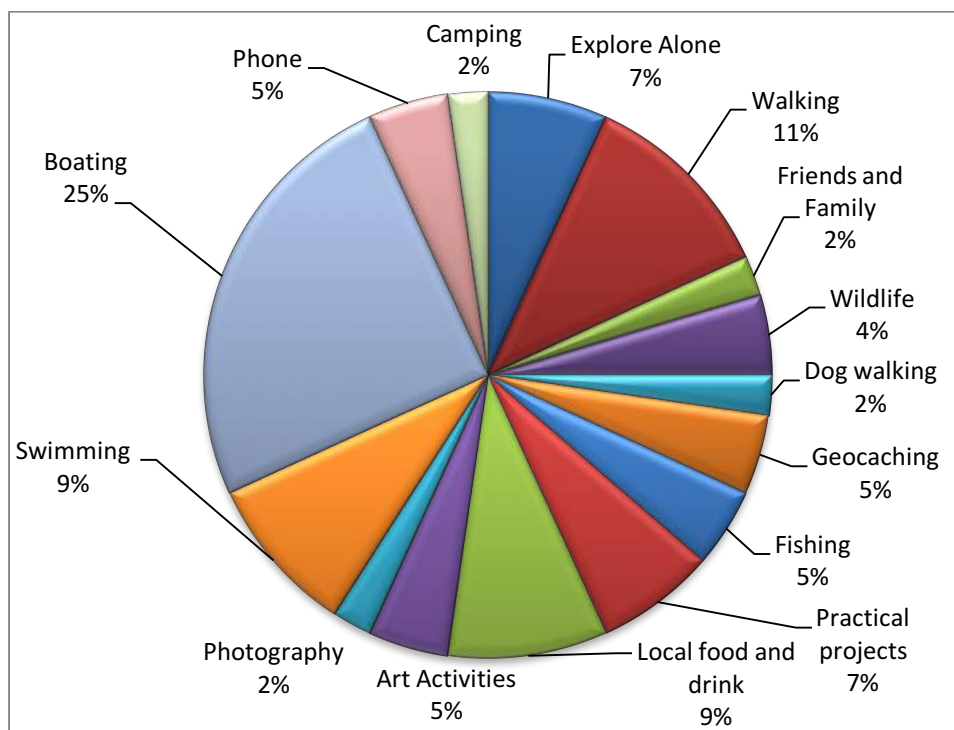


Figure 4: Recreational activities that can't be undertaken in the Elan Links area as identified by visitors.

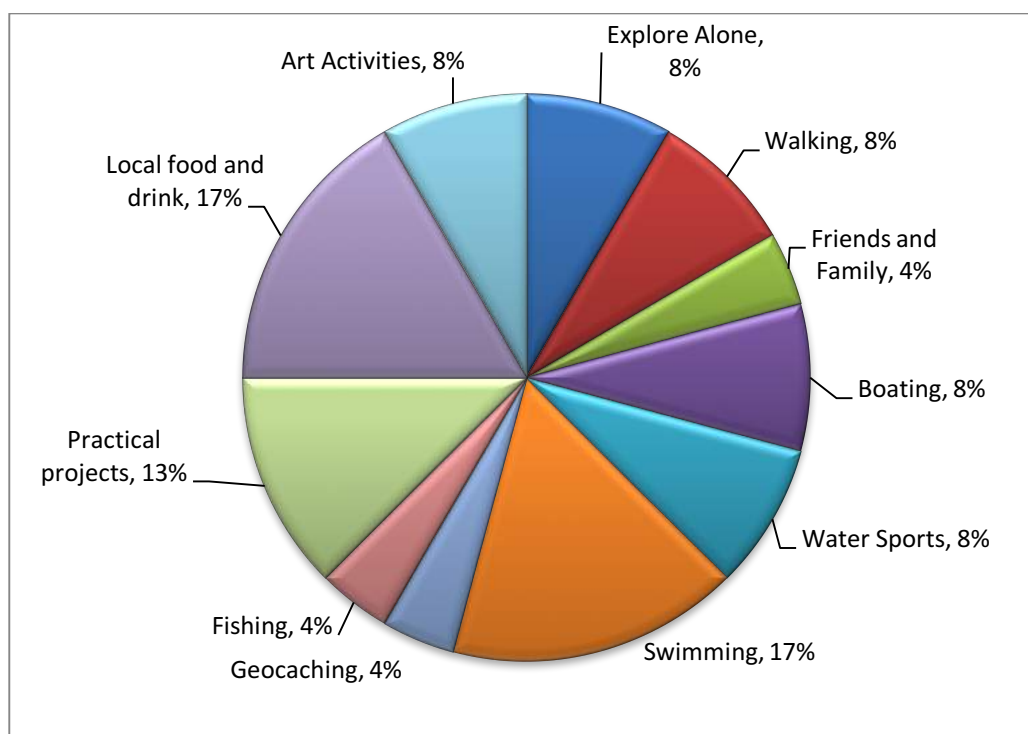


Figure 5: Recreational activities that can't be undertaken in the Elan Links area as identified by residents.

The above figures show that there are many activities that both residents and visitors can not undertake in Elan. There are considerably more activities identified by the visitors compared to those of the residents and this is believed to be the result of lack of promotion and information about the various activities being held.

Some of the respondents also highlighted that the reasons behind not being able to explore alone was as a result of the open hill land and not having the confidence to explore this. Those who identified this as an activity that can't be undertaken in the area, recognised that it was an activity that could be undertaken by others, but it was a barrier for them. To improve this, Elan Links needs to arrange guided walks through the more remote areas to build confidence, improve the waymarking and/or information provided to build the confidence of those who wish to explore the hill and the landscape of Elan alone.

### 4.3 What is needed in Elan?

During consultation events, residents and visitors were asked what recreation and access improvements are needed (in addition to improved routes and waymarking) in the Elan Links area. The following figures demonstrate the weighting both residents and visitors feel for the identified six 'needs' for in the Elan Links area:

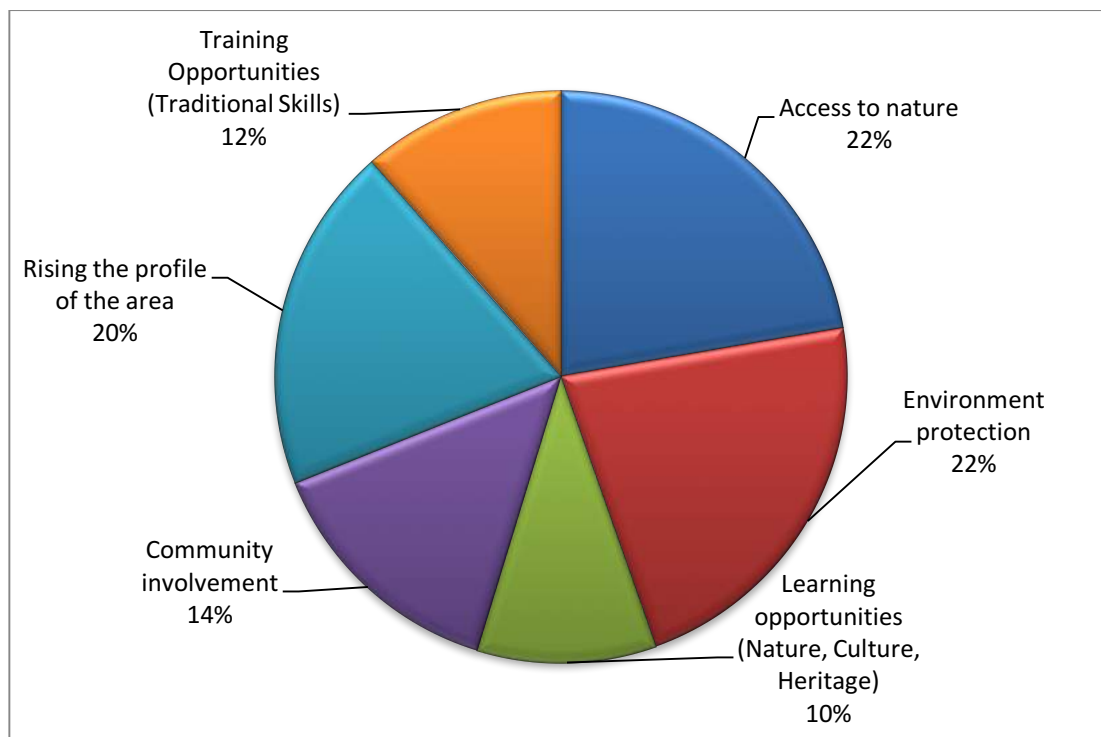
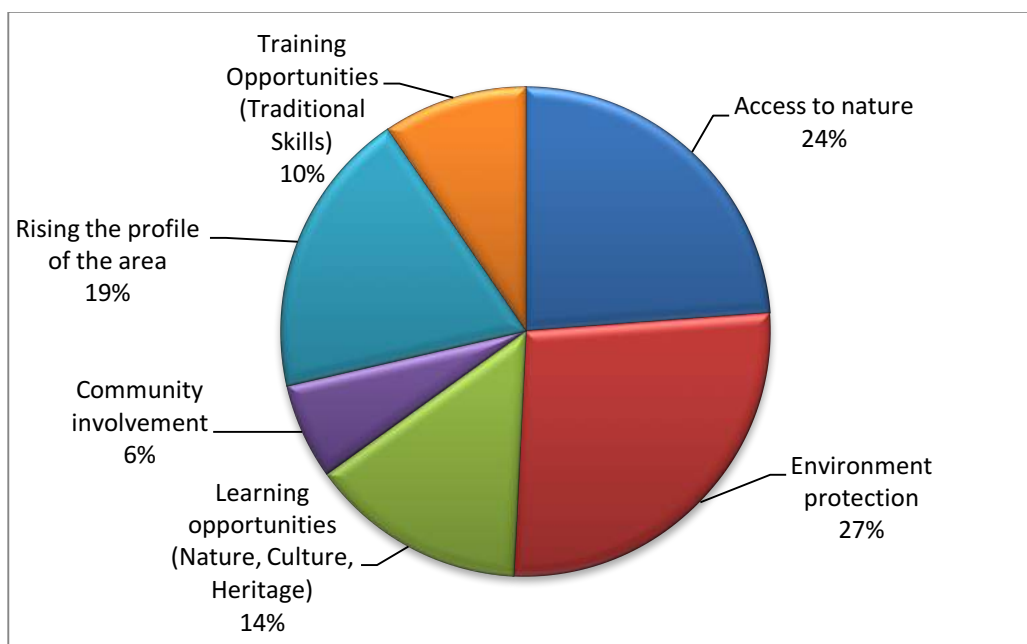


Figure 6: What residents feel the need for in the Elan.



**Figure 7: What visitors feel the need for in Elan.**

The results for both residents and visitors are similar, with both feeling a need for more access to nature in the Elan Links area. A larger percentage of residents feel the need for community engagement in the area compared to the visitors. A large percentage of both groups have identified a need of environment protection and raising the profile of the area.

As a whole, the information from the consultation work described here has helped to inform project development across the Elan Links Scheme as well as being incorporated into the projects specific to access and recreation.

## 5 Strategic Principles

### 5.1 Why develop strategic principles?

In any geographical situation, where there is provision for more than one activity, choices are likely to arise that favour one group of people or another. The Elan area is no different. The area is important for nature, for economic activity (farming, water, forestry, tourism) and for access and recreation. With the latter, the area is used for a host of different access and recreation purposes. In this situation, clarity as to how and why particular choices are made is important if conflicts are to be minimised and even better resolved. Elan partners therefore identified the need to agree the strategic principles underpinning the provision of access and recreation amenities and facilities that could guide decision-making.

### 5.2 Defining the Principles

These principles have been agreed by the major partners responsible for Elan's access (DCWW and EVT) and the wider Elan Links partners. In developing these principles, the partners have been informed by wider stakeholder discussions and the public consultations.

### 5.3 The Access and Recreation Principles

- **Principle 1.** The Elan landscape has been influenced by centuries of management activity by humans and this activity still benefits the landscape and the natural life of the area. Activities associated with the water extraction industry, and the practices of farming and forestry, nature and landscape conservation therefore need to be accommodated and respected in any development or plan, as do the needs of people who live in the area.
- **Principle 2.** People's health and wellbeing is improved by time spent at Elan and by exercising and undertaking physical activity in its exceptional natural environment. These benefits would be reduced if Elan's natural and other qualities were diminished. Access and recreation provisions should therefore recognise the need to conserve the unique natural heritage and landscape of Elan.
- **Principle 3.** Elan has an important place in the history of access provision to the UK countryside - offering the public statutory entitlement to 'air, access and recreation' for well over 100 years. Future provision of access and recreation should value this heritage and be available to all.
- **Principle 4.** Everybody has different interests and abilities and people should be enabled to access Elan in ways that suit them while protecting Elan's unique qualities.
- **Principle 5.** Elan has much to offer, therefore ways for people to progress to different or more challenging activities should be simple to identify so as to help people access these opportunities.



- **Principle 6.** Elan is rich in heritage, much of which is underutilised and accessed currently. Therefore, ways for people to visit and engage with Elan's diverse strands of heritage should be promoted.
- **Principle 7.** The remote upland landscape of Elan carries a variety of risks. People should be supported to make sensible choices about their own and others safety in this environment, recognising that people have different skill levels and abilities.
- **Principle 8.** Elan has a 'two language' heritage. Access and recreation information and interpretation should reflect this utilising both Welsh and English.

#### 5.4 Using the Principles to guide future access and recreation provisions

The strategic principles outlined above are intended to provide a way of assessing and deciding between the myriad of options for developing improved access and recreation provisions in the Elan area, both in the short term – through the Elan Links: People, Nature and Water Delivery Phase and in the longer term as the legacy of this programme of work is maintained and evolves. Proposals and plans for access and recreation developments and provision should be in line with (or at the least not work in opposition to) each of the eight principles.

## 6 Current Access and Recreation Provision: Information and Interpretation

In this chapter, current provision for access and recreation information and interpretation are reviewed in brief. A separate ***Elan Links Interpretation Strategy*** has been produced to detail interpretation improvements planned for key recreation and heritage sites (including a mobile app) during the Elan Links programme of works. Actions identified here work as part of this Interpretation Strategy (for the full plan please refer to LCAP appendix 4).

### 6.1 Entering the area

The norm is for most visits to the area to be by car. There is brown tourism signage from Rhayader to the Elan Valley but with the high level of through-traffic (the A470 being the main North-South road of Wales), there is arguably a greater opportunity here to signpost people onto Elan.

Other access points to Elan include numerous footpaths and bridleways linking the Estate to the wider Cambrian Mountains including the Cambrian Way. Of these routes few are currently publicised linking Elan to other local opportunities including the Cambrian Mountains, Strata Florida and Gilfach Nature Reserve.



Figure 8: Elan Valley 'entry' sign

At three points around the Estate, the Elan Valley is identified on Estate signage indicating when visitors are entering (and departing) the Elan Valley. The map below identifies these three locations and Figure 8 demonstrates the current provision:

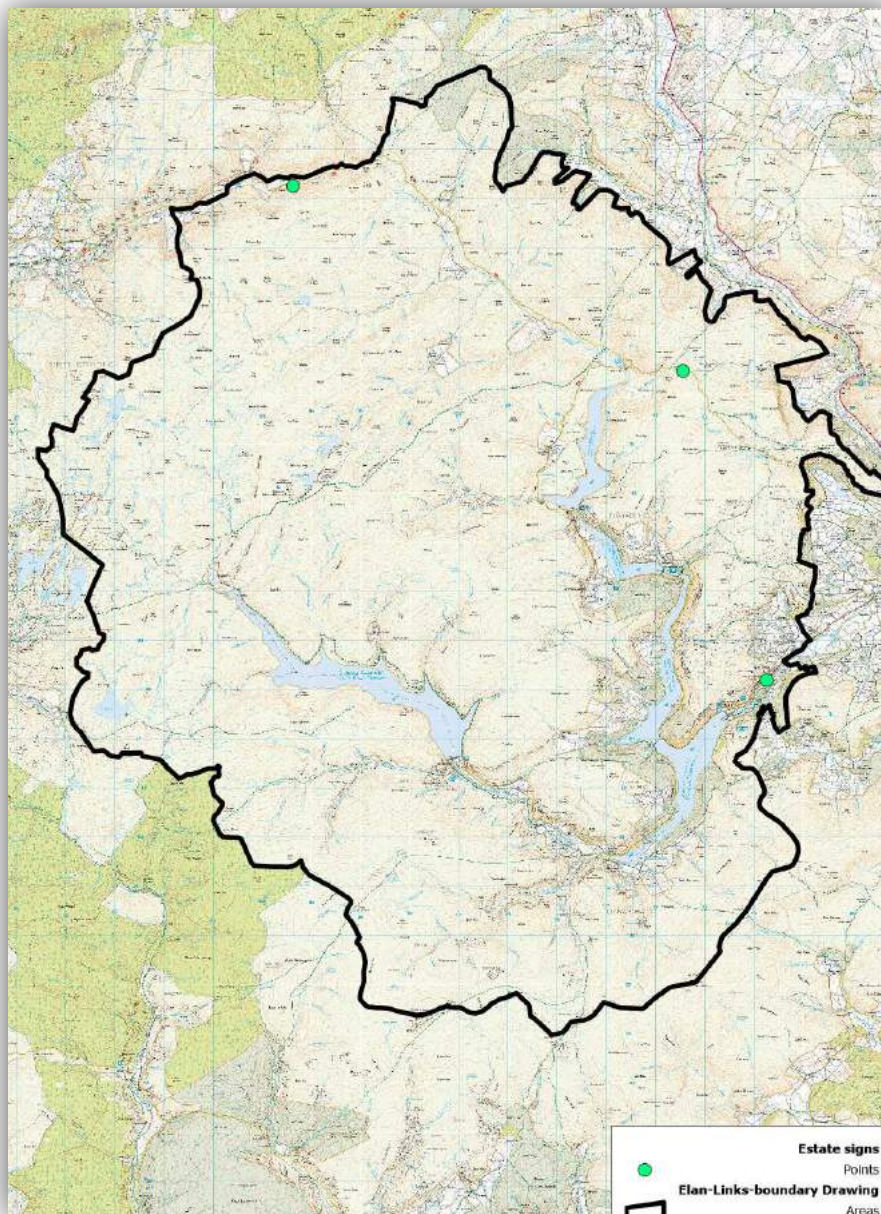


Figure 9: Positions of Elan Valley entrance signs

### 6.1.1 Parking

The level of information at the car parks is typically rather restricted, with onsite display boards (see overleaf) and often little else. Whilst dam car parks such as Caban, Claerwen, Penbont (Pen y Garreg) and Graig Goch permit visitors to wander and see the dams closer, there is little information or route guidance as to what they can do and/or see at each site. At car parks such as Llannerch y Cawr and Gwaelod y Rhos, unless you are familiar with the Estate and the walk you wish to undertake, there is little information about what can be done.

In attempting to attract people away from the 'honey pot' area of the Visitors Centre these car parks offer an opportunity as public hubs where simpler routes and access to the wider Estate can be given.

## 6.2 Pre-visit Information

The Elan Valley has its own website that provides information about the area including a range of activities available at Elan and an events calendar that gets updated regularly. On the website, it is possible to find information about walking and cycling routes, accommodation and background information. Even though route information is available on the website, apart from those available through the Mountain Bike Wales website, there is no downloadable route information or route maps for people to bring with them when they visit.

Feedback from consultees, partners and stakeholders suggests there is considerable opportunity to improve information provision on the website, as well as downloadable materials to allow people to plan their visits and activities beforehand.

## 6.3 Out on the Estate Information

### 6.3.1 Display Boards

An external information board near the Visitor Centre entrance shows the basic Estate layout. This gives information to those looking to tour the Estate by vehicle or use the Elan Valley Trail. It doesn't however give details of walking, mountain biking, horse riding routes or family activities sites.

There are display boards across the Estate, namely at Nantgwyllt, Llannerch y Cawr, Claerwen, Penbont, Gwaelod y Rhos and Graig Goch car parks which provide basic visit notices and details of events held on the Estate (see Figure 10). There is not an overview map of the Estate on most of them. Until recently no takeaway information was possible, but to test this approach, a few document dispensers have been used to hold the events guide which includes a small map (as seen on the A2 tearaway).



Figure 10: Display Board at Gwaelod y Rhos

### 6.3.2 Signage

There are brown tourism signs for the Visitors Centre, Caban Coch, Pen y Garreg and Graig Goch Dams and Reservoirs. Currently there are no signs directing people to Dol y Mynach and Claerwen Dams and Reservoirs and other historically interesting locations across Elan.

The lack of signage means that many people who come to Elan by car are unaware of the historical locations and the two dams and reservoirs in the Claerwen Valley and hence people are less likely to explore these areas.

### 6.3.3 Waymarking

The process of checking the promoted walks (by a group of volunteer Powys Ramblers) has also highlighted the aged nature and inconsistency of much of the waymarking used in the area, both on footpaths and bridleways. Furthermore, waymarking information from obsolete or lapsed routes still exists. Some legacy waymarkers have the potential to confuse visitors, and more recent and functioning waymarkers and route information leaflets need reviewing for accuracy. Examples of the range of marking systems currently in use are shown below (see Figure 11) to illustrate this.



Figure 11: Examples of Waymakers on Elan

Feedback from visitor-facing Rangers confirms the negative impact of this issue on users experience.

The group noted that updating waymarkers and renewing the promoted routes will be an important part of future access and recreation work. However, it also remains important to recognise that for

more experienced and skilled walkers the experience of Elan's special quality of remoteness during technical hill walks is reduced by the provision of all but occasional waymarking.

#### 6.3.4 Interpretation

Across Elan there is currently limited interpretation. The main interpretation at the moment is information boards dotted around at various locations such as along the Elan Valley Trail and at the dams. Although there is a lot of information on these boards specific to their location, they are large in size and can detract from the natural beauty and landscape.

The ***Elan Links Interpretation Strategy*** outlines the interpretation proposed during the project. This interpretation is designed to complement, rather than detract, from the natural beauty of the landscape.

### 6.4 Elan Valley Visitor Centre

The Elan Valley Visitor Centre is an important initial focal point for those visiting the area and an exceptional resource in the provision of face-to-face, pre-visit and onsite information and interpretation to recreational users. Lying close to the Eastern entrance to the Elan Links area the Centre is a point of call for over 155,000 visitors each year (*source: visitor counters at the Elan Valley Visitor Centre*). Owned and managed by DŵrCymru Welsh Water, the centre offers a café, gift shop, visitor exhibition, tourist information centre (with Rangers available on the information desk), recently refurbished (2016) children's play area, toilets, car/coach parking, cycle hire and meeting/function rooms.

A range of themed events are run from the Visitor Centre each year (plus a range of events also being held at locations throughout the Estate). Rangers can be hired as guides, beginning tours from the Visitor Centre for coach parties and private parties. Stakeholder partners use the Visitor Centre as a pick up and drop off point for their clients e.g. Elan Valley Lodge (high ropes & kayaking) and Duke of Edinburgh groups. The Visitor Centre also serves as a base for a range of external recreation group events, including Rhayader Running Club and local cycling clubs. The Visitor Centre's popularity has increased in recent years and over the last five years, has been open year-round (as opposed to March-October previously).

The Visitor Centre is also the only opportunity to obtain detailed information such as route maps. This service is provided by rangers who are available every day, to offer route and journey information to visitors. At the information desk, an illustrative A2 map (see Figure 12 below) is available for people to take, at no charge, on which Rangers can annotate required routes and points of interest. On the reverse of this map visitors are also given the basic information on Elan.

### 6.5 Route Information

There are many recreational routes across Elan but not all are fully promoted and properly waymarked. The lack of promotion and waymarking as well as the lack of information provided on the routes that exist, makes it hard for people to explore the area.

### 6.5.1 Foot Routes:

Formerly no route information was available on this A2 map (only basic rights of ways annotated) but in 2017 some of the basic routes have been included (see Figure 12). As yet we await feedback with regards to the use and ease of using this information.



Figure 12: 2017 A2 tearaway map

Further routes on the footpath, bridleway and byway networks can be annotated by the rangers. However, rangers report that one of the most frequently asked questions at the Visitor Centre information desk is, 'do you have any route guides?' to which there are currently very few and mostly are now out-of-print.

A number of walking routes are currently promoted through leaflets and on-line:

- Map of the RSPB Carngafallt walks. Available as leaflet from the Visitor Centre.
- Woodland Walks route card pack, detailing 8 walks. Available as leaflet from Visitor Centre.
- A photocopy of an out-of-print 'Four Walks' leaflet (showing the Craig Cnwch walk). Available from the Visitor Centre.
- 10 promoted walks through [www.elanvalley.org.uk](http://www.elanvalley.org.uk). –please see Figure 13 below, with OS map function on the website with brief route description. Downloadable route card information however is currently not functional.

**Our Routes** Difficulty Distance

Start	Route Name	Features	Distance	Time	Difficulty
3	Penbont Woods		0.6mi	30 min	Moderate ? >
4	Cnwch Wood		1mi	30 min	Multi-Access ? >
4	Craig Cnwch		3.5mi	2 hours	Moderate ? >
1	Gro Wood		4.5mi	2 hours	Moderate ? >
4	Around Y Foel		5.3mi	3 hours	Strenuous ? >
2	Garreg Ddu Reservoir		6.5mi	3 hours	Moderate ? >
5	Elan Valley Trail		9mi	3 hours	Multi-Access ? >
1	Drygarn Fawr		9.5mi	5 hours	Strenuous ? >
3	Maen Serth and Crugyn Ci		9.5mi	4 hours	Strenuous ? >
4	Reservoir Challenge		18.5mi	7 hrs	Strenuous ? >

Figure 13: Online routes

Analysis of the consistency and ease of access of the route information available to our volunteer ramblers indicates that except for the face-to-face service provided to users by the rangers, the range of route information is scarce and inconsistent in terms of branding and quality. On-line, the route information available through [www.elanvalley.org.uk](http://www.elanvalley.org.uk) is of inadequate quality, incomplete in scope and does not meet the expectations of the modern user.

### 6.5.2 Cycle Routes:

Aside from Sustran's Elan Valley Trail leaflet and A2 Estate map, there is no other printed route information about either road cycling or mountain biking. Some cycling information can be found on [elanvalley.org.uk](http://elanvalley.org.uk), however it is very brief (road cycling) and can be somewhat confusing (mountain biking). The recently redeveloped [www.mbwales.com](http://www.mbwales.com) website, has given Elan Valley a presence: <http://www.mbwales.com/agents/elan-valley/>, adding Elan routes to this website and making links to them from [elanvalley.org.uk](http://elanvalley.org.uk) should improve the visitor experience. However, even with excellent route information, online and in print, without effective (and sympathetic) waymarking, it is difficult to encourage people to engage in cycling and the responsible uses of routes i.e. reduce straying off track. Figure 14 below shows examples of how cyclists are assisted through route information leaflets and cards at DŵrCymru Welsh Water's; LlynBrenig site, and Natural Resources Wales'; Nant yr Arian site. There is a clear opportunity to modernise and improve route promotion at Elan.





Figure 14: Example of route guides elsewhere

### 6.5.3 Horse and Pony Routes

Horse riding routes are currently not promoted (in terms of route information), there is currently no horse riding route information available online, or in printed form, however, there has in the past been route promotion. The British Horse Society (BHS) produced a book called 'Powys on Horseback', which showed routes in Rhayader and Elan Valley.

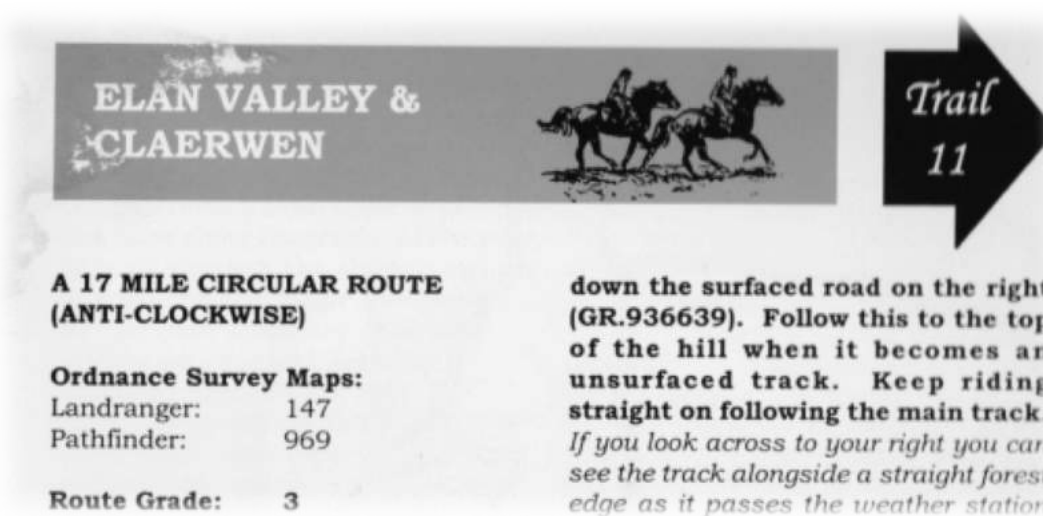


Figure 15: Out of Print guide

### 6.6 Disabled access

Currently, of those routes promoted (see Figure 13: Online routes), there are only two multi-access routes. The main route being the Elan Valley Trail. The majority of the Elan Valley Trail is easily accessed for those using wheelchairs and handcycles and gates have been changed in the past to allow them to be opened easily. The gates have been designed to be accessed easily, but it has recently been identified by disabled users that it can be a barrier to some users in handcycles to follow the trails.

On the website there is a little information for disabled users, only that there are disabled toilets at the Visitor Centre. There is currently no information on the website about any interpretation that could assist blind, partially sighted or deaf individuals or groups when they visit the Elan Valley. This needs to be assessed to ensure that visitors of all abilities are able to enjoy Elan.

## 6.7 Interpretation conclusions and recommendations

It is clear that there are opportunities to improve the level of information available to visitors both at the Visitors Centre and away from it.

The vision should be that routes be well described and mapped, apart from those requiring OS map and compass, so waymarking can be kept to a minimum, thereby maintaining the wild and unspoilt nature of the Estate.

Through the Elan Links Partnership there is an opportunity for a single branding system for all promoted routes information and waymarking in future. Furthermore the ability to engage with volunteers to ensure regular waymark checking and maintenance, however a delicate balance needs to be achieved between cluttering the open landscape and stopping people getting lost. Where waymarking is appropriate, sympathetic materials and design will be employed.

Alongside the current Access and Recreation Plan there is already work in motion to renew the Estate signage. New waymarking and interpretation will work coherently with this ongoing programme.

Routes should be promoted online, by leaflet, maps, orientation boards at car parks and a mobile application. They will be a mix of shorter, easy routes and longer routes for more adventurous visitors and to allow progression of difficulty as visitors become more accustomed to the area and environment.

## 7 Evaluation of Current Access and Recreation Activities

Elan is home to a wide range of different outdoor recreational activities, from the mainstream to the more niche. In this chapter, the main activities and provision for these activities are reviewed.

During this evaluation, the Plan touches on the routes and level of activity available, plus areas where deficiencies and/or opportunities have been identified through our assessment and public consultation. Interpretation, waymarking and other route or activity information are discussed in Chapter 6.

While the activities listed are not exhaustive they do take account of the principle activities noted by the DCWW Rangers and EVT staff on-the-ground in Elan, the activities currently promoted (if different) and the results on usage evidenced by consultation (shown in Chapter 4).

### 7.1 Entering Elan

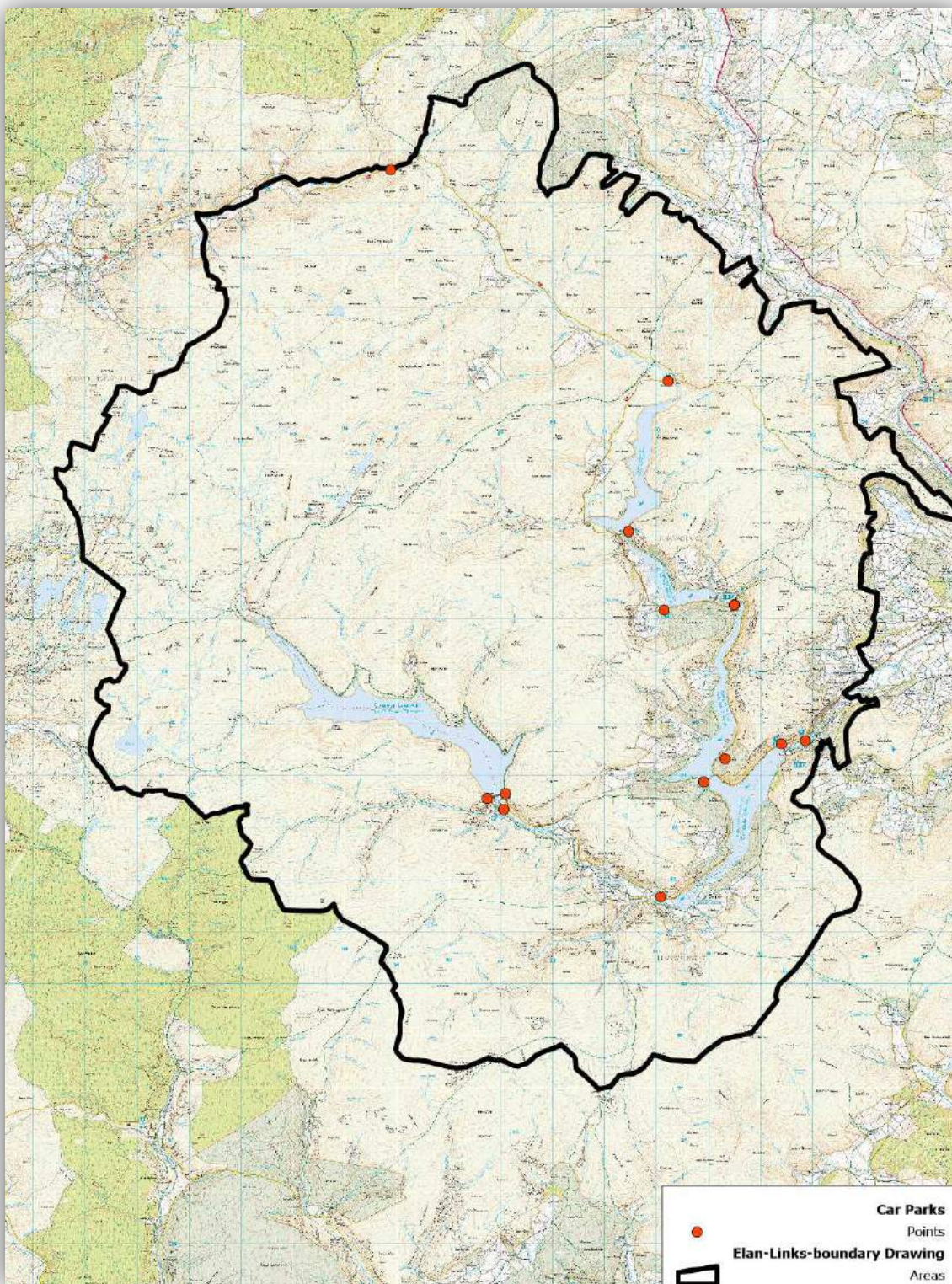
Due to the deeply rural location of Elan nearly all visitors use some level of motorised activity to access the Estate. This could range from a car or bus journey to Rhayader and utilising the Elan Valley (multi-use) Trail onto the Estate, or utilising one of the long distance routes on to Elan, or a full tour by road.

Generically for all of the possible users there are certain considerations (both on and off Elan):

- Roads:** The current road and vehicular access routes are currently all adopted by Powys County Council (either as a Highway or BOAT), with the Elan Partners not promoting any other vehicular routes.
- Signage:**
  - A certain level of highway signs exist including brown tourism signs at Rhayader indicating and directing to Elan Valley, brown tourism signage for the Visitors Centre, CabanCoch, Pen y Garreg and Graig Goch Dams and Reservoirs - there is no provision to Dol y Mynach and Claerwen Dams and Reservoirs.
  - Parking signage at the beginning of the Elan Valley Trail plus custom Trail markers at the start of the route.
  - Around the perimeter of the Estate there are three custom 'Elan Valley' signs to indicated when you are on Elan.
  - There is Elan Valley branded signage at parking points on the Estate, plus display boards with limited information.
  - There is currently limited information for car tourists of the diverse heritage that is on view.
- Parking:** There are twelve designated parking areas across the Estate, of varying capacity. Maintenance of the parking areas is essential in order to continue to encourage visitors to stop, and return in the future and this is typically led by DCWW or the EVT. The largest parking area is in the Visitor Centre grounds and has adequate capacity. The surfacing is generally good, although some areas of tarmac will need to be renewed in the near future. Please see the below table and figure as to the locality and capacity of the car parks.

Table 2: Elan car parks

<b>Car Park</b>	<b>Estimated Capacity</b>	<b>Maintenance/ Notes</b>
Visitor Centre	80 Cars 3 Coaches	Tarmaced areas have been improved over recent years. Further improvements to tarmac required over time.
CabanCoch	15	Recently tarmaced turning area around the roundabout. Occasional flooding in lower section.
Llanerchi (Nantgwyllt)	10	Parking area is in fair condition apart from pot holes on entrance between tarmac and scalping sections.
Llannerch y Cawr	6	A small car park directly off the Claerwen road. Generally in good condition although the better surfacing tapers off.
Claerwen (base)	25	Small embankments make the parking area somewhat confusing. Pot holes are a problem here.
Claerwen (upper)	6	A tarmacked car park, extended from the approach road over Claerwen dam.
Claerwen (upper, across dam)	6	Not a 'mapped' car park, however it is used as a stopping place for views, and longer stays for some visitors walking near the banks of Claerwen Reservoir.
Y Foel	10	The approach and track to the car park are generally sound although prone to channelling due to water run-off. The car park itself is in good condition although its seclusion can encourage anti-social behaviour.
Penbont	8	A well used, small car park. Pot hole filling a regular task. The carpark could be expanded with the removal or relocation of the storage shed.
Gwaelod y Rhos	6	A small, lesser used car park. Surface in generally good condition.
Craig Goch	10	A narrow parking area with access to toilet facilities. Surfacing generally in good condition (some tarmac, some hardstanding). At capacity, manoeuvring in and out of the parking area can be tricky.
Pont ar Elan	8	A recently built, enclosed car parking area with picnic seating.
Powys Border	8	A rough gravelled car park at the Powys Ceredigion border sign.



**Figure 16: Car Parks across Elan**

In addition to the designated parking areas, there are lay-bys and 'pull-ins', visitors often use in their journeys through the Estate. There are a number of informal pull-ins/parking areas on Cwmdauddwr Common, off the Aberystwyth Mountain Road which have not been formally annotated as car parks.

Generally the traffic flow across the Estate is good and reported disputes relating to traffic and parking are low.

Parking in Rhayader is good (includes parking sites with no charge), however the promotion of the parking areas could be improved. A spacious car park at the start of the Elan Valley Trail in Cwmdauddwr, is somewhat hidden, both the signage to the carpark and the trail would benefit from improvements.





Currently the level of provision appears to be sufficient and this process has not given rise to requests for additional parking/pull-ins or passing places. However, as this is a fluid plan on-going monitoring of this is necessary and vital alongside the Elan Links aspirations for tourism development and thus increased visitors numbers.

## Activities undertaken at Elan:

### 7.2 Walking

With its 72 square miles and largely open access status, it is perhaps not surprising that walking is the most popular activity at Elan (see Chapter 4, Figures 2 and 3) for both residents and visitors alike according to our consultation findings. During our public consultations, most people commented that Elan is a great place for walking and that the public right of way network combined with the open access on foot makes Elan a better place than many others for walking.

The area offers walks for varying abilities, from flat, level and tarmacked, to walking through challenging terrain over open hills. A number of walking routes are currently promoted through leaflets and on-line:

-  Map of the RSPB Carngafallt walks. Available as leaflet from the Visitor Centre.
-  Woodland Walks route card pack, detailing 8 walks. Available as leaflet from Visitor Centre.
-  A photocopy of an out of print 'Four Walks' leaflet (showing the Craig Cnwch walk). Available from the Visitor Centre.
-  10 promoted walks through [www.elanvalley.org.uk](http://www.elanvalley.org.uk).

During the Development Phase, all of Elan's promoted routes have been walked and checked for accuracy by volunteer Powys Ramblers and local walking group members. In addition to this assessment they also considered the breadth of provision as well as the availability of non-promoted walks and have identified three gaps in the provision:

1. Easy-to-moderate routes including family-friendly routes.
2. Routes that provide better access to heritage sites (combined with improved interpretation facilities).
3. Links to long distance pan-Wales and pan-Cambrian Mountains routes.

From our public consultation, it was also noted that more could be done to improve some of the "old walking routes" once promoted at the Visitor Centre and that shorter walking routes may be beneficial to beginners and family groups. The idea that Elan should be a place where progression into walking for longer is enabled / promoted was also popular.

### 7.3 Running

An increasingly popular recreational activity at Elan is running. This has been seen through the many entrants of the Rhayader Runners: 5k and 10k road races held from May to July and the annual 20 mile road race held in March. For fell and cross country runners there is the annual Reservoir Roundabout (for runners and walkers) held in the New Year and organised by the Reservoir Roundabout Committee.

Outside of these organised events there are many runners on the Elan Valley Trail, the rights of ways and the permissive routes open to walkers and runners alike, however the present level of usage is uncertain. Stakeholders and a number of consultees noted that there is only the tarmac Elan Valley Trail and then the significantly more challenging cross country opportunities for running and as such promoted progression routes acting as a 'stepping stone' between the two would be beneficial.

### 7.4 Cycling

Elan has a range of cycling opportunities, including; mountain biking, road cycling, touring, leisure and family cycling and sportives/competitions. Sustrans Routes 8 and 81 pass near-to and through the Elan Valley.

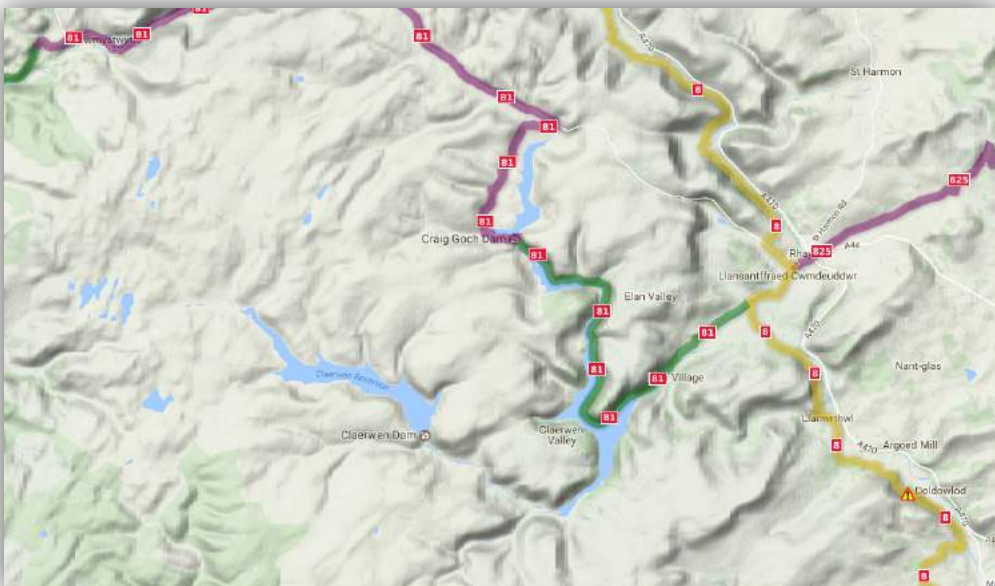


Figure 17: Screenshot from the Sustrans website identifying routes 8 and 81

The traffic free section of Route 81 is the largely accessible Elan Valley Trail (which sits on an old railway). Mountain biking routes follow the bridleway network across the Estate with most graded red or black (difficult or severe) on the MTB scale.

Our public consultation concurred with this variety of user, with many noting that Elan was a particularly great location for road cycling. However, it was also noted that the offer for mountain biking could be developed to attract more of these user groups and that the level of information in terms of mapping and waymarking could also be improved.

From the analysis of the overall suite of biking routes by the coordinated volunteers they also identified that there is a large gap in provision between the Elan Valley Trail (easy) and the more

extensive bridleway network (difficult / severe). As with walking, the idea of Elan being a place where progression in these types of activities should be enabled / promoted was popular.

### 7.5 Horse & Pony

The Visitor Centre provides riders with parking and basic corral facilities. Horse riding routes are currently not promoted (in terms of route information), however, there has in the past been route promotion of the bridleway network (including permissive routes). Current usage by horse-riders is not monitored but consultation with stakeholders suggests there is considerable potential to increase usage particularly since pony-trekking (and horse riding) in Rhayader and Elan Valley has in the past been much more popular than today. Currently, one business offering pony-trekking remains in operation locally. Consultation results also raised concerns about the viability and sustainability of some rights of way. Route-checking along the entire bridleway network has not been completed at time of writing but interim results indicate that a number of routes are safe to ride but need clearer route waymaking and promotion. Routes crossing blanket bog are notoriously subject to bog 'movement' and as such need to be monitored regularly for safety and are not ideal candidates for promotion.

British Horse Society volunteers have offered their assistance in the development of short and longer horse riding routes during the Elan Links Delivery Phase. Furthermore working with local businesses offering pony trekking is likely to provide a means of progression from 'led' routes to self-sufficiency.

An additional corral away from the Visitor Centre was suggested during consultation and a few consultees also mentioned they would like to see opportunities for carriage driving developed at Elan. Unfortunately for carriage riding there would appear to be limited opportunity on the Estate to develop carriage rides of enjoyable length, due mainly to the challenging terrain.

### 7.6 Water access and angling

There is currently no (general) public access to the Elan and Claerwen Reservoirs and rivers for safety and drinking water cleanliness reasons. By exception, a licence is granted to the Elan Valley Lodge to access the water as part of their lease and integral to their business activities. These activities are mainly corporate team-building services, however the Elan Valley Lodge does offer kayaking and canoeing experiences to the general public through their 'activity days' advertised within the Elan Valley Events guide. The number of these 'activity days' has grown over recent years due to demand. In addition, private groups (of six or more) can speculatively ask the Elan Valley Lodge for a kayaking/ canoe experience, this depends on instructor availability. It is appreciated that a number of consultees wished to see improved access for visitors to the reservoirs for boating, swimming and/or water sports. Unfortunately at this time the residing policy will remain for reasons of health and safety and access to the waters edge.

Access to waters for fishing is operated by the Rhayader and Elan Valley Angling Association. This is regulated through the issuing of permits available from the local hardware shop, newsagents and Elan Valley Visitor Centre.



## 7.7 Orienteering

Elan has previously hosted orienteering opportunities with an orienteering route previously existing in Llanerchi woodland, primarily used by the Elan Valley Lodge, Outdoor Activity Centre. Since forestry operations in Llanerchi this course is more obscure and impractical, a smaller course has been developed in the woodlands behind the Elan Valley Lodge. Apart from this, there is currently no publicly available orienteering course(s).

Through our consultation we have seen that very few (if any) locals and visitors currently use Elan for orienteering. However recent navigation workshops have shown a demand for this type of recreation and stakeholder discussions have highlighted that reintroduction and promotion of orienteering courses, would provide a valuable (low impact) recreational opportunity.

## 7.8 Astronomy & Dark Skies

Elan lies at the heart of the Cambrian Mountains which is recognised as having some of the darkest skies in England and Wales. In 2015, the Elan Estate was awarded International Dark Sky Park (Silver) status, after a successful application to the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). The award recognises the Elan Valley's low light pollution levels, a commitment to further reducing bad lighting on the Elan Valley and public engagement events. Recognition by the IDA is already attracting experienced astronomers and dark sky imagers that are likely to be comfortable with exploring the Estate by night.

A number of consultees commented that the dark skies (and therefore astronomy) was something they were interested in and that more opportunities through events would be welcomed as not everyone was a knowledgeable enthusiast who would head out into the area without support. It is believed that developing an observation area(s) with useful information will help, as will a local astronomy group.

## 7.9 Motorised activities

### 7.9.1 Car tours

Either as their sole activity or after a walk or ride etc., a large proportion of visitors will take a car tour of both Claerwen and Elan Valleys. Many car tourers ask at the Visitor Centre for driving route directions - the complementary A2 map and Ranger instructions meets this need. However, away from the Visitor Information Desk, there is limited access to directions. Improvements in this area will help visitors get the most out of their visit to Elan as would information for visitors accessing the area from the West.

### 7.9.2 Coach tours

Experiencing Elan by coach has been a favoured activity for many decades. Coach tours are popular with tour operators, and private groups. The coach route that is now widely accepted in the coach driving community is a clockwise loop through the Elan Valley (avoiding Claerwen), back to Rhayader. A large proportion of coach tours use the Visitor Centre before or after their tour (occasionally some do both). Passengers use the Visitor Centre facilities, take in the interpretation and walk the short route(s) around the Visitor Centre grounds. Coach tour information is available from the website and additional coach information provided by the customer service team upon request.

### 7.9.3 Off-road motorised vehicles

Although unrepresented in the public consultations, off-roading with four-wheel drive vehicles (4x4's) and motorbikes is a popular leisure pastime for many locals and visitors and brings income to a number of businesses in Rhayader and District. Unfortunately in Elan, the activity, particularly on illegal routes, has the potential to cause damage to habitats and species, to reduce tranquillity, and to reduce accessibility for other recreational users through damage to routeways and erosion.

There are four routes within the Elan area for legal off-road use:

- a) The Golf Links: a Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT) which runs from the Aberystwyth Mountain Road (SN 922707) to Gwardolau (SN 962686).
- b) Rhiwnant to Cerrigcwplau Byway: a BOAT that follows the southern bank of the Claerwen River between Grid References SN 895617 and SN 868635.
- c) Claerwen Road: a BOAT that follows the northern shore of the Claerwen Reservoir from Claerwen Dam (SN 871636) to Claerwen Farm (SN 819672).
- d) Ceredigion section of the Monk's Trod: an unclassified road leading from Teifi Pools (SN 795680) to the Claerwen stream by RhydHengae (SN823 682). This joins the Powys section of the Monk's Trod which carries a Permanent Traffic Regulation Order that restricts access by four-wheeled motorised vehicles, whilst a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order restricts use by two-wheeled motorised vehicles.

During consultation, concern has been raised about off-road activity. On the one hand, some recreational users of the area feel that their enjoyment is reduced by noise and unsustainable use by illegal off-roading. On the other-hand, off-road enthusiasts are keen to stress that legal use should be supported and promoted.

The Elan Links Partnership have engaged with a number of organisations representing responsible and legal user. Discussion and coordination with legal off-roaders, clear information and firm compliance measures (against illegal off-roading) will help ensure that legal routes are well managed and conscientious use is promoted. This approach will help ensure that the negativities of this activity can be minimised, while enabling legal off-roaders to enjoy this pastime sustainably.

### 7.10 Nature based activities

Elan is a haven for nature and for this reason it holds several designations and is home to many rare species (see Section 3.4). Unsurprisingly therefore many people (visitors and residents alike) spend time 'nature-watching' at Elan (see Chapter 4). Indeed, a number of locally based wildlife and nature based groups are proactive at Elan and are involved in volunteer based activities to support specific wildlife and nature. During consultation it became apparent that many visitors feel that nature-watching is an activity they are 'unable to do' at Elan. It is believed that this could be rectified through better interpretation and improved support and events.

### 7.11 Film & Photography

Film and photography has been found to be one of the most popular recreational activities for users of the area and is particularly popular with local residents (see consultation results in Chapter 4). With developments in digital photography (including mobile phones), the photographs produced are of increasing quality and are frequently to be seen shared on social media

applications. Furthermore the increased popularity and focus on Elan's dark skies has increased those engaging in night time photography.

The area has featured as a film location; from Hollywood films, to television, to local adverts. With all aspects, there is considerable potential to engage with new and different audiences in response to the increased visibility of the area.

In general film and photography are very low impact. However, the use of drones is a growing activity for both hobbyists and professionals and this has the potential to create both positive and negative impacts as popularity increases. There are many areas of the Estate which fall within the permitted rules for drone operation. Permissions for drone flying on the Estate lies with DCWW and EVT. Professional drone operators are generally aware of their requirements for safe operation and licences required to operate commercially. However, not all hobbyists understand or adhere to drone flying regulations. In response to the rapid increase in drone popularity, the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) produces current drone flying regulations and guidelines which are available on the Elan Valley website and from the Visitors Centre.

## 7.12 Art & Creativity

Elan has always provided inspiration to artists. The Romantic movement of the late 18th and early 19th century saw its artists and poets taking inspiration from its beautiful landscapes. Turner visited and sketched the area and W.M. Rossetti wrote about the visit of the poet Percy Bysshe-Shelley. Elan's engineer, Eustace Tickell, created a series of beautiful prints and etchings for his book 'The Vale of Nantgwilt' and Lady Charlotte Guest, translator of the Mabinogion, drew inspiration from a visit to Carn Gafallt. A link with that tradition continues and today a sculpture stands at the Elan Valley Visitor Centre to commemorate Shelley's stay.

Contemporary artists, still find inspiration from Elan. Writer David Constantine published his book of short stories 'Under the Dam' in 2005. Powys Dance have held outdoor dance performances. Last year, 'Taking Flight' Theatre, a theatre company who work with the less abled, held an outdoor theatre performance of 'Romeo & Juliet' and Arts Council Wales piloted a twelve month Artist Residency programme at Elan. In the 1930's Frances Brett Young published 'The House Under the Water', (made into a mini series in the 1960's). He stayed in Rhayader, in the house later lived in by Peter Cox who locally wrote two dramas based on the recent history of Valley, 'The Valley of Nantgwylt' a YFC national drama winner and the Community Play 'Y Delyn Golledig -The Lost Harp'. This led to the founding of CARAD, Community Arts Rhayader and District. The organisation facilitates and encourages local creativity, running many projects both in the Valley and with its residents.

The Elan Valley continues to attract and inspire artists both local and from away including writers, metalsmiths, jewellery designers, painters, photographers, musicians, craftspeople who all work in, near or visit to inform their practice. There are now several local arts and crafts groups for amateur and professional artists. The Visitor Centre offers exhibition space, creative courses and a retail outlet for artists.

Consultees noted that there is considerable potential for the local area and economy to benefit from a more joined-up approach to promoting arts and creativity at Elan and that there are considerable opportunities to use the arts to better understand and promote Elan's heritage.

### 7.13 Education

Pupils and students are a large user group of the Estate and are supported by a DCWW Education Ranger in the Visitor Centre. In addition help with travel costs for school groups can be provided by the EVT. School groups access several areas of the Estate including touring by road, dams, walking routes, rivers, ponds and habitat studies. University and college groups use the Estate for practical and field studies elements of their courses.

Typically, it is schools within a 40 mile radius which use the Elan Estate. Previously visits from Birmingham schools were popular, however, these have decreased, partly because of the shortage of affordable overnight accommodation for larger groups locally. Consultation results demonstrate considerable enthusiasm and potential for this activity to be rejuvenated if barriers can be reduced.

### 7.14 Playing (Play Area)

Many families see the Elan Valley Visitor Centre's Play Area as an attraction in its own right. Improvements and an extension to the play area (in 2016) has seen an increase in families visiting to play. Our consultees noted that the new playground and facilities were a great improvement.

### 7.15 Current 'niche' outdoor recreational activities

#### 7.15.1 Geocaching:

A network of hidden caches of varying sizes and contents exist throughout the Estate (mainly in more accessible places as opposed to open hills). Found by GPS device, this tends to be a self-regulating activity, promoted by participants and enthusiasts.

Currently all sites are organised by groups/individuals and are (generally) at accessible locations. Considering health and safety this has been deemed to be the safest practice for beginners with GPS. More experienced individuals are typically interested in other activities on the open hill such as walking and orienteering. Consultation did not identify a need for improvements to the geocaching provision.

#### 7.15.2 Archaeological sites

Evidence of Elan's inhabitants through the ages is documented and of interest for many visitors. Elan's archaeological features are also of interest to, and documented by, national and local organisations including CADW, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust. Local enthusiasts and interested visitors will make journeys across the Estate to access these sites. Currently there is no particular provision for this interest group in terms of promoted routes and easily accessible interpretation. Consultation results suggest that an improvement in provision would promote uptake.

#### 7.15.3 Geology & Geomorphology

The geological and geomorphological features of the Elan Estate are documented and of interest to specialists as well as many (non-specialist) visitors. The geological trail leaflet promoted at the Visitor Centre, highlights areas of interest. However, the leaflet is somewhat dated and does not match the current Elan Valley brand. Furthermore the website has some geological information, however there is an opportunity to update this. Uniform branding and improved interpretation is

needed alongside the Elan Links Interpretation plan and the Estate wide signage renewal currently in progress. Additionally, an Elan Links app could open up site specific information to a new audience.

#### 7.15.4 Outdoor Living

Currently camping on the open Estate is prohibited (for water quality reasons) except for a select few sites available to organised Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. However, just outside the Elan Links area there are two campsites, one near to the Eastern boundary and the other to the West.

Furthermore, there are two mountain bothies on the Elan Estate and others scattered across nearby hills. Visitors, particularly long-distance hill walkers, use the bothies as a link in their longer journeys across the area and beyond, whereas others make the bothy their final destination. The Lluest Cwmbach bothy was refurbished in partnership with the Mountain Bothy Association and as such is advertised and maintained by themselves. Claerddu bothy is not publically advertised at present but is well used as demonstrated by the Visitor Book.

In general the provision for outdoor living has been identified as adequate during the consultations, however a demand for a 'middle-ground' between bothies and self-catering was identified for larger groups (reference to the community engagement log).

#### 7.15.5 High Ropes & climbing

The Elan Valley Lodge has a high ropes course which they offer to their residential, team-building clients and also public sessions in the summer (as part of their "activity days").

The Estate has many crags which have been identified by climbers including the CabanCoch/ Craig Gigfran crag, said to be of historic importance as the site of the "*first recorded rock climbing in Radnorshire*" ([ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com)). This activity is largely unseen and the numbers of climbers is thought to be low. Climbers' guidance of these crags includes avoiding them in bird nesting seasons, however, having a clearer picture of the 'do's & don'ts' would help users, rangers and stakeholders alike.

#### 7.15.6 Duke of Edinburgh

Elan is frequently used as a location for Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. The challenging nature of the landscape and its remoteness means it can be classed as "wild landscape" suitable for a gold award expedition. Our consultation has indicated that having group bunkhouse accommodation within the wilds of Elan would enhance the potential of Elan being used in more ways in the future.

### 7.16 Accessibility

Alongside the routes that are currently available for walkers, cyclistsetc. there needs to be consideration of the accessibility of these or alternative routes for users with limited accessibility and disabled users.

At Elan there are currently only two accessible routes; a twenty minute circular route from the Visitor Centre and thenine mile route of Elan Valley Trail. Accessible cycle hire adds to the provision for those with impairments. However, a recent volunteer assessment has highlighted a number of issues on the Trail. These primarily related to the style and usage of some of the gates

on the Trail which were difficult and in places impossible due to the style of wheel chair he used preventing him from using the handles and opening the gate where these opened towards the user. It has become apparent that a number of essential improvements are required to our current provision. Furthermore it was highlighted that a wider range of areas would be beneficial and promote people onto the wider Estate. An alternative to route surface improvements could be to provide provisions for more rugged off-road chairs or scooters (e.g. Trampers).

Inside the Visitors Centre the exhibition hall, café, W.C. and shop can all accommodate users with physical disabilities. However there is limited available for users with disabilities in terms of their sight and hearing. There is also no provision of this nature away from the Visitor Centre. Included with the Interpretation Strategy, prepared on behalf of the Elan Links project, on-site interpretation includes elements to touch / feel and potentially hear. Done appropriately there will be an opportunity for this to be a multi-audience facility.

## 8 Summary of proposed access and recreation provisions

During the evaluation of the current routes, route information and interpretation, and the public consultations, a number of points have been illustrated of how Elan can improve its access and recreational provisions.

This chapter elaborates on some key themes which have been noted during this process and then develops into the partner recommendations on how to achieve our opportunity of being an exemplar area in our recreational and access offering.

Furthermore in this plan Partners have also identified areas where priority improvements should be complete in the next five years within the Elan Links project, and legacy improvements, which will help achieve the strategic principles of the Elan partnership.

### 8.1 Key Themes

#### 8.1.1 Maintenance & Continuation

From Elan's current utilisation there is an enjoyment of what there is to offer both in organised events and open access. Although this plan identifies improvements which can be made, it is important to ensure that things that are currently done are continued and that current routes and facilities be reviewed, renewed and cared for to ensure we maintain peoples existing enjoyments.

#### 8.1.2 Information, Interpretation & Waymarking

Alongside route improvement there needs to be an increase in the quantity and quality of the information available to varying audiences, so visitors can make the most of their visit to Elan no matter which subject has brought them to the area.

There also needs to be the correct level of waymarking which will be dependent on the route type and location and tie into the progression concept so some routes are more clearer than others.

#### 8.1.3 Variety

Through the variety of consultations and volunteer engagements that have been completed it is clear that people are interested in a huge range of past times and therefore Elan's provision needs to be diverse. This can be in terms of the length, difficulty and/or locality of the route provisions.

#### 8.1.4 Progression

A key message that has been noted is that of progression. The ability for any user type to have a variety of routes available depending on their ability and difficulty desires. Progressionary routes would enable users, regardless of their background or abilities, to experience more of Elan and in more ways (if they choose to), starting at the skill or fitness level and developing further. This is about providing the opportunity to advance and add value to their experiences. For example, those new to hill walking will benefit from waymarked routes but have opportunities to improve their skills and advance to longer, more difficult un-waymarked walks.

### 8.1.5 Hubs

Alongside the existing car park provisions there are opportunities to develop hubs which can portray and distribute additional information to visitors away from the Visitors Centre and provide a variety of routes available from a single point.

### 8.1.6 Accessibility

Although this consideration will be part of the general route and hub provisions it is important that individual attention is paid to the requirements and range of options available for less abled users. This could include fully disabled users but also those who have mobility difficulties ranging from pushchairs, wheelchairs, and sticks/crutches. Accessible provisions should be a primary consideration and not a secondary thought, to ensure these users are able to utilise and enjoy Elan to its fullest potential.

### 8.1.7 Collaboration

Historically DCWW and EVT have worked in partnership to promote access and Elan. The added benefits at this time are the Elan Links partners who can add value to the offering and variations in the material / interpretation techniques that can be utilised. The project also coordinates a sub-committee, which will provide a forum to test ideas and practicalities out on a wider range of users.

## 8.2 Proposed Actions - 5 Years

From the key themes identified the plans partners have continued to formulate a more specific set of actions in order to achieve their long term aspirations and inform Project 9: Making the Most of Elan. These actions are derived from the feedback, suggestions and consultation alongside the practical issues and the partnerships set of strategic principles.

### 8.2.1 Walking

As a one of the main past times on Elan the short term goal is to provide a greater variety of routes for all abilities alongside ensuring consistency in the level of information, interpretation, GPS data, that is available to users. Actions include:

- 👤 Develop an adopt-a-route scheme for Elan volunteers to ensure regular surveillance of routes.
- 👤 Add ten new/revived walking routes: two new walking routes per year (over five years), to the walks listings, aided by Elan volunteers.
- 👤 Develop more easy-to-moderate and family friendly walking routes.
- 👤 Develop links to long-distance routes and gateway communities (e.g. Rhayader&Gilfach)
- 👤 Test promoted routes by utilising unfamiliar walkers to the route, (including access to heritage sites).
- 👤 Install commonly branded waymarking which is useful to walkers whilst being sympathetic in retaining Elan's sense of remoteness.

### 8.2.2 Running

Potential routes will develop alongside walking, however having a particular advertised route or progression of routes advertised would be beneficial, action:



- 🏠 Have recommended running route(s)
- 🏠 Develop the GarregDdu roundabout as a mid-progression route.

### 8.2.3 Cycling

As identified this is a primary candidate for progressive routes which takes users from the tarmac trail to moderate and unmarked hill routes. Actions identified:

- 🏠 A (MTB) 'blue' graded woodland mountain bike route would provide a progression route for cyclists.
- 🏠 More (MTB) green and blue (easy and moderate) mountain biking routes should be developed to increase provision for mountain biking progression.
- 🏠 Route information for bikers of all abilities needs refreshing and route cards need to be created (using common branding)
- 🏠 Routes should be waymarked according to the agreed levels of difficulty and wilderness.

### 8.2.4 Horse Riding / Pony Trekking

Generally this is trying to increase levels through letting visitors know the opportunities, including those from local businesses and ensuring adequate facilities:

- 🏠 Promotion of horse-riding routes is needed including on-line with consistent branding of waymarking and route information.
- 🏠 Revive routes where practicable in conjunction with local businesses and volunteers.
- 🏠 Ensure regular assessment of routes for accessibility and safety.
- 🏠 Work with the BHS and Lion Royal Hotel to maximise usability and potential.

### 8.2.5 Orienteering

Aim to reintroduce orienteering to the wider Estate and with a greater level of independency. Encourage and develop visitor's skills to allow independent usage. Actions to include:

- 🏠 Orienteering courses should be developed in a phased fashion (short route first) alongside appropriate promotion to test and then expand the 'market' for this activity.
- 🏠 Two orienteering courses to be developed and mapped for public use.

### 8.2.6 Star Gazing & Astronomy

With the Dark Sky Park status continuing to develop it is important that we are able to accommodate all levels of interest, from the basic general appreciation for the Dark Sky to the fulltime astronomer and dark sky photographer. Recommendations include:

- 🏠 Development of improved facilities, information and interpretation for dark skies will enable more and a wider audience to benefit from IDA recognition.
- 🏠 Work alongside Elan Links partners to develop new forms of interpretation;
- 🏠 An expanded resource of volunteer Astronomers should be developed through Friends of Elan supported by key Elan Links partners.
- 🏠 Develop ideas for an observation area or Dark skies hub, out on the Estate.

### 8.2.7 Car Tours

Through the Estate wide signage project many of the recommendations will be completed. Additional interpretation and accessible information has been identified as an action:

- 🏠 To include a GPS car touring function in the Elan mobile application.

### 8.2.8 Off- Road Vehicles

The Partnership believes that in line with past experience managing off-road use in the Elan Valley and elsewhere<sup>1</sup> the Partnership needs to follow the principles of education, clarity and enforcement: education of off-road users to promote sustainable practices; clarity about which routes are available for off-road use and by which type of vehicle (and other recreational users); and enforcement to prevent illegal activity. In addition, the Partnership sees the need to work with others to ensure that routeways are fit-for-purpose and if possible to identify permissive access that may enable sustainable off-road use.

- 🏠 Ensure there is accurate and up to date information available through a range of media for off-road users including trek-leaders and local businesses explaining what is legal as well as a 'code-of-conduct' developed jointly with off-road user groups that promotes sustainable use.
- 🏠 Seek to ensure that the system to report incidents of illegal activity is clear, simple to use, readily accessible and effective.
- 🏠 Work with Powys County Council and off-road user groups to ensure that the condition of the Golf Links, Claerwen and Rhiwnant to Cerrigcwplau routes allows reasonable passage of vehicles and that signage is adequate to enable users to follow them.
- 🏠 Work with user groups and other interested parties to identify if there are suitable options for trialling permissive access for off-road users in the Elan Links area.

### 8.2.9 Film & Photography

Film is a relatively self-advertising asset so providing website information and contacts are updated no further provisions have been identified, however it needs to be clear on the website that permission and licenses are required.

Continued work on social media demonstrates the beauty of the landscape for photography. Provisions for dark skies photograph have been listed with astronomy.

### 8.2.10 Arts & Creativity

The Elan Links partnership enables the opportunity to build on the relationships with CARAD in Rhayader and the Arts Council. The AptElan project highlighted the demand for creativity retreats and our actions are therefore:

- 🏠 Develop and promote relationships with Arts Council Wales including the opportunity of Artist Residencies, and galleries.
- 🏠 Provide exhibition space on the community wall in the Visitors Centre for displays.

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<sup>1</sup>Reviewed by Ashton L. (2013), *Review of Off-Road Exemplar Projects Supported by Countryside Council for Wales 2007-2012*

### 8.2.11 Education

- 🏠 To encourage schools to visit Elan by publicising information
- 🏠 To develop at least one accommodation site in the area for use by educational groups at an affordable rate.

### 8.2.12 Heritage (including archaeology, geology and geomorphology interests)

Increase awareness with emphasis on key accessible sites and interpreting things accessible from key hubs / car parks.

- 🏠 Improve access to and interpretation for archaeological sites whilst considering the impact of increased visitors
- 🏠 Engage with visitors on site excavations where possible
- 🏠 To include features (geological, archaeological etc) in the Elan mobile application and increase the amount of information in interpretation plans.

## 8.3 Proposals - Post 5 years

It is essential to plan for the long term and create a sustainable future beyond the lifespan of a lottery fund bid. Trails will require maintenance, and interpretation panels will eventually go out of date and digital marketing must continually evolve. Sustainability for local businesses is also important. They will gain if visitors stay longer, or more visitors come to the town area, with more spending in the local shop or pubs. Guests staying locally may spend an extra day in the district, rather than travelling further afield. All these aspects help keep money circulating in the local economy; local businesses will in turn spend a higher proportion of their profits locally – the multiplier effect in economics jargon.

The Elan Links project can contribute to this by ensuring local businesses are made aware of the opportunities to tender and supply goods or services. Materials for some aspects of the works should be very specifically locally sourced, in order to match the local materials and styles e.g. local stone.

The nature of this project means that a diverse range of businesses, including many local families, but also larger organisations are working for a shared objective. Good communication is the starting point, and all methods should be considered to achieve this. Social media have joined the suite of options, but perhaps an informal network that meets at the end and beginning of the main tourist season could be considered? This would need to come from the local businesses themselves, and could have a large element of social activity; if the communication is there, the partnerships will benefit.

To ensure the identified key themes are continued, it is imperative that works continue after the Elan Links project. The following points demonstrate the types of actions that will be required across the various user types and recreational activities.

- 🏠 Continually review and update routes including physical works, signage, interpretation and route maps with the assistance from a pro-active volunteer group.
- 🏠 Ensure routes are consistently branded and made accessible through a range of formats including digital and reviewed regularly.

- 🏠 To continue collaborations and expand our partnerships, for example; promote longer walks from outside the Elan Valley to use Elan routes and include the bothies for a stopover. Work in partnership with the Elenydd Wilderness Trust, Mountain Bothies Association and Cambrian Way to promote longer walks/ spurs into the Elan Estate.
- 🏠 A watching brief to be kept to identify future opportunities for expanding opportunities particularly for fell and trail runners.
- 🏠 In future developments of the Visitor Centre, showers would be a welcomed facility (as indicated in public consultation).
- 🏠 Survey and monitor traffic flows and plan for additional pull-in places where attractions and points of interest are likely to increase attention.
- 🏠 To work with local town development organisation, Rhayader 2000 to promote reciprocal opportunities to visitors
- 🏠 Keep a watching brief on developing activities to ensure modern programme provided for on Elan.

## 9 Conclusions

This Plan details the review and evaluation of current access and recreation provision at Elan undertaken by the Elan Links Partnership and supported by a range of individuals and stakeholders. The plan then goes on to identify recommendations for action as a result of this process. Some of these recommendations are for the long term, however, many will be implemented as part of the Elan Links Scheme over the next five years. The Elan Links actions are spread across a number of projects in the scheme but the work is principally focused on projects:

- 🏠 5a: Increasing access to Elan's built heritage; and
- 🏠 9: Making the most of Elan.

In implementing these projects the Elan Links **Interpretation Strategy** will play a vital role and should be read in conjunction with any plans for waymarking / interpretation / display materials.

Appended to this Plan is "Project 9 Proposals" providing a more detailed work-up of the specific capital expenditure that this plan identified for the five years of the Elan Links delivery phase.

*The Partnership would like to thank the many individuals and stakeholders who have given freely of their time and expertise in supporting the development of this plan.*



**Proposed Routes  
under  
Project 9: Making the Most of Elan**

## 10 Introduction

The following appendix relates solely to projects identified as achievable during the Elan Links programme of works under Objective 9.

In addition to Project 9 there is additional access and recreation information and interpretation in Project 5a which will again improve the recreational activities and specific pastimes.

## 11 Elan Links Project 9 proposals:

### 11.1 New or Improved Routes

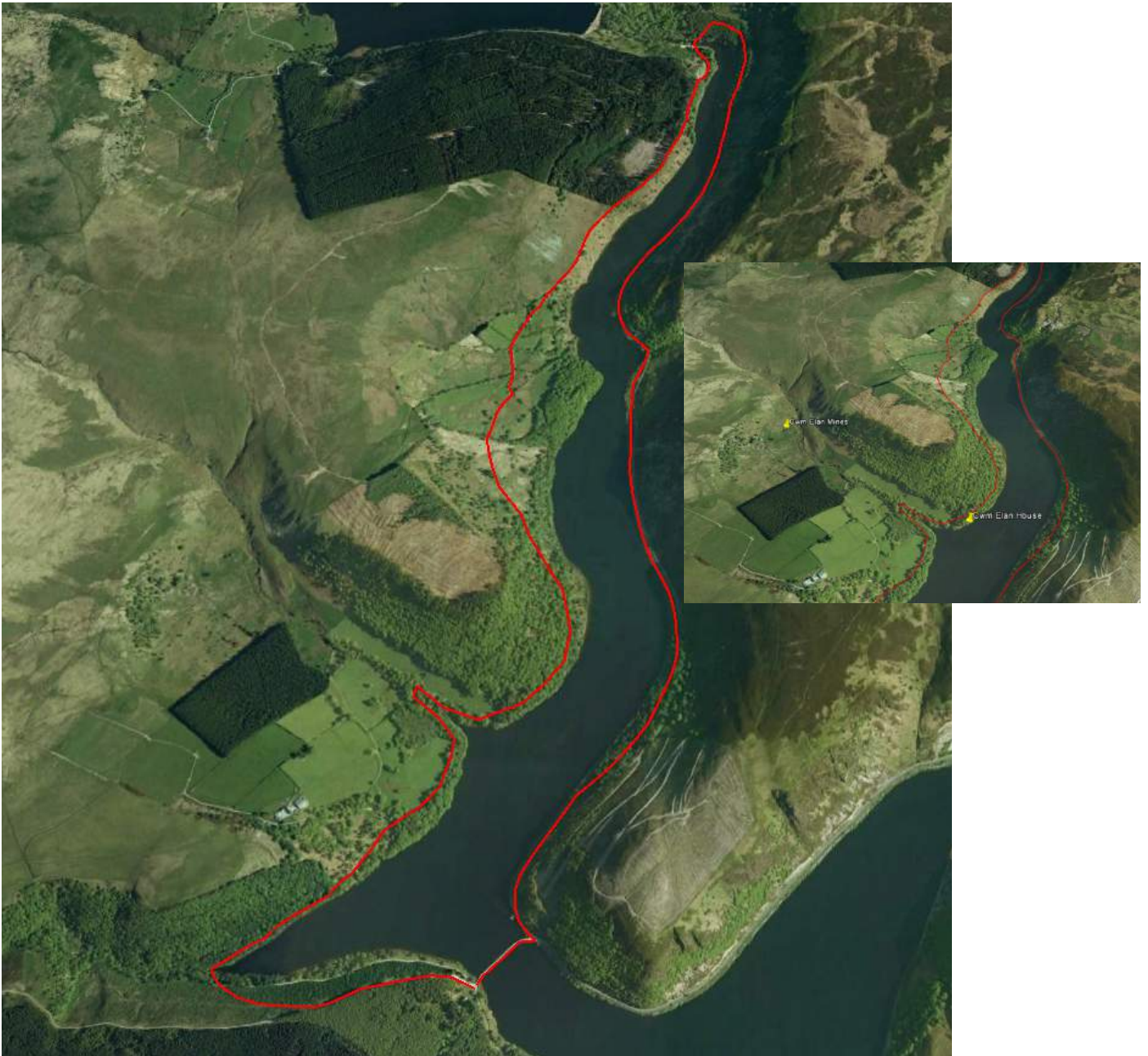
#### 11.1.1 GarregDdu Roundabout

The walk around Garreg Ddu reservoir is a firm favourite with visitors. It is a moderate, level walk that takes walkers (and runners) through woodlands, farmland and back along the Elan Valley Trail. The more popular starting point is at Nantgwyllt Church Car Park.

This route provides a longer circular route with a mix of the tarmac trail and gentle woodland paths allowing progression and more variety for a range of users. However some improvements are required at the beginning of the loop (start from Nantgwyllt) where the route is currently on a farm access track. It is proposed to alter the existing route to provide a new pedestrian track utilising a forestry extraction rack to provide additional safety to walkers and runners.

On this route, we will be providing improved interpretation and information with regards to the heritage surrounding the route including Y Foel tower and the water abstraction point and journey to Birmingham, Cwm Elan Mines and the original Manor House: Cwm Elan House and gardens, which was flooded with the reservoirs but for which parts are still visible above the reservoir water line.

Also due to the level of geocache activity in the area this route can also be promoted for a family activity; such as a Geocache style hunt which brings the family to work together.



Route length: 9.5km

Works required to route:

- Route building and improvements to parts
- Bridge construction
- Waymarking & signage
- Information boards

Interpretation/ information on route:

- Garreg Ddu reservoir and Y Foel tower;
- Woodland Management and Project 1c information;
- Cwm Elan Mines;
- Cwm Elan House and Gardens;
- In addition to the existing Trail information and Dam interpretation



### 11.1.2 Dol y Mynach Dam, Tunnel & Bird Hide

Often missed by visitors, 'the unfinished dam' (Dol y Mynach) forms an important part of Elan's history and provides a snap shot into the mechanisms of the dams construction. Dol y Mynach dam can be seen from the roadside but only if you know to look out for it, as it is obscured by vegetation. Until recently, the only access to the dam was along a banked woodland path. It was originally proposed that this project fund a new accessible access track down to Dol y Mynach Dam and the valve tunnel tower, however these works have had to be completed prior to the approval of this plan and this project now focuses on specific access points and interpretation.

The access track sits also on alongside the woodland path to the bird hide. This route will bring to life the hidden dam and its role in both providing water and a shallow reservoir for a variety of wildlife, and promote the existence and utilisation of the Bird Hide for which even the most regular visit may be unaware.

The aim of the linear route to and from the Dam is to provide an accessible route for pushchairs, wheelchairs and handcycles (not the branch to the Bird Hide). The new route requires further assessment and "road-testing" to ensure gates and surfaces are suitable to all the target users.

These two short routes combined, will provide a family orientated experience taking in engineering and wildlife interpretation and promoting access to unique parts of Elan's heritage.



Time: 45 minutes

Dol y Mynach Dam (& tunnel) route length: 0.42km (0.84km return)

Bird hide route length: 0.06km (0.12km return)

Total: 0.96km (to Dam, tunnel & Bird Hide)

Works required to route:

- Ensure full accessibility to Dam, replace gates and monitor surface.
- Woodland path to bird hide
- Waymarking& signage
- Interpretation
- Added to website & maps

Interpretation Information on route:

- DolyMynach dam
- Dol y Mynach tunnel
- Coed Lan-fraith(SSSI) woodland
- Wildlife of DolyMynach reservoir
- Hidden points of interest and heritage

### 11.1.3 Woodland Cycle Route

This is a new route, utilising some existing forestry tracks and new tracks to create a circuit. This route is designed to provide progression in cycling abilities and bridge the gap between very easy and difficult mountain biking routes. The route will be graded as a MTB 'Blue' trail. The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IBMA) describes this as; "*Occasional cyclists with some experience of road use or easy trails. Reasonably fit families. Children 10+yrs riding solo. Suitable for mountain bikes, hybrids or robust touring bikes*".

Llanerchi Woodland is outside of the Elan Valley's SSSI and SAC areas, but all works will be in accordance with Natural Resource Wales' guidance.

Parking is provided at Nantgwyllt car park which is the start and end point of the proposed route. The exact route is subject to design which will be tendered alongside construction.

This route although described for (push) bikes could have a range of users including horse riding however a delicate balance and code of conduct needs to be in place to ensure all user groups have the necessary safety and enjoyment. This will be confirmed with the sub-committee upon finalisation of the route.

Estimated ride time: 1 hour

Length: 3.8km or which new track is approximately half and improvements to forestry track to the second half.

Works required to route:

- Trail/ track building
- Waymarking and signage
- Interpretation
- Added to website & maps

### 11.1.4 Longer Permissive Routes

Although there is a range of walking routes, in an area of 72 square miles, there is much to explore. New walk routes might feature those areas of the Estate identified in the landscape characterisation work, or link gateway communities such as Rhayader, Llanwrthwl and the Gilfach Nature reserve.

10 new (promoted) routes will be identified and selected by Estate users who know routes best including:

- Elan Valley Trust walk leaders
- Powys Ramblers
- Rhayader Walkers
- Friends of Elan volunteers
- Elan Ranger Team

These walks maybe new or revived, the Elan Ranger Team have produced a folder, which records a range of walks which could be a useful starting point.



Selected routes will be waymarked (only where required), described, mapped, added to the website and available in print or download (and potentially by mobile app.). Routes which require OS map and compass navigation skills over open hills, will not be waymarked and visitors will understand the skills level required.

Selected routes also need some points of reference in the written descriptions and some points will be needed to reaffirm the user that they are on the right route. The aim of using a variety of information will be to allow varying abilities to explore a variety of walks and progression through the difficulties from fully guided to exploring alone.

### 11.1.5 2.1.5 Orienteering Routes

The proposed sites of two orienteering courses are in Gwaelod and Cnwch woodlands. The Cnwch route will be aimed at younger or novice orienteers and the Gwaelod route, more extensive and suited to adventurous/ experienced orienteers.

Routes will be developed by an orienteering route organiser. Check point markers and punches will be installed and accompanying maps designed and printed.

## 11.2 Hubs

The following proposals are to enable access to a variety of information away from the main 'honeypot' of the Visitors Centre.

Each hub is easily accessible and has existing car parking facilities. As part of implementation of this project consideration will be needed to the appropriate signage and advertising of these hubs, alongside the principles of the Interpretation Plan. Initial it is envisaged that they will be give promotion on the website including the routes available at each and provide or upgrade the information boards onsite.

It is proposed that there will be an increased level of interpretation and information for visitors at these sites (for detailed interpretation provisions please refer to the Interpretation Plan), in addition to three or four routes which vary in length and difficulty from each of these hubs.

The identified three hubs are:

### 11.2.1 Nantgwyllt (Llanerchi) Hub

Centred around Nantgwyllt car park and Church this location is pivotal to the Elan and Birmingham heritage as the location links the Elan and Claerwen valleys and provides the outlet for the water to Birmingham via Y Foel tower. Heritage points such as this will be pivotal to the interpretation and information provided on site, via the app and via and written literature.

This location is can provide access to existing routes such as the Elan Valley Trail and Garreg Ddu roundabout (shown in blue on the map below), in addition to a range of new and/or revived routes which are identified on the map below:

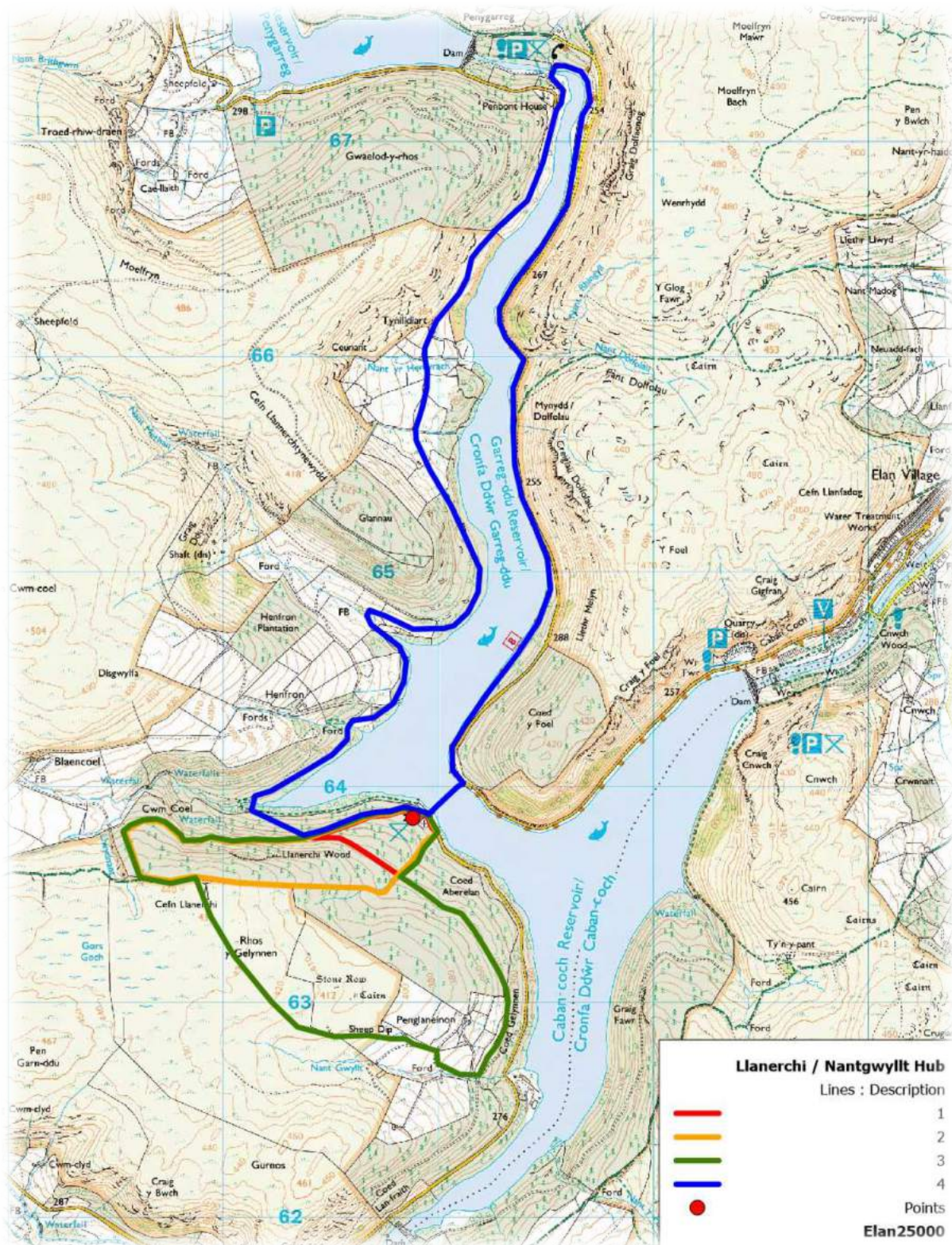


Figure 18: Nantgwyllt / Llanerchi Hub

For this hub it is proposed works will include:

- Clearing vegetation where necessary to open routes.
- Waymarking & signage of the selected routes.
- Main hub interpretation unit including a map of the identified routes.
- Interpretation for the heritage and habitats around, including;
  - Submerged dam of Garreg Ddu;

- Y Foel tower and the water journey to Birmingham,
- Connectivity between Elan and Claerwen reservoirs,
- Woodland & Forestry on Elan
- WW2 Pill Boxes (on the opposite bank)

it is envisaged there will be a mix of fixed and interactive interpretation.

- Add new routes to the website, maps & interactive app

### 11.2.2 Claerwen Hub

Situated at the base of the Claerwen dam there is an existing car park and public toilets, plus accessibility to the B.O.A.T between Rhiwnant and Cerrigcwplau. This area has been proposed as a potential for additional facilities such a new horse corral, however these proposal would be outside of project 9, at this time.

Claerwen offers visitors the opportunity to get up close to the largest dam on the Estate and can provide access for disabled / less-abled visitors on a short route plus family walks from the base to the top of the Dam. It will also provide access to the estate's bothy at Claerddu and access to longer more difficult (in both terrain and map reading) walks between the Claerwen and the Elan Valley.

Four circular routes have been proposed at this hub. Two short and two longer routes. The route at the base of the Claerwen is also intended to be a fully accessible route (for wheelchairs, pushchairs etc.)

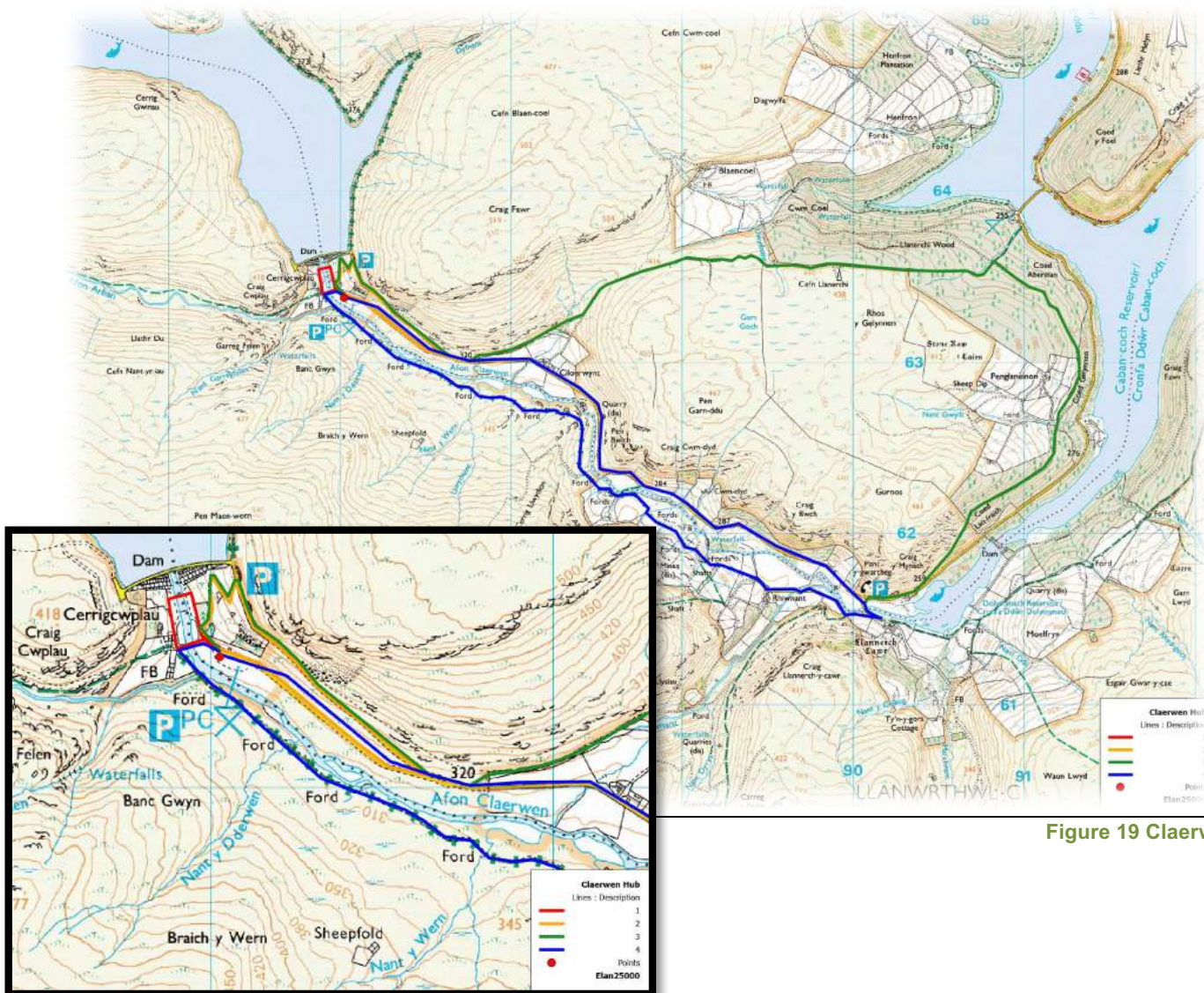


Figure 19 Claerwen Hub

### Works required to this hub:

- Improvements to two gates for wheelchair/pushchair accessibility (to red route).
  - Clearing vegetation where necessary to open routes.
  - Waymarking & signage of a select four routes.
  - Main hub interpretation unit including a map of the identified routes.
  - Interpretation for the heritage and habitats around, including;
    - Farming
    - Hydro electricity generation
    - Claerwen dam (inc. dam safety: trigonometry point)
    - The opening of Claerwen dam and HRH Queen Elizabeth II
    - Link between Claerwen and Elan valleys
    - Link between Claerwen and south Wales.
- it is envisaged there will be a mix of fixed and interactive interpretation.
- Add new routes to the website, maps & interactive app

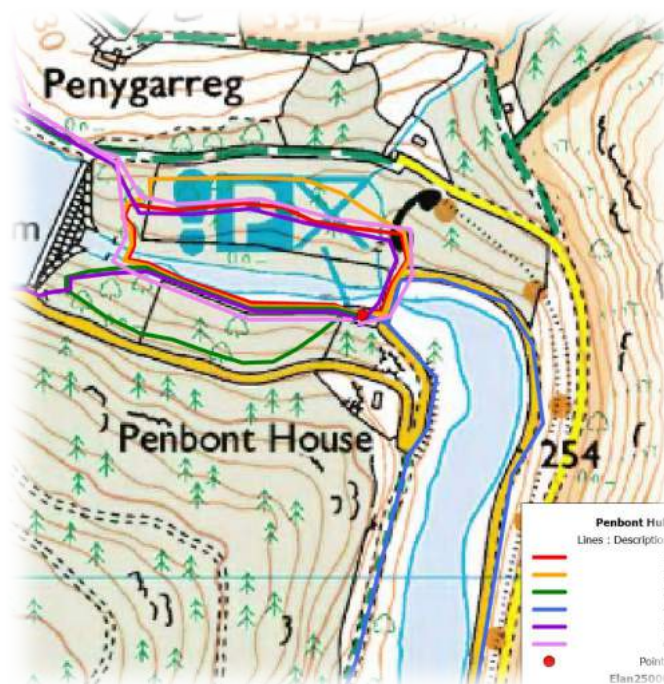
### 11.2.3 Penbont Hub

Positioned at the base of Pen y Garreg dam the Penbont car park provides access to the Dam (which is used for Open Days) and the Estate's Tea Room and Bed and Breakfast; Penbont House. This is the only other eating establishment away from the Visitors Centre.

The newly renovated (Project 5b) Chief Engineer's House is also accessible from this hub with routes to and from it possible.

With the Elan Valley Trail passing alongside Penbont Woods there is easy access to the route and the wider estate, and the Garreg Ddu Roundabout plus a variety of shorter family routes within the woodlands.

Six routes have been identified are shown on two maps below:





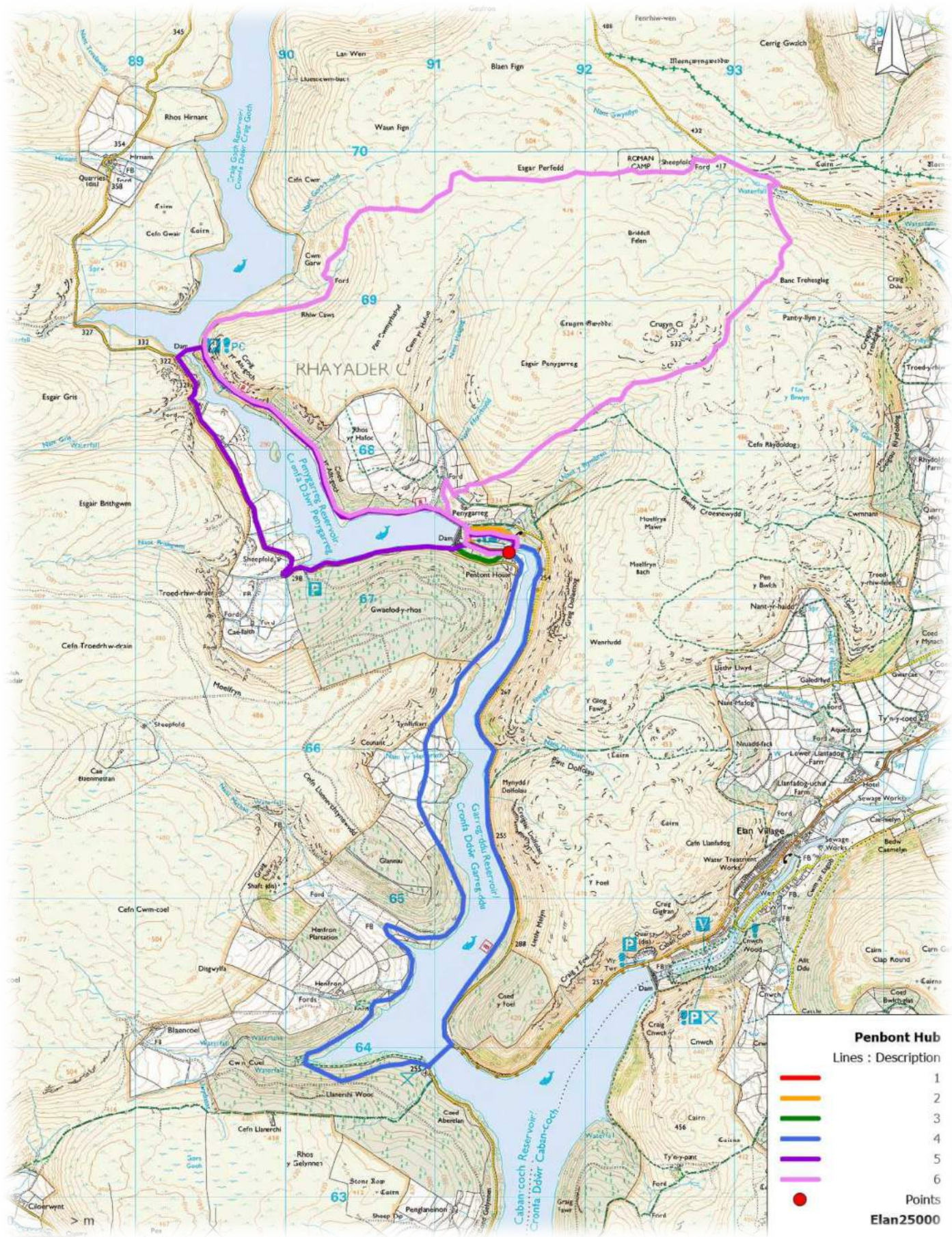


Figure 20: Penbont Hub

Works required to this hub:

- Clearing vegetation where necessary to open routes.
- Access improvements (one gate) to allow access to lower woodland track. This will allow easier access for pushchairs, wheelchairs and scooters (who wish to view the base of the dam, on a linear route only)
- Main hub interpretation unit including a map of the identified routes.
- Interpretation for the heritage and habitats around, including;
  - Woodland biodiversity (links to project 1c woodland birds project and project 3e Wethers)
  - PenyGarreg dam
  - Folklore
  - Resident Engineer's bungalow
  - Hydro electricity generation
  - Bug / Geo Cache Hunt for childrenit is envisaged there will be a mix of fixed and interactive interpretation.
- Add new routes to the website, maps& interactive app

## 11.3 Current route promotion and works:

### 11.3.1 Walking

The current 10 walks promoted through [elanvalley.org.uk](http://elanvalley.org.uk) and (some) in route card form, have been a mainstay in Elan's walks offering. The walks range from a 30 minute, accessible route to an 18 mile 'Reservoir Challenge'. To ensure the current walks are adequate we are proposing to complete minor works, primarily relating to their information route cards, GPS data and Waymarking.

Works required to routes (and route promotion):

- Waymarking
- Adding to websites
- Design and print route maps (integrating with walks route cards)

### 11.3.2 Mountain Biking

All mountain biking routes are on the existing Rights of Way and permissive network. This project is about promoting these routes which, are renowned in the mountain biking community, but under promoted locally. Red bull have placed the Elan Valley in the top of its mountain biking lists including:

<http://www.redbull.com/uk/en/bike/stories/1331817737023/best-mtb-destinations-in-wales>

&

<http://www.redbull.com/uk/en/bike/stories/1331770232599/8-of-the-best-natural-mountain-biking-routes-in-the-uk>

Project partners, MBwales.com host a page promoting mountain biking in the Elan Valley: <http://www.mbwales.com/agents/elan-valley/>. There are currently three of Elan's routes on the MBWales website, another five of Elan's routes will be added. Routes include a 60km, Tour of Elan ride and a smaller blue route for younger or novice riders. Routes will be reced by the mountain biking members of the access and recreation sub-group. The routes will also be named by the group.

Once these routes are added to MBWales.com, the mountain biking section at [elanvalley.org.uk](http://elanvalley.org.uk) will link to the website. The MBWales website offers a short description of the route and the facility to download a GPX file, which can be loaded on to GPS navigational devices (there's no facility to print out directions). Only a percentage of mountain bikers will use this navigation method, therefore all routes need to be waymarked and accompanied by map guides.

Works required to routes (and route promotion):

- Waymarking
- Adding to websites
- Design and print route maps (integrating with walks route cards)
- Improvements to boggy areas

### 11.3.3 Horse riding

The development of horse riding routes will use a similar method as new walks route development. The British Horse Society volunteers, Lion Royal Trekking centre and stakeholders interested in horse riding route development, will identify routes to promote. These will include:

- Day riding routes
- Longer/ multi day routes

It is vital that routes are reviewed and assessed regular due to the changeable nature of the landscape and the seasons to ensure routes are viable and safe for users.

Works required to route (depending on routes assessed and chosen):

- Potential access improvements
- Waymarking& signage
- Added to website & maps