



Devon Countryside Access Forum
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Jim Jobe/Carol Whale
Department for Communities and Local Government
2nd Floor, NE, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

3 July 2017

Dear Mr Jobe and Ms Whale

Running Free - Consultation on Preserving the Free Use of Public Parks

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a local access forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). Its remit is to advise “as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area...” It has a statutory function to give independent advice to named bodies, including the Secretary of State for any Government Department, under section 94 of the CRoW Act and they are required to “have regard” to “any relevant advice given to them.”

The DCAF currently has seventeen members who represent the interests of landowners/managers, access users and other relevant areas of expertise such as conservation and tourism.

The consultation did not coincide with a meeting of the Forum but this response will be on the agenda for formal ratification at the next meeting on 12 October.

In response to the specific questions raised in the consultation the Forum would like to advise as follows:

Question 1: Do you agree that local authorities should not be able to charge parkrun or parkrun junior for the use of public parks?

The use of public parks is traditionally free at source for all users. The Devon Countryside Access Forum strongly agrees that use of parks in rural and urban areas should continue to be free and that local authorities should not charge Parkrun or Parkrun Junior. The success of these organisations has resulted in significantly greater numbers of people enjoying parks with associated health and wellbeing benefits. It is

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is required, in accordance with Sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, to provide advice as to the improvement of public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment.

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part of the remit of the forum to improve public access to land for the purposes of recreation and enjoyment and therefore important to support the custom of free public access to all public parks, country parks and green spaces in the control of the local authority. By continuing to provide free facilities the inclusiveness of parks is preserved.

Question 2: Is there any specific activity, in addition to parkrun or junior parkrun, that takes place in a public park, that does not require exclusive use of the park or a part of the park, that should be considered for inclusion in provisions to prevent local authorities charging for that activity, and if so why?

A number of regular recreational access activities also use parks and other green spaces on a non-profit basis. These would include Walking for Health, Walk and Talk groups and Green Gym schemes. Such organisations frequently target people new to exercise or those recovering from injury or physical/mental illness. The fact that the activity is free is part of the promotion. Any attempts by parks to charge groups or any individuals would be very retrograde. The physical and mental health benefits of outdoor exercise are well-documented and your attention is drawn to a few relevant publications:

- [Evidence Statement on the links between Natural Environments and Human Health](#) (2017) – DEFRA report
- [Annex C Literature Review January 2014](#) Devon Local Nature Partnership Health & Access Group. Review of the literature concerning the benefits to health of engagement with the natural environment.
- [Everybody active, every day: an evidence-based approach to physical activity](#) Public Health England 2014.
- [Walking Works](#) Walking for Health 2014.

Question 3: Are there any activities that involve a financial charge to a client or clients by a professional or business, but do not involve exclusive use of a public park or part of the park, that should be considered for inclusion in provisions to prevent local authorities charging for that activity, and if so why?

Whilst recognising the financial constraints experienced by many parks, the Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that it would be counter-productive to try and charge people like professional dog walkers or personal trainers a fee as it would be very difficult to monitor, extremely difficult to enforce and unlikely to be very cost effective.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum trusts that its comments will be taken into account.

Yours sincerely

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Hilary Winter
Forum Officer

Letter agreed and sent on behalf of Devon Countryside Access Forum

Chair: Sarah Slade Vice Chair: Chris Cole