



Devon Countryside Access Forum

Lucombe House
County Hall
Topsham Road
EXETER EX2 4QD

Tel: 07837 171000
01392 382084

devoncaf@devon.gov.uk

www.devon.gov.uk/dcaf

Coastal access

Cremyll to Kingswear & Combe Martin to Marsland Mouth

Initial response from the Devon Countryside Access Forum January 2018

A Devon Countryside Access Forum working group discussed the coastal access provisions for the above lengths of coastline in Devon, currently being investigated by Natural England. This response was approved by the Forum at its full meeting on 25 January 2018.

General considerations

The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises Natural England that the following considerations should be borne in mind in assessing the coastal access stretches from Cremyll to Kingswear and Combe Martin to Marsland Mouth.

Users

1. The DCAF recognises that a route for walking is enshrined in the Act. However, improved access for horse riding or cycling might be achieved in some locations and Natural England is requested to discuss this with appropriate landowners.
2. Bearing in mind Equality Act requirements, efforts should be made to improve access for disabled people. Natural England should consider where improvements to access for those with mobility vehicles could be achieved, particularly associated with viewpoints or nearby parking areas. See separate paper on disability access and the coast.

Information

- a) Route information is important. Appropriate signage, particularly where there are route options, is vital.
- b) Information boards should be provided at access points, for example in car parks. These should also refer to the public rights of way website. Use of Apps, QR codes and other technology should be explored by Natural England.

Land management matters

- 1) Negotiation with landowners should take account of their interests and livestock systems.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a local access forum. It 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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- 2) Areas where dogs are free to roam and where there are restrictions should be identified for wildlife and land management reasons.
- 3) Implications for economic uses such as shooting and tourism should be considered.
- 4) The implications for future development should be made clear.
- 5) The new coastal access rights will have reduced liability for landowners. This should be made clear to landowners and Natural England has an important role in educating the public as this is a significant change from the existing liability criteria.
- 6) Where the current South West Coast Path route is inland there is, in some cases, a significant area of land seaward. Excluding excepted land, the DCAF advises that the route and extent of coastal margin in such instances may not be a 'fair' balance between private and public interests.

Path surfacing and design

- The England Coast Path through Devon should retain a feeling of wilderness with appropriate surfacing.
- Where realignment of the coast path is being considered, links to existing public rights of way should be a key consideration in determining the route.

Consultation

- ✓ Where roll-back is proposed, landowners further inland should be advised of the potential for roll-back. The DCAF notes that Natural England usually bases its roll-back provisions on the Environment Agency's data which predicts coastal changes up to 2025-2030. The DCAF is concerned that this is a very short time scale and advises that it is critical to understand the implications for landowners in the medium term. There have been some unexpected slippages and erosion along the coast recently. The Forum advises that landowners beyond the line indicated by the EA data should be informed about roll-back.

SPECIFIC ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Devon Countryside Access Forum has assessed some of the issues and opportunities presented by Natural England and has the following comments.

Come Martin to Marsland Mouth

1. Where the route on the ground is not clear this should be clarified e.g. *Combe Martin*. The path should be easy to walk without a map.
2. *Watermouth Castle and The Warren*. Routing the path through The Warren might be an option if landowners are in agreement, and subject to considerations for the caravan park.
3. *Lantern Hill*. It was felt it would not be necessary to route the England Coast Path round Lantern Hill as this area would constitute spreading room anyway.
4. *Ilfracombe Tunnels*. There is currently a charge to access Ilfracombe Tunnels and the cliffs and beaches below. Natural England will need to assess the impact on business interests.

5. *Shag Point*. There are issues around the stability of the cliffs but a more seaward route merits investigation with landowners.
6. *Putsborough Sands*. The current route of the SWCP affords good views and it is felt these are better than a route further seaward.
7. *Chesil Beach*. The DCAF agrees it would be good to improve safety, where possible, and look at alternative crossings of the main road. If more land is included as spreading room with a new crossing Natural England is advised to consider whether restrictions on access are necessary.
8. *Saunton*. The Forum would welcome further consultation on options at Saunton due to economic interests – the golf course and tourism – and wildlife considerations.
9. *Horsey Island*. There are likely to be more land management issues if the route is moved inland. It may not be feasible to move back the existing path due to ground conditions. There is some concern about spreading room if the route is moved to one of the alternatives and a query over balance.
10. *Chivenor*. The DCAF advises that the airfield and wildlife interests should be taken account of. It advises that there may be little gain to the benefit of enjoyment.
11. *Barnstaple*. The DCAF recognises that Natural England will be obliged to use the first crossing, the new bridge. This will take the route away from the town which is a concern from the economic point of view. Natural England is advised to work with the Town Council to create a signed local trail.
12. *Penhill Point*. Access to this area could be explored with the landowner. However, the DCAF is mindful of the fact that the existing SWCP route is also a popular cycle path and the balance between private and public interests would need to be borne in mind as this route is unlikely to change or be dispensed with. The DCAF does, however, recognise that this section of the current route is in an embankment with limited views.
13. *Home Farm Marsh*. There is an existing cycleway so again the balance issue comes in as this route is unlikely to change. There are already good views and wildlife considerations on the marsh itself.
14. *Instow*. As with Combe Martin it would be good to clarify signage on the ground.
15. *Appledore*. The DCAF advises that the route may be best to continue going through the town to ensure benefits of passing trade.
16. *Hobby Drive*. The Forum recognises the commercial interests here associated with a shoot in the spreading room and Natural England should consider this. Clovelly would be included in spreading room but should have exclusion of access as an attraction.

17. *Hartland Point*. It is unclear where the boundaries of the curtilage of the lighthouse fall. Some areas would be open access and spreading room. The DCAF considers that the current path is reasonably convenient.

18. *Sandhole*. Taking the route off the road would be advantageous but the route needs to be safe. Advice should be sought on erosion alongside landowner consultation.

Cremyll to Kingswear

a) *Cellar Beach*. There would be options to take the route closer to the coast, subject to discussion and agreement with the landowner.

b) *Yealm Estuary*. The DCAF recognises the complexity of using discretion to create a continuous path around the estuary. There are both wildlife and economic issues. There are some permissive paths on the west side of the estuary but the curtilage of hotel grounds and riverside homes would create difficulties in developing a path. The Warren Point gap would require bridging and there are sailing considerations. Cofflete Creek is also extensive. On the east side there is no obvious footpath. The roads are narrow and would not necessarily provide views. Taking the path round the estuary would be an expensive and difficult option as well as being of considerable length.

Improving the ferry to ensure it is less seasonal may be a better option and would have wider community benefits. If a continuous path round the estuary is provided there is a danger the ferry link could be lost or become less economic. Natural England is advised to explore the potential of increasing the service across more of the year and providing a weekend service in the winter.

c) *Ivy Cove*. A shoot exists on the cliffs. The DCAF advises that the current path is in good condition, is wide and offers good views. Views may be lost on a lower path and there would be a commercial impact.

d) *Meadowsfoot Beach*. Natural England is asked to check that the mapped route is the one walked on the ground. Existing access arrangements and restrictions should be considered.

e) *Erme Estuary*. The DCAF is aware of historic parkland and SSSI issues. It would be useful to identify an alternative route for when the tide is not suitable to allow wading across. This would not give rise to spreading room. Natural England is advised to investigate whether an alternative route is possible through local villages and in discussion with landowners.

f) *Burgh Island*. The DCAF consider that the island will be coastal margin land anyway and it is not necessary to route the coast path to include the island.

g) *Avon Estuary*. Designating the route up the estuary would give rise to a lot of spreading room and this may not be acceptable to landowners. There is an existing and well-promoted Avon Estuary trail walk, developed by the South Devon AONB and the leaflet for this is commended by the DCAF. There would

be some legal issues if this was the formal alternative route due to use of permissive access and private driveways. The Forum would encourage Natural England to work with the AONB to support its local initiative in promoting the route and ensuring the route continues.

- h) *Bantham*. Bantham Ham would be spreading room and there is currently a footpath Thurlestone Footpath 1 around the Ham. The Forum does not feel it is necessary to include the Ham as part of the formal England Coast Path.
- i) *Hallsands and Beesands*. The Forum recognises the problems associated with coastal erosion. It is not for the Forum to identify where roll-back routes should go but alternative routes should take place through negotiation. If it is decided to implement roll-back on these sections consultation should take place at this point with landowners who own potential routes inland.
- j) *Slapton*. A full variation report should be submitted, with full consultation, if the road is breached. The DCAF advises that this should not be designated as roll-back.
- k) *Matthew's Point*. This is a steep site and tight with buildings. The DCAF feels it may be difficult to achieve a route closer to the sea but spreading room may be an issue on the existing route. If spreading room is a concern for landowners this may be worth exploring.
- l) *Strete*. The DCAF advises working with landowners to see whether it is possible to make route improvements to avoid the main road.
- m) *Stoke Fleming*. The DCAF recognises this area is particularly difficult as large houses and curtilages make it difficult to achieve a more seaward route. It would be useful if options could be explored, even if some use still had to be made of the existing road. The Forum would welcome the opportunity to discuss options once these have been explored with landowners.

One route has been identified as offering opportunities for disability access and should be explored with the landowner. The Forum understands the National Trust is the owner.

- *Little Dartmouth*. The DCAF understands there is an accessible path from the car park towards Dartmouth Castle, but the coast path itself (which forms a nice circular walk from the Castle back to the car park) could do with some improvement as there are a few ruts in places. However, there is a stile from the upper path connecting to the coast path, (just beyond the houses/small holdings), thus restricting access down to part of the coast path and closing off any potential for a circular walk for disabled users.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF) is a local access forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). Its statutory remit is to give independent advice “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...”

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