



Devon Countryside Access Forum
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Minutes of the Forty-Ninth meeting
of the Devon Countryside Access Forum
held at County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter EX2 4QD
Thursday, 25 January 2018

Attendance

Forum members

Simon Clist
Sean Comber
John Daw
Gordon Guest
Jo Hooper

Chris Ingram
Sue Pudduck
Councillor Philip Sanders
Sarah Slade (Chair)
Maggie Watson

Devon County Council Officers and others present

Lloyd Batten, DCC apprentice
Helen Clayton, Senior Officer, Public Rights of Way, DCC
Ros Mills, Manager, Public Rights of Way, DCC
Hilary Winter, Forum Officer

1. Apologies and resignations

Apologies had been received from Mark Bullock, Chris Cole, Andrew Cox, Linda Lee and Mark Simpson.

The resignations of Mark Bullock and Andrew Cox were noted.

2. Declarations of interest

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of the Forty-Eighth meeting held on 12 October 2017

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2017 were approved and signed.

4. Matters arising

4.1 Minor road network (4.3 12.10.17)

An email response from DCC had been received stating that a review of the minor road network had not started due to competing demands. It was intended to make it a high priority with an internal consultation in April. No major impact on public rights of way was anticipated.

Concern was expressed at the rapid deterioration of the minor road network and the danger to cyclists, and young people in particular, due to the scale and depth of potholes. Any incremental decline would inevitably become a maintenance issue for the Public Rights of Way team if minor roads became unsurfaced, unclassified County roads. It was noted potholes could be reported and tracked on the DCC website.

It was agreed it would be useful to invite the relevant officer from DCC's Highway Asset Group to the April meeting, to discuss the impact on users of minor roads and on the connectivity to the Public Rights of Way network.

Action: Forum Officer to invite DCC Officer.

4.2 Disability access position statement (7.1 12.10.17)

The position statement is on the DCAF website and would be a useful document to raise awareness. The Chair thanked everyone who contributed.

4.3 Explore Devon website (7.2 12.10.17)

Chris Ingram reported that she had looked at the Explore Devon website which included excellent information on how to ride, accessible beaches and road safety. It was geared primarily to tourists. Improvements could include a link to the Public Rights of Way website; an explanation of multi-use and where riders can go; and codes of conduct. Parking of horse-boxes was a major issue.

It would be useful to see better links to available riding areas on Forestry Commission and National Trust land. The Forum Officer had written to several organisations but had received a limited response. Some dealt with web information on a site by site basis.

Ros Mills, DCC, and the Forum Officer had attended a meeting with DCC Officers involved with Explore Devon. DCC would have to ensure any information was accurate before it went on the website due to liability concerns. User groups could provide more useful detail and weblinks were an option to provide such information. The same concern about accuracy applied to photo sites. Ensuring information remained accurate was a major consideration but electronic media ought to be the way forward. Time constraints in inputting details were acknowledged.

It was agreed P3 parishes may like to talk to landowners and check details of where horse box parking could be accommodated. It was acknowledged however that such provision should not impact on the management of adjacent land.

Linking to the PRow website did present some challenges, for example bridleway routes on Hollow Moor and Whiteleigh Meadow were not easy or

were seasonal. A caveat to cover this could be considered.

It was noted that some user groups, such as the Trail Riders' Fellowship, had up-to-date line mapping and encouraged responsible usage.

It was agreed the Forum Officer would liaise with Ros Mills, DCC, about contacts in the Forestry Commission and National Trust.

Chris Ingram agreed to look at the wording of the Explore Devon website.

Action: Chris Ingram to follow up. Forum Officer and Ros Mills to discuss further links with the Forestry Commission and the National Trust

4.4 Trail principles (7.2 12.10.17)

The revised version was approved, subject to typographical correction. The principles would be sent to Ros Mills, Public Rights of Way Manager.

Action: Forum Officer to forward to Ros Mills, DCC.

Ros Mills, DCC, confirmed that carriage driving was not currently promoted within the SW region on multi-use trails. However, several authorities had responded saying that if there was a demand for it they would no doubt consider it, provided the path was able to accommodate carriage drivers with regard to surfacing; widths; laybys; turning bays; land owner agreement and other factors.

4.5 Parish Paths Partnership (P3) workshops (9. 12.10.17)

No one from the Forum had been available to attend the P3 workshops but these had been very successful with positive feedback. The days were a mixture of case studies, networking and a walk.

4.6 Verges (15. 12.10.17)

The letter from the Forum was noted and approved. The response from DCC was discussed.

Although it had been a DCC decision to save money, it was noted that the Weeds Act 1959 was still in place and there was a concern that moving material around the countryside was spreading various types of weed. There appeared to be a general disregard for the value of verges for recreational access. Dumping on verges may render them unusable for walking or as a safe refuge and encourages fly tipping. The importance of supplying evidence, preferably photographic, where incidents had been identified was raised.

It was agreed a representative of the Highway Asset Management Group, DCC, could also discuss this issue and it would be useful to invite Skanska,

new highway contractors, too.

Action: Forum Officer to include this matter in the invitation to attend the next meeting.

5. Correspondence log

Attention was drawn to item 11. The BHS Officer for Dartmoor had expressed concerns about the use of smooth tarmac, particularly on hills, which made roads more difficult and slippery for horses to use. A top dressing was preferable. It was agreed this was also an issue in Devon where SMA (stone mastic asphalt) had been put on. However, Highway Management had top dressed some areas and are aware of, and have experience of, the problem.

This was an additional area to discuss with the proposed speaker at the next meeting.

Action: Forum Officer.

Attention was drawn to the recommendation under number 12 and it was resolved to send a letter advising that a safe crossing is designed across the main A road, linking the proposed multi-use trail and West Down. Planning permission for the trail section had been approved by the Development Management Committee on 24 January.

Action: Forum Officer to send a letter to DCC.

6. Public questions

No public questions had been received.

7. DCAF member attendance at events/meetings

7.1 DCAF working group - Dawlish Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace

Sarah Slade, Chris Cole, Simon Clist, Gordon Guest and the Forum Officer had been on a very interesting site visit to the Dawlish SANGS, accompanied by ranger staff from Teignbridge District Council. It was impressive that the three district council areas had got together to form the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee and deliver SANGS sites. The new Country Park was very accessible.

The recommendations made in the letter to Teignbridge District Council were approved. A positive response had been received from the Senior Ranger outlining some changes that could be made to improve accessibility.

The DCAF noted that the purpose of a SANGS site is primarily to accommodate dog walkers and discourage dog walking on more sensitive and designated wildlife sites. Therefore, its suggestion of incorporating cycling routes was seen as difficult to achieve and likely to generate conflict.

The Chair thanked everyone who made comments.

7.2 DCAF working group - England Coast Path

A small working group had met and produced initial draft comments. The draft was agreed and would be sent to Natural England. It was noted that an easy access route parallel to the South West Coast Path at Selworthy Beacon, Somerset, had been provided on National Trust land.

Action: Gordon Guest agreed to provide photos to accompany the report. Forum Officer to submit response to Natural England.

8. Minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee held on 9 November 2017

Minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee were noted.

9. Public Rights of Way proposed budget reduction 2018-2019 - impact assessment.

Ros Mills, Public Rights of Way Manager, spoke about agenda paper 9; an impact scenario for a potential budget cut of £50,000 to the Public Rights of Way revenue budget. The revenue budget amounted currently to £627,000 to maintain just under 5000 km of public rights of way (including bridges); 560 km of uUCRs and 225 km of off-road cycle routes. In addition, allocations of funding were made to the National Parks; 25% match funding for the South West Coast Path; a contribution to East Devon District Council to maintain the coast path; and the P3 scheme. No reduction in the capital budget was proposed.

There were statutory duties involved in maintaining the public rights of way network and lack of maintenance could result in legal challenge. Community engagement through P3 is seen as very important and it was not proposed to reduce that commitment, a view supported by members.

Ros Mills suggested that a reduction in the maintenance of uUCRS could be one way of dealing with the budget cut but might not achieve the proposed amount. Otherwise there could be reductions across the board or for particular types of route or spend. Currently the spend per person (resident of Devon) on public rights of way maintenance in Devon is £0.93, amounting to £125/km. The positive economic impact of the PRoW network and access was significant, as evidenced from closures during foot and mouth. The fifty or so small contractors who do work on public rights of way were part of the wider economic effect.

Ros Mills confirmed there was no money from Public Health or Sustrans for maintenance, despite the evident health and well-being benefits of public rights of way. The Local Nature Partnership, of which Public Health is a member, had commissioned much useful work on the health benefits of access to countryside/green space. The South West Coast Path Association carried out successful fundraising to assist with capital schemes. A quarter of staff in Public Rights of Way were lost in 2012 but levels have been protected for the past few years.

Members expressed reservations about even cuts across the board as this could result in poor standards overall and increased complaints.

It was agreed it would be useful to ascertain the views of young people on this matter and suggested avenues were the Youth Parliament; British Trust for Conservation Volunteers; DoE and Ten Tors participants; and the National Citizenship Scheme. It was recognised there was a shift in how younger people use public rights of way and other trails with more organised and activity based use. There was a need to increase awareness and find out whether people do value PRoW. Use of social media and incorporation of information into the National Curriculum were also suggested.

It was noted that Parish Councils had the opportunity to put money on the precept and it was acknowledged that some already so do. Public rights of way could be considered part of their responsibility as custodians for the future.

Ros Mills asked members to use post-it notes to crystallise ideas. Members duly undertook this task and put forward a variety of proposals for consideration. These fell under several main themes:

- Reducing a particular budget heading, or budget for a type of route, would be preferable to cuts across the board;
- Route functionality and use should be identified to prioritise those routes in greater demand. PRoW mapping would assist in this task;
- There was the potential to increase partnerships with landowners, user groups, communities, parish/town councils and others to ensure continued maintenance, either through funding/sponsorship of work, employment of a dedicated 'warden' or use of volunteers;
- Signs and waymarking could be prioritised. (Signing and waymarking is a legal duty).
- Expert services of the Public Rights of Way team could possibly be sold to other authorities;
- Novel ways of fundraising should be explored, for example donation boxes, crowdfunding, card type payments etc.;
- Raising awareness of who provides and maintains paths.

Action: Ros Mills to consider the budget cut implications in the light of DCAF comments and report back at the next meeting.

10. Public Rights of Way update

Helen Clayton and Ros Mills, DCC, provided an update.

Wardens were particularly busy. In north Devon some rights of way had been affected by the recent extreme rainfall. Wardens were involved in the coastal mapping exercise. Training undertaken included CDM (construction design manual) and 4 x 4 vehicle use. Inspections were behind schedule.

Natural England had proposed a reduction in funding for the South West Coast Path for 2018/19 of 50%. It was noted that if additional DCC money is spent to bridge this funding gap on the SWCP this would have an impact elsewhere on the network. It was also noted that if no extra resource is put in then DCC would maintain the route to standard public rights of way criteria. Members expressed concern at the potential reduction in funding for a National Trail and resolved to send a letter to Natural England, the Secretary of State and MPs.

Action: Forum Officer to circulate draft letter to members.

The Definitive Map Review team is working on reports for the next Public Rights of Way Committee meeting on 15 March. A Public Inquiry would be held in Berryarbor on 10/11 April. DCC was neutral and had been directed to make an Order.

The Parish Paths Partnership events had been successful and provided opportunities for networking. Highway colleagues had attended. P3 parishes were currently submitting yearly returns.

DCC had agreed the next section of the Pegasus Trail could be constructed by the landowner.

Section 31(6) deposits were being scanned by a DCC apprentice and will go on the interactive map. Section 31(6) records were now a standard search enquiry for conveyancing and this work will improve the on-line information.

The Public Rights of Way section continued to be involved in many planning applications.

The Chair thanked the Public Rights of Way staff for their hard work.

11. To note and approve responses to consultations

11.1 Cranbrook Development Plan: Preferred approach. East Devon District Council.

The response was noted and approved.

11.2 Sidmouth - Alma Bridge replacement. Devon County Council.

The letter was noted and approved.

12. Current consultations

12.1 Dog walking code, Exe Estuary Partnership

A consultation on the draft Dog Walking Code for the Exe Estuary had been launched. Following discussion, several points emerged to be included in the response.

- There seemed to be a fair balance between areas where dogs were excluded and other areas. Wardens were frequently out on site at Dawlish Warden to explain restrictions.
- The map was useful to plan a walk.
- Some people continued to ignore beach restrictions.
- Some concern was expressed about the design of the leaflet and suitability for people with visual impairment/colour blindness.

- The Environment Agency should be added to the organisations to contact in the event of pollution.
- To ensure conformity with national guidance it would be preferable if the section on 'Walkies' referred to effective rather than close control.
- It would be useful to include the statement from the national guidance about not approaching people, cyclists etc. uninvited.
- Devon and Cornwall police website had a section on how to be safe around dogs.
- 'Want to know more' could be smaller with 'Walkies' a more prominent section.
- Regular worming of dogs should be added.

Action: Members were asked to provide any further comments and the Forum Officer would circulate a draft response.

13. Invitations to meetings

13.1 Exe Estuary Partnership Winter Forum - 6 February 2018

No-one present at the meeting offered to attend. The invitation would be sent to members who had given apologies.

Action: Forum Officer.

13.2 Understanding the Health and Wellbeing Value of the Pebblebed Heaths - 28 February 2018

Sarah Slade and Gordon Guest agreed to attend. A further place was available.

Action: Members to advise Forum Officer if they wished to attend.

13.3 Devon Local Nature Partnership - 16 March 2018

Maggie Watson expressed interest in attending and details would be forwarded.

Action: Forum Officer.

14. Dates and venues for meetings 2018/19

Meeting dates for 2018/19 were agreed as Thursday, 25 April; Thursday, 11 October and Thursday, 24 January. Due to parking difficulties at County Hall, other venues would be explored.

A Training Day would be held in the week commencing 18 June, on the theme of health and well-being.

15. Any other business

1. *Rights of Way*

A book had been received from Natural England entitled 'Rights of Way – Restoring the Record', 2nd edition, by Sarah Bucks and Phil Wadey. A letter from Pippa Langford, (Principal Specialist (Commons and Public Rights of Way), Natural England), encouraged local access forums to share their work on the Definitive Map process on Huddle, the local access forum national website. She thanked members of LAFs for the time they give. The book is available to borrow from the Forum Officer.

DCC is in the process of completing its Definitive Map Review on a parish by parish basis and is in a reasonable position to meet the 2026 deadline.

2. *Environment Plan*

The Twenty-Five Year Environment Plan had been published by Defra. It included a brief mention of recreational access and public rights of way. It included new ways in which people use access, the importance of encouraging young people to connect to the environment, and mental health and well-being.

3. *British Standard for Gaps, Gates and Stiles*

The revised version of the British Standard was awaited following submission of comments and additional work by the expert committee. This will apply to all new gaps, gates and stiles and enable the Equality Act to be taken into account.

4. *Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS)*

Simon Clist raised concern about maintenance of SANGS after the initial funding period. Continued funding to ensure sustainability was important. This was primarily a remit for the district rather than County Council. Gordon Guest confirmed there was an ongoing discussion in Cullompton about the funding for green infrastructure associated with 8000 new homes.

Funds needed to be provided in perpetuity to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and, whilst there was recognition of this in some parts of the construction industry, it was not so across the whole industry.

Helen Clayton, DCC, said a lot of development schemes do not specify routes dedicated as public rights of way. Often recreational access proposals are area based. If public rights of way are involved, DCC would ask for a commuted sum for future maintenance.

It was noted all aspects should be agreed at an early stage, at Outline Planning Permission, and this could control the future management. Development offered more Council Tax for authorities. Ways of securing local funding, possibly through the Parish Council precept, were raised.

This would be an agenda item or presentation at a future meeting.

5. *Recreational access improvements*

Sean Comber, Trail Riders' Fellowship, raised the importance of improvement

work being carried out on public rights of way and unsurfaced unclassified county roads by voluntary groups, such as the Trail Riders' Fellowship, working with DCC. Funding from the organisation and working with communities, landowners and DCC staff gave the opportunity to help with budget cuts and deliver projects. It was noted many people have useful skills and some people involved with P3 had health and safety accreditation.

Ros Mills, DCC, confirmed that P3 volunteers inspected against set criteria designed for the scheme.

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