



Devon Countryside Access Forum
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Minutes of the Fifty-Fifth meeting
of the Devon Countryside Access Forum
held at The Wiltshier Room, Broadclyst Victory Hall, Broadclyst, Exeter EX5 3DX
Thursday, 23 January 2020

Attendance

Forum members

Andrew Baker
Sean Comber
Tim Felton
Gordon Guest
Jo Hooper
Charlie Lloyd

Sue Pudduck
Tino Savvas
Sarah Slade (Chair)
Bryan Smith
Maggie Watson

Devon County Council Officers and others present

Helen Clayton, Senior Officer, Public Rights of Way, DCC
George Coles, member of the public
Ros Mills, Manager, Public Rights of Way, DCC
Hilary Winter, Forum Officer, DCC

1. Apologies

The Chair paid tribute to John Daw, an upstanding and respected member of the community and member of the Devon Countryside Access Forum. A minute's silence was held.

Apologies were received from Chris Cole, Cllr Tony Inch and Cllr Philip Sanders.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2019

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September were approved and signed.

4. Matters arising

4.1 Fly-tipping conference, Chartered Institute of Waste Management

Sean Comber reported that the conference had been postponed.

4.2 Stover Country Park. Letter sent in support of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

The letter sent in support of the bid was noted. The outcome would be known in March.

5. Public questions

No public questions had been received. An email about coastal access from a member of the public would be considered during the Forum's deliberations on this matter.

6. Correspondence log

The log was noted. The Chair drew attention to the importance of the Forum's position statements in responding to consultations without undue burden on members.

7. Meetings attended by DCAF members

7.1 Exe Estuary Partnership, DCC and Devon Countryside Access Forum working group

It had not been possible to arrange a further meeting of the working group during the autumn and it was hoped to hold the next meeting in March 2020.

Jo Hooper had emailed Exeter City Council and had received confirmation that the toilet close to the Turf Locks was only available to the boating community. Conversations with pubs might be helpful in securing disabled access. It was agreed to put this matter on the agenda for the working group as the Exe Estuary Partnership might be able to assist in promoting the message about disabled facilities.

Action: Ros Mills, DCC.

It was agreed that the trail statement, once agreed, would give more weight to any discussions with the service sector. The Devon Countryside Access Forum's remit was to give advice to specified organisations.

7.2 Active Devon Conference

Tim Felton and Sue Pudduck had attended the Active Devon conference and were thanked for their report. They reported that it had been very well-

organised and motivational. The new initiatives were exciting and were about getting people out and confident to use the outdoors and not just about elite sport. It was suggested that Active Devon could give a presentation at a future meeting. Tino Savvas said he was involved in a Connecting Actively to Nature (CAN) project in Torquay which had a turnout of thirty-nine in poor weather for the first event. It was noted Forestry England and running and cycling organisations were recognising the benefits to health of organised events.

7.3 Marsh Barton railway station

Tim Felton, Gordon Guest, Jo Hooper and Maggie Watson had been on a site visit to look at initial plans for the proposed Marsh Barton Railway Station. The scheme included a new bridge over the railway line, adjacent to the existing bridge, for walkers and cyclists. This now featured slightly steeper but shorter ramps than previously recommended by Network Rail. The proposed gradients are within recommended accessibility standards for Devon County Council footbridges and would offer a more favourable gradient than the existing hump back bridge, used by motorised traffic, along Clapperbrook Lane. A formal planning application would be made by Devon County Council later in the year.

The working group agreed that the principle is good and would in itself offer improvements to recreational and functional access. Officers accompanying the working group had explained the different responsibilities of train operators and Network Rail.

It was agreed the proposed bridge gradient was acceptable provided there are sufficient resting platforms of an appropriate length and suitable non-slip surfacing on the ramps.

There was concern about the existing and potentially much higher use of the car park at the end of Clapperbrook Lane due to the narrow road and numbers of recreational access users, commuters and rail station users. The proposals included disabled parking only.

The plans for the station and provision of information points and shelters were good, provided the latter were available for disabled users.

It was agreed space for cycles on trains was a problem, together with accessibility of some stations further down the line for cyclists and disabled users. These matters fall within the responsibility of the train operator. The Exe Estuary was currently a major destination and people may come up by train to cycle down the estuary.

Devon County Council expect the station to be a 'destination station' which would lessen car parking problems in Marsh Barton and encourage sustainable travel. Proposed new jobs and housing, together with increased recreational use, might mean this was not the case and additional parking was recommended.

The draft response presented by the working group was agreed. A few amendments were suggested and the response would include the following:-

1. Pedestrian access is an important and integral part of the scheme.
2. The crossing of the canal is difficult and dangerous in the summer and it is recommended that the scheme is extended across the canal.
3. The scheme should be future-proofed. Parking and other access improvements in and around the station could be secured through use of s106, raised from future developments.
4. Members raised some concerns about chicanes. Instances were cited of the removal of chicanes between Digby Station towards Exeter Chiefs' ground.

Even if some cyclists continued to use the road section, some vulnerable users would be taken off the road.

Action: Forum Officer to circulate draft to members.

8. Draft recreational trail proposals

A discussion took place on the draft document developed following the last meeting. Changes to the draft text and order were made for clarification and impact. It was agreed to include electric scooters in the section about electric bikes and power assisted mobility vehicles.

It was agreed that 'share with care' conveyed a stronger message than 'share this space' and other suitable short messages such as 'respect other users', 'give space' and 'pass with care' had potential to encourage safe use of trails. It was important to intersperse messages. It was thought subliminal positive images, such as a smiling face, might be effective.

It was agreed to mention accessibility and include the Disability Position Statement.

Action: Forum Officer to circulate a re-worded draft.

Bryan Smith had recently cycled on the newly opened Wray Trail and said it was a wonderful asset.

9. Minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee held on 12 November 2019

Minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee held on 12 November were noted. A policy change to the Definitive Map Review had been agreed which changed the end date of the parish reviews from 1 January 2020 to 1 January 2025.

10. Public Rights of Way update

Ros Mills reported that the Public Rights of Way team would be moving to Great Moor House, Sowton, due to refurbishment of Lucombe House at County Hall.

Some capital money was being spent on improvements to the surface of the Exe Estuary Trail between Bridge Road and Turf Locks. Signs, press releases and social media would be used to inform the public of the five-day closure.

A new form had been developed to enable landowners to apply for consent to change/improve the surface of public rights of way and state what work they plan to do at their own expense. This will enable surface suitability to be checked and record future maintenance responsibilities and requirements.

An App was being developed to log the asset inventory on each public right of way and would be rolled out in the summer 2020 using ARC GIS. Wardens would need to carry out this work as part of their regular inspection programme. It may mean an additional year is added to the current three-year inspection programme policy.

The legal records associated with recreational trails are complex and include information on ownership, restrictions and covenants. A conclusive map of these is being gradually put onto the GIS system and will assist management and maintenance.

Marta Gawron was introduced as the new Public Rights of Way Assistant Officer. Part of her duties will include dealing with some chargeable public rights of way work and a business case was made for the post. The Legal team at the County Council previously undertook aspects of this Public Path Order work.

Helen Clayton reported that the next Public Rights of Way Committee would be on 5 March. There were delays in the Planning Inspectorate, mainly due to the demands of coastal access inquiries. Dates over an eleven-month period, rather than its target six months, are currently being sought by the Inspectorate to hold local PRoW Public Inquiries.

The Public Rights of Way team would be bidding into some additional highway money that had been allocated for drainage.

11. Presentation by Jane Beech and Richard Andrews, Coastal Access team, Natural England.

Richard Andrews and Jane Beech, Natural England, presented details from the Combe Martin to Marsland Mouth and Cremyll to Kingswear reports for the England Coast Path, currently out for consultation. The presentations focussed on proposals for estuaries, significant realignments and exclusions/restrictions. Much of the coast falls under designations such as Special Areas of Conservation, Marine Coastal Zones, Scheduled Monuments, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Heritage Coast, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Biosphere Reserve.

The England Coast Path will differ from the South West Coast Path in providing coastal margin land; land between the trail and the mean low margin which the public can use at their own risk.

Each stretch had now been divided into individual reports allowing work to commence on a report length if no objections had been received. Any objections

received by the Secretary of State will have to be determined before work on that report route can start.

Earlier discussions and consultations with the South West Coast Path Association, Devon County Council, the Ramblers, the Disabled Ramblers, the Devon Countryside Access Forum and others had informed the published reports.

With estuaries, Natural England had discretion to stop at the estuarine limit or at the first pedestrian crossing point.

Combe Martin to Marsland Mouth

Richard Andrew explained that, in summary, this included one estuary; one direction to exclude access; one direction to restrict access; sixteen realignments from the current South West Coast Path route and 1.4km taken off-road (3.6km if the road section of the 'American Road' is included).

For the Taw and Torridge estuary it was proposed to align the route to the first pedestrian crossings, the Taw Bridge (Barnstaple) and Bideford Long Bridge, using the existing SWCP/ Tarka Trail. This would provide a continuous route around the estuary.

Realignments were proposed for:

- a) Chesil Cliff, Croyde, to take 80m of path off road.
- b) Braunton Burrows and Horsey Island, to take approximately 500m off-road at Saunton. The trail will be aligned seaward, taking the trail off 5.3 km of the 'inland' American road and path. The existing public right of way along the American road would still be available. At Horsey Island, discussions had taken place with the Devon County Council archaeological team about stone stiles. Some would be removed to improve access. Where these were listed, a suitable gate would be erected alongside to British Standard 5709: Gaps, gates and stiles (2018).
- c) Scheduled monuments at Gallantry Bower and Embury Beacon. The proposal is to align the trail to protect scheduled monuments and provide information boards to advise walkers of the site sensitivity. A question was asked about whether public rights of way would be realigned but currently these would remain as on the Definitive Map.
- d) East-the-Water. Aligning the trail on nearby pavements will take the trail out of the railway cutting and avoid steps and a road crossing.
- e) Dyer's Lookout. The current route is badly eroded and the proposal is to align the trail inland of the current SWCP route.
- f) Watertown, Appledore. Aligning the trail on the edge of the field and foreshore will avoid the current low tide (foreshore) and high tide (road) route. The route would protect high tide roosts.

A couple of directions were proposed to deal with high tide roosts, issues with dogs and nesting birds, and safety concerns around the mud flats and salt marshes.

A section 25A direction to exclude people from salt marsh and flats was proposed. This would not stop people with existing historic rights having access. This included a RSPB reserve.

A section 26(3)(a) long term dog restriction for Home Farm Marsh, run by the Gaia Trust, was proposed. Notices would be erected in key places. Home Farm was accessible for mobility scooters.

It was confirmed that monitoring of restrictions would take place by the Gaia Trust at Home Farm and by the Tav/Torridge Estuary Partnership and the RSPB on the estuary. Natural England had funded work on high tide roosts.

A large development was planned at Yelland Quay and Natural England will be consulted on nature conservation and the coastal path.

It was confirmed that there would be signs for both the SWCP and England Coast Path. The importance of continued signing into towns was raised as vital for the economy.

The Treasury would be funding the England Coast Path. Advantage had been taken of Rural Development Programme for England funding from the European Union whilst this had been available.

As part of the coastal path, an additional 1km stretch of route at Westward Ho! would be improved to allow access by mobility scooters.

Cremyll to Kingswear

Jane Beech outlined the position on the Cremyll to Kingswear stretch. The Plymouth area was included in the reports but was outside the Devon Countryside Access Forum area.

Seven estuaries were included, including the Tamar and Plym in the Plymouth area, plus five exclusions and ten realignments from the SWCP totalling 32 km (including) and 3km (excluding) alternative and temporary routes.

Proposals for the estuaries were as follows:

River Yealm

Option 3, aligning the route to follow the existing SWCP via a seasonal ferry, had been proposed. This would have an alternative route when the ferry was not running, using existing highways, public rights of way and an existing permissive route to extend to the first pedestrian crossing point.

Other options considered were; option 1, aligning the trail around the estuary to the first pedestrian crossing points at Wapplewell, Brixton and Yealmpton and, option 2, aligning the route to follow the existing SWCP route via the seasonal ferry. Option 1 would add 22.5 km to the path as gardens and historic parkland were excepted land. The alternatives were also constrained due to the convoluted nature of the estuary and limited views in dense woodland. The benefits of the other options would not justify substantial additional cost.

It was noted that the former route of the old railway line had not been included as an aspiration/option. Natural England said it would have been hugely costly to replace the bridge.

River Erme

There were two options and option one had been selected. Option one would align to the existing SWCP across the estuary by fording at low tide between the two slipways at Mothecombe and Wonwell. It was acknowledged that this was only available for an hour either side of low tide and some users would not feel able to cross. Although there was an old footbridge farther up the estuary, the adjacent land was very marshy.

Option 1, along the estuary to the first crossing point on the A379 at Sequer's Bridge, had been considered. This route would have to avoid historic parkland (excepted land) and other challenges such as topography and land use of the estuary margins; nature conservation and land management interests; and pedestrian use of the A379.

River Avon

There were four options and option four had been proposed. This followed the existing SWCP route via an improved full-time ferry service between Cockleridge Ham and Bantham. Natural England would review the trail alignment and prepare a variation report if the ferry became less suitable. An alternative route, along the Avon Valley Walk, would be available when the ferry is not in service.

The other options considered were option 1, an estuary trail to the first crossing point at Aveton Gifford using the Avon Valley Walk. This would be away from the estuary with significant coastal margin. Option 2 would create a new estuary trail to Aveton Gifford. Option 3 was as option 4 but without the alternative route.

Kingsbridge Estuary

There were two options and option one, the existing SWCP route, had been proposed as there was a regular year-round ferry taking walkers between Salcombe and East Portlemouth. Option 2 would take walkers inland to the pedestrian crossing at Kingsbridge but the length of the estuary with all its inlets, 39 km, would make a waterside route challenging and expensive. There was also excepted land along the shoreline.

River Dart

Of the two options, option one following the existing SWCP route was proposed. The regular year-round ferry takes walkers between Dartmouth and Kingswear. Again, a waterside route was seen as inordinately expensive as option 2, to the crossing point at Totnes, would add 46 km and there was excepted land along the shoreline.

A number of key realignments within the Devon County Council highway authority area were suggested in the reports.

1. Mothecombe Beach. The current route is cut-off at high tide and for two hours either side. The proposal is to align the route along the seawall and

include new steps. The possibility of a ramp was raised but Natural England said this was not possible and it was noted that the onward route was challenging.

2. Hallsands and Beesands. The SWCP route had been affected by erosion of the road following storms. The new coastal path route would follow the reinstated road, with potential to move back. At Beesands a route had been negotiated through the corner of a field.
3. Torcross. The SWCP was closed in 2018 due to storm damage and a temporary closure was in place. The diversion is currently along a narrow road and includes steps. The plan is to repair and build a new stone wall to allow reinstatement of the path along its original route.
4. Slapton Ley. Again, the route of the SWCP was affected by storms in March 2018. Natural England worked with the County Council and stakeholders to reinstate the path to the landward side of the new section of the A379. This path would be a more sustainable route should there be further erosion of the shingle ridge and road.
5. Strete. Consideration was given to aligning the trail to the seaward side of the A379 and Strete. However, buildings and gardens are adjacent to the cliff and there is strong community support for the route to continue through the village. There have been recent improvements to trail infrastructure and a reduction in village speed limits.
6. Stoke Fleming. Discussions with landowners have not enabled a route adjacent to the coastline to be proposed due to areas of excepted land (buildings, gardens and curtilage). The owners did not wish to voluntarily dedicate a route. The option is for a trail following a new seaward alignment between Church Road, in the centre of Stoke Fleming, and Redlap Lane west of Warren Point, via the public footpath and fields along Shady Lane.

A few restrictions have been applied, some to conform to other relevant legislation.

- Carswell Estate. A year-round total exclusion due to game birds and shooting is proposed.
- Mothecombe Beach. A seasonal dog ban would be put in place.
- Burgh Island. A total year-round exclusion is proposed due to land management and commercial activity.
- Blackpool Sands. A dog ban would be put in place.

Natural England was asked whether there was scope to subsidise ferries and the reply was that there may be incentives to bolster ferries. Natural England allocates money for the maintenance of the SWCP, which includes 100% of the costs to subsidise the ferries and 75% towards trail maintenance. One ferry had been changed to reflect land management interests. Natural England suggested that improvements could be included in representations made by the DCAF.

Gordon Guest had been asked to look at accessible sections by the Disabled Ramblers.

A working group was proposed to consider a response and Sue Pudduck, Tino Savvas, Gordon Guest, Bryan Smith, and Sarah Slade expressed interest.

Action: Forum Officer to circulate potential dates to all members.

There was an eight-week period to make representations. Landowners could make objections. Representations will be compiled into a written report on which the Minister would make decisions. The Planning Inspectorate would deal with objections before presenting a report to the Minister. After final decisions had been made, Natural England would work with the local authority to open the stretches of England Coast Path.

12. To note and approve responses to consultation and any feedback.

12.1 Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site Partnership Plan

The response was noted and approved. A report should be published in February and a final plan adopted in April 2020.

12.2 Fire Beacon Hill

The response was noted and approved. The RSPB would be publishing a report shortly.

12.3 Pebblebed Heaths Visitor Management Plan

The response was noted and approved. The consultation report and recommendations had been published and these were being taken to the South and East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee on 28 January.

12.4 Cranbrook Local Plan Examination

The response was noted and approved.

13. Current consultations

13.1 Mid Devon Local Plan Review – Proposed Main Modifications Consultation

It was resolved to write in support of the main modifications outlined in the agenda paper which were in line with previous Forum comments.

Action: Forum Officer

13.2 Network Rail. Public consultation on revised plans to protect vital rail line between Teignmouth and Dawlish.

Bryan Smith had attended one of the consultation events. Proposals included a new trail and opportunities to link with the National Cycle Network. It appeared the existing public right of way would remain a

footpath. Jo Hooper mentioned there were objections to the beach access plans.

Details of the remaining consultation events would be circulated. It was agreed to hold a working group to examine the implications for access. Jo Hooper and Bryan Smith expressed interest.

Action: Forum Officer

14. Any other business

14.1 Devon Local Nature Partnership Conference - 20 March 2020.

The Devon LNP conference details would be circulated when available and consideration given to attendance, depending on the topics being covered.

Action: Forum Officer

14.2 Devon Countryside Access Forum membership

The Forum Officer had circulated details of Forum membership to a range of bodies and organisations and was publicising it through the press and social media. The closing date was 21 February.

The Chair thanked Chris Cole, Sean Comber, Jo Hooper and Maggie Watson for their valuable input and support over the past three years. Maggie Watson had decided not to apply for a further term and was thanked for her inspirational and thought-provoking contribution.

15. Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be on 23 April, venue to be advised.