



**Devon Countryside Access Forum**  
**c/o Public Rights of Way team**  
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Minutes of the Fifty-Ninth meeting  
of the Devon Countryside Access Forum  
held virtually on  
Tuesday, 21 September 2021

**Attendance**

*Forum members*

Andrew Baker  
Joanna Burgess  
Chris Cole (Vice-Chair)  
Tim Felton  
Lucinda Francis

Gordon Guest  
Sue Pudduck  
Tino Savvas  
Sarah Slade (Chair)  
Cllr Linda Hellyer

*Devon County Council Officers and others present*

Richard Walton, Public Rights of Way Manager, DCC  
Hilary Winter, Forum Officer, DCC

**1. Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Cllr Richard Chesterton, Jo Hooper, Sue Leith, Lorna Sherriff and Bryan Smith.

The Chair noted the appointment of new councillors, Cllr Linda Hellyer and Cllr Richard Chesterton, to the Devon Countryside Access Forum. Cllr Linda Hellyer and Richard Walton, the newly appointed Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, were welcomed to the meeting. Lorna Sherriff had been appointed as the South West Coast Path National Trail Officer and the Forum was pleased she was able to continue as a member.

**2. Declaration of interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Minutes of the Fifty-Eighth meeting held on 27 April 2021**

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2021 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed at a later date.

## **4. Matters arising**

### **4.1 Teign Estuary Trail**

A decision on the planning application was expected in October following discussions with the Environment Agency and Network Rail. The outcome would be reported at the next meeting. Jo Burgess offered to speak to the Planning Officer if required.

### **4.2 Lower Otter Restoration project**

The footpath to the west had been closed on 1 September for eight weeks. Vegetation and creek creation work would commence shortly. There was no parking in South Farm Road and at Whitebridge and this would continue until spring 2023 when a new car park is built off South Farm Road.

The project start had been delayed so that scrub management was not being carried out during bird nesting season. It was not thought this would delay the overall timeframe due to deadlines associated with funding streams. It was noted car parking is at a premium.

Richard Walton, DCC, was liaising with legal services, DCC, about agreements related to diversions, extinguishments, road alignment and maintenance responsibilities. The Public Rights of Way team had a statutory and advisory role, with the Environment Agency currently leading on temporary path closures through its powers. Path diversions would use Town and Country Planning Act legislation and so be coordinated by East Devon District Council. He thought the scheme was generally better accepted as there was now increased understanding about the wider objectives. Access was seen as very important. Inevitably there would be frustration around the construction phase and some people unhappy about the project.

The need to achieve improvements by installing accessible gates, particularly to the north of Whitebridge, was raised.

### **4.3 Clyst Valley Regional Park Masterplan**

The Masterplan had been approved by East Devon District Council's Strategic Planning Committee on 27 April. Simon Bates, project officer, was working with the local Ramblers' on both the 'Don't Lose Your Way' initiative and also upgrades/possible diversions in relation to the proposed Clyst Valley Trail. Work on scoping a bid to the Lottery had been started which will have a major emphasis on routeways, including the establishment of quiet ways.

Gordon Guest, also a Cullompton Town Councillor, expressed concern that there were no additional links from the Clyst Valley trail project up to the planned Garden Village near Cullompton, only a mile from Ashclyst Forest.

Richard Walton, DCC, had been involved in discussions with the Planning Policy Transport Team and can feed in items to those conversations.

It was resolved to consider wider trail links at the January meeting as part of the strategic role of the Forum.

*Action: Forum Officer*

#### **4.4 Exe Estuary Trail accessibility**

Gordon Guest and the Wheelchair Access Group had been out on site with Kirstie Pritchard, DCC, to look at accessible routes along and around the Exe Estuary Trail which could be promoted. Information would be on the website in due course. The lack of wheelchair accessible toilets remained an issue.

#### **4.5 Countryside Code refresh**

A summer campaign targeted at families and 16-24 year olds had been launched using interactive paid-for social media adverts. A promotional film had been released, with a short version on social media. The Code had been translated into other languages and the Code launch evaluated. Advice for land managers was being reviewed and refreshed, with a launch later in September. The Behavioural Insights Team had been commissioned to deliver a piece of research investigating how behavioural insights could be applied to improve messaging around the refreshed Countryside Code, with a focus on avoiding litter, fire safety and keeping to the path.

### **5. Meetings attended by DCAF members**

#### **5.1 East Devon Pebblebed Heaths, launch of National Nature Reserve**

Sarah Slade, Chair, and Chris Cole, Vice Chair, had attended the online launch of the Pebblebed Heaths National Nature Reserve. A Management Plan was being prepared.

#### **5.2 Training Day, Exeter**

Members had enjoyed the Training Day held around Ludwell Valley Park, Northbrook Park and Riverside Valley Park in Exeter. Members had been accompanied by staff from the Devon Wildlife Trust, Exeter City Council and Devon County Council. Members welcomed the opportunity to meet out on site and many had been unaware of the extent of Exeter's green areas and the extensive nature of the paths.

It was confirmed that the Wheelchair Access Group had not experienced problems crossing the Topsham Road. A long-term aspiration of the Devon Wildlife Trust was a bridge crossing.

It was noted that Devon Wildlife Trust was no longer involved with Seaton Jurassic. Whilst this was likely to have been a commercial decision due to the impact of CoVID-19, there was concern this might impact on funding for other projects, such as Ludwell Valley Park. It was agreed to follow this up.

*Action: Forum Officer*

### **5.3 Restoring Stover Park project event**

The Chair and Vice Chair had attended an interesting Restoring Stover Park event. The project sought to improve accessible areas and links to wildlife and heritage. A notable proportion of the bid is focussed on restoring the stables, in the curtilage of Stover School, with limited public access. Comment was made that additional consideration around greater public access to the stables was important.

Richard Walton, DCC, confirmed the project included land purchase which will enable a longer trail with additional permissive access, alleviating pressure around the wildlife sensitive lake area. Open days for the subterranean stables would be a requirement of funding. As the bid would be to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), heritage and landscape value are key criteria. The link with the school was being strengthened. Work was being done on drawing in match funding, for example from Highways England, with regard to de-silting the lake, and Devon County Council's Capital Programme. A review meeting would take place with the NLHF in January to include appraisal of the project proposals and critical assessment of design and costings. Subject to the results of this review, the bid submission would be in May 2022.

It was agreed the project was worthy of support and a letter would be submitted, when appropriate.

## **6. Correspondence Log**

A number of items were raised.

### *Item 1*

It was noted there were no current plans to infill or demolish bridge structures in Devon. It was agreed that the Forum Officer should write to the Historic Railways Estate to request that the Forum is informed should the situation change.

*Action: Forum Officer*

### *Item 25*

The feedback from the Neighbourhood Plan Officer at Broadclyst Parish Council was noted.

### *Item 26*

Attention was drawn to the DCAF response to the Soil Association on Forestry

England's management of its forests. FE was complimented on its recreational access provision. The need to remove any remaining barriers to disability access was raised and information requested on proposals to introduce event zones in forest areas.

*Item 28*

It was noted that questions were arising concerning the 'Don't Lose your Way' project and the 2026 cut-off date. Richard Walton and Caroline Gatrell from the Public Rights of Way team had attended a Ramblers' area meeting. A presentation had been given on the 'Don't Lose Your Way' project by the Ramblers' project officer. The Public Rights of Way team was assisting with advice from parish reviews and in filtering projects to enable focus on the paths with the strongest chance of proceeding.

A request was made as to whether local contact details for the DLYW project could be shared. Richard Walton would check and if feasible supply these.

*Action: Richard Walton, DCC*

**7. Public questions**

There were no public questions.

**8. Minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee meeting held on 1 July 2021**

The Minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee meeting were noted. This had been a short meeting, chaired by Cllr Linda Hellyer for the first time.

**9. Public Rights of Way update**

Richard Walton, Public Rights of Way and Country Parks Manager, had provided an agenda paper and discussed further aspects of his role in the County. He explained that he had been involved with Local Access Forums in his previous roles with Cornwall Council, the New Forest National Park and Bracknell Forest Council and there was much synergy in relation to topics and issues. LAF recommendations were important in steering wider work.

Richard expanded on the 'Don't Lose Your Way' project explaining that the Ramblers' and British Horse Society were working hard on this and involving interested people. The Public Rights of Way team was liaising carefully to inform the process and ensure the highest quality proposals were put forward with the right evidence base to ease future workload. The Devon parish by parish review was recognised as a strong approach and the Ramblers' had been advised to focus on parishes where the review was currently taking place or not yet happened. Appropriate information could be shared on parishes where the review had been completed.

Further information was given on the England Coast Path process:

- Work was continuing with Natural England and landowners to finalise the designation process.

- Exmoor National Park would lead on establishment works and grant bids on the Minehead to Combe Martin stretch.
- On the Combe Martin to Marsland Mouth stretch most recommendations had been approved. A decision following the Planning Inspector's visit was awaited. In the interim, additional discussion with landowners between Croyde and Velator had taken place which may lead to a better outcome.
- The Cremyll to Kingswear stretch was largely approved except reports on Cremyll to Batten Point, Mothecombe Beach to the Avon Estuary and Torcross to Kingswear. A visit by the Planning Inspector should be complete by the end of the year.
- Grant bids should be submitted for projects next month. These included:
  - Cliff stabilisation and reinstatement of the path at Torcross. The Marine Management Organisation had given approval. A bid of £123,000 (100%) would be submitted to the Establishment Fund.
  - Reinstatement of the concrete causeway from Croyde to Downend following approval for works on a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
  - Signage works costing an estimated £20,000 on the Kingswear to Lyme Regis stretch.
- Between Appledore and Westward Ho! discussions were taking place with Torrington District Council and Natural England to move the England Coast Path off-road along a proposed new coastal embankment, part of flood prevention work.
- Path improvements at Mothecombe Beach are proposed but this stretch had not yet been approved by the Secretary of State.

Richard Walton confirmed that the £20,000 for signs on the Kingswear to Lyme Regis section would be a combination of new signs/directional signs and adapting existing signs. Liaison would take place with the South West Coast Path Association. The SWCP would remain the primary branding.

The Definitive Map team was making sure it is prepared for the 2026 deadline for registering unrecorded rights based on historical evidence, but the Secretary of State had powers to extend this date.

The parish review had been impacted by COVID-19 as face-to-face meetings were deferred. Meetings were now taking place with appropriate safeguards. Agenda items were being prepared for the Public Rights of Way meeting in November.

Work was taking place with the Road Safety team and the British Horse Society to promote the Dead Slow campaign. The DCAF's support was sought in terms of being named as part of the messaging and promotion. It was noted this fitted with the new hierarchy in the Highway Code.

It was agreed to support the Dead Slow campaign. Concern was noted about other vulnerable users such as cyclists and mobility scooter users, the latter not included in the Highway Code. It was suggested a statement on consideration could be added to some of the DCAF position statements. The Chair moved that this matter be added to the next meeting agenda.

*Action: Forum Officer*

Dartmoor National Park had sought agreement from the Public Rights of Way team on an A38 corridor consultation on access opportunities, including unsurfaced, Unclassified County Roads, extending beyond the park boundary. Mapping had been provided. The timescale for the consultation was not known. Scope for DCAF involvement would be considered in due course.

Richard Walton confirmed that August, combined with coronavirus, had not been a good time for recruitment across the board in DCC. The Senior Officer post in Public Rights of Way would be readvertised following scrutiny of the job description and positivity around the role. As requested, details of the post would be forwarded to DCAF members. Recruitment would also be carried out to replace the vacant PRoW Assistant Officer post.

*Action: Richard Walton, DCC*

One matter arising from the minutes, not on the agenda, was a question about whether ACDC could be used by P3 and other groups using volunteers. Richard Walton undertook to look into this. (ProW contractors were asked to register with ACDC to ensure health and safety and insurance matters were managed properly).

*Action: Richard Walton, DCC*

With regard to signage, an appropriate balance between information and landscape was raised as an important consideration.

## **10. Presentation by Chris Woodruff, Manager, East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

A welcome was given to Chris Woodruff, Manager of East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Chair of the Advisory Board of the Pebblebed Heaths National Nature Reserve.

The main themes of the Glover Review 2019 were outlined. These shone a good light on the AONBs and potential opportunities. The Review listed twenty-seven proposals, some related to access and improving people's connection with the landscape. There were five main themes.

- Landscapes alive for nature and beauty
- Landscapes for everyone
- Living in landscapes
- More special places
- New ways of working

The Ministerial Statement on the Glover Review mentioned designating four new AONBs:

1. A new Yorkshire Wolds AONB
2. A new Cheshire Sandstone Ridge AONB
3. An extension to the Surrey Hills AONB (where initial work had already begun)

4. An extension to the Chilterns AONB, alongside consideration of the potential for strengthened management and governance arrangements.

Should these areas meet the designation criteria, they would contribute substantially towards Government's ambitious pledge to protect and improve 30% of our land for nature by 2030, delivering over 40% of the additional 4000 square km required.

The Review focussed on complementing protection alongside new approaches to driving nature recovery and people's access to nature, especially in environmentally deprived areas in and around cities.

Defra was currently undertaking research into children and young people's engagement with the natural environment through a series of scoping exercises and case studies covering ethnic minorities, disability, schools, partnerships, long term engagement, under-represented children and rural children.

The National Association of AONBs was carrying out a lot of work and was vocal about the need to retain the local dimension, even if there are benefits arising from a proposed centralised National Landscape Service structure. Increased liaison was taking place with National Parks and this had been positive with sharing of different approaches.

Funding was being explored through increased private investment, particularly by diversifying funding sources to include emerging markets in natural capital and other commercial opportunities.

One suggestion was that the AONBs should change their name and be called National Landscapes and the Chilterns had already adopted this. It would be more than a branding exercise and full recommendations and a consultation were expected shortly.

Glover Proposal 5 states there would be "A central place for national landscapes in new Environmental Land Management Schemes." The government had agreed to do more to support public access and the new Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme would provide additional investment to allow farmers and other land managers to work in partnership with National Park Authorities and AONB teams "to improve public access, and deliver bigger and better outcomes for the environment, for people and for places."

Many AONBs had no direct experience of working with farmers so this constituted a big step change.

Over the three-year programme there was over £50m to support the Agricultural Transition Programme. Projects would need to:

1. Support *nature* recovery
2. Mitigate the impacts of *climate* change
3. Provide opportunities for *people* to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage
4. Support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses (*place*), and deliver National Park/AONB Management Plan objectives.



The programme will be delivered in house by AONBs/NP staff with Local Assessment Panels. In Devon a minimum grant of £1,000 - £2,000 had been set locally, up to a maximum of £250,000. Local Assessment Panels would meet on an eight-week cycle to determine applications. The current application window was from 1 July 2021 - 30 January 2022, with a subsequent window from April 2022 to January 2023.

There were five AONBs in Devon (Blackdown Hills, East Devon, North Devon, South Devon and Tamar Valley). Budget pots for the scheme ranged from £115,000 to £342,000, based on AONB area and proximity to urban areas. Staffing was a mix of internal staff backfilled (part-time), new staff (part and full-time) and contractors for the FiPL Advisor role and administrative role.

Members of the Local Assessment Panel included farmer and Natural England representatives and a mix of other members, for example AONB Board members, the Local Authority, NFU, National Trust, RSPB, Woodland Trust, Duchy of Cornwall and wider advisory networks such as the Forestry Commission, Environment Agency and Highways England. The DCAF and Public Rights of Way team might be asked for advice where appropriate.

18 – 25 expressions of interest had been received per protected landscape across the themes, including permissive access projects.

The People Theme looked at access in the broadest sense and stated intentions were:

- there are more opportunities for people to explore, enjoy and understand the landscape;
- there are more opportunities for more diverse audiences to explore, enjoy and understand the landscape; and
- there is greater public engagement in land management, for example through volunteering.

Under the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme some key examples of what might be considered under the PEOPLE theme included:

- Funding additional educational access/activities beyond the current Countryside Stewardship limit of 25 days per annum.
- Improvements to promote easier/all ability/wheelchair/all-terrain mobility access e.g. fencing a field boundary to link up with other access routes.
- Creating a series of short self-guided farm trails exploring different aspects of the landscape, farming and food production; improving an old hard-standing to provide car parking and renovating the old dairy building to provide an indoor teaching space with toilets and additional hand washing facilities.

People could apply for projects extending over a three-year period to include feasibility studies.

Members made reference to the increasing tension and dichotomy between renewables, climate change and the landscape. Chris acknowledged that there was more pressure with the climate change agenda around renewables and tree planting

and potential landscape transformation. East Devon District Council had appointed a Climate Change Officer. FiPL could support renewables where the site can be used as a demonstration site. Some small-scale and appropriate schemes were in place which were sustainable and non-intrusive. Projects had to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. Other future matters included the greater exploitation of water energy and opportunities arising out of the need to supply electric vehicle charging points.

Chris confirmed there was no general requirement to have a rights of way person on assessment panels but the advice is there can be such a person. In East Devon a representative does cover access and engagement and specific queries can be referred to the Public Rights of Way team or the DCAF. People on the Assessment Panel were selected by the AONB.

Chris said take-up was from both estate and family farms. It was likely that estates would encourage participation by tenants. Chris reported that some Environmental Land Management Scheme advocacy work was undertaken by the AONBs/NPs in the early 2021 to help farmers prepare for the planned changes in farming. Surveys from this work showed in East Devon AONB that beef/sheep farmers were the least prepared and most concerned. Dairy farmers were the opposite. Valley farmers in the East Devon AONB were likely to be more intensive and less interested than farmers in the steeper valleys. There was a lot of inertia in farming systems, currently compounded by labour and material problems faced in carrying out any large-scale projects. It was hoped by AONBs that the FiPL scheme would extend beyond its initial three years.

The distinct lack of emphasis on food production was raised. Chris said this should be possible to highlight under FiPL and indicated the fund could support schemes aimed at improving the understanding and perception of farming and he cited the positive experiences following an AONB farm visit to Gittisham Farm in 2019.

Reference in the example FiPL proposals list to mobility scooters was positively noted. Users of mobility scooters can often cope with rough surfaces, despite expectations otherwise. The major obstructions were gates and boulders across path entrances. Small changes should be factored in when improving access. Chris said he was very aware of these issues.

From prior work in the Forest of Bowland, Chris had experience of Quiet Lanes which tie in with the Glover Review, FiPL and safe access to the countryside and queried DCC's position. It was confirmed there had been an earlier project, Country Mile, which explored the safety of rural roads. Richard Walton undertook to follow up on this as the PROW team lead on category 12 road maintenance. There may be opportunities to see whether there can be a more integrated recreational offer.

Graphs were presented which showed information from people counters around the AONB. At Beer Head many more people passed the counter in July 2020 (nearly 3000) compared with pre-coronavirus in July 2019 (under 2000). The Napoli disaster (2007) had resulted in a long-term impact on people visiting the coast.

Other counters sited on the East Devon Way at Woodbury Common, Colyton and Gittisham showed much higher use at Colyton, close to a larger population where

the trail could be accessed without a car. Figures had also noticeably increased at Colyton compared with pre pandemic.

Chris was thanked for his presentation.

It was agreed to put Quiet Lanes on the agenda for the next meeting.

*Action: Forum Officer*

## **11. To note and approve responses**

### **11.1 Northbrook Approach, Exeter. Devon Wildlife Trust**

The response was noted and approved. The Devon Wildlife Trust would be putting a paper to Exeter City Council's Executive in October 2021.

### **11.2 Teign Estuary Trail planning application, Devon County Council**

The response was noted and approved.

### **11.3 Planning application number 21/1392/FUL – car park improvements (Pebblebed Heaths), East Devon District Council**

The response was noted and approved.

## **12. Current consultations**

### **12.1 Exe Estuary Management Plan 2022-2027**

Discussion took place on the Public Transport, Access and Land Based Recreation sub-theme of the Exe Estuary Management Plan 2022-2027. The issue of the lack of disabled toilets was raised as the national guidelines (2010) do not incorporate the requirements of new designs of mobility scooter. Some toilets around the Exe Estuary were not wheelchair accessible and this deterred use of the trail. The design of others, for example at Topsham, were not suitable for scooter use. Family Changing Rooms, used in some areas, were bigger than required for disability use.

It was noted that the Exe Estuary Trail was very popular and promoting responsible and considerate use should be a key issue in the new Plan.

Lack of awareness of the trail amongst disability groups was an area where weblinks and direct contact would be useful.

In terms of new policies it was suggested that promoting the trail to schools and young people would encourage younger users. In addition, there were sections on both sides of the estuary where the route was on-road and efforts should continue to be made to secure better off-road provision through discussion with Network Rail and others.

A draft would be circulated.

*Action: Forum Officer*

### **13. Work Programme 2021-2022**

The draft work plan was noted. Members raised the importance of continuing to campaign for improved links between trails/green space areas and across wider areas to secure additional off-road benefits for recreational users and enhanced opportunities for sustainable travel, for example to the north of Exeter and between Tiverton and Cullompton. This would be added to the work plan.

*Action: Forum Officer*

Adding the 2026 cut-off date for historical rights of way claims was suggested but it was agreed to leave this until the date was implemented.

### **14. Dartmoor Way progress**

The Dartmoor Way walking route had been launched virtually in autumn 2020 with an official launch in April 2021. Funding was sought for the next phase of the project which will include revenue budget to the end of 2022 and addition of full website information on pushchair friendly and limited mobility access. The DCAF had been approached about funding sources and one or two suggestions had been made. Members were asked to let the Forum Officer know any potential funding sources.

*Action: Members*

### **15. Any other business**

The Chair brought some items to the attention of the Forum which had arisen since the agenda was prepared.

#### **1. Heart of Teignbridge Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan**

The online survey was aimed at local residents. The full Plan incorporated aspirations for better links between the Stover Trail and the Teign Valley Trail and a brief response was proposed. The closing date was 1 October. A draft would be circulated for approval.

*Action: Forum Officer*

#### **2. Dartmoor National Park**

The Dartmoor National Park Authority had launched a consultation on proposed bylaw changes which included new restrictions around dogs and wild camping. This arose out of intense recreational pressure during CoVID-19 and the proposals sought to make the bylaws more enforceable and understandable. The possibility of suggesting increased ranger involvement, alongside education, was raised. It was agreed that any formal response fell within the remit of the Dartmoor Local Access Forum but any member could respond individually. The Forum Officer would circulate links.

*Action: Forum Officer*

3. East Devon District Council

EDDC was carrying out a consultation on its public toilets - standards, provision and priorities. The response questionnaire was very structured and the Forum Officer would send a link for individual members to respond.

*Action: Forum Officer*

4. Disability access provision

Gordon Guest had informed members that the pub at Sourton, visited during early stages of refurbishment on a Training Day, now had excellent provision for disabled visitors. It had been mooted that a certificate would be a way of recognising this, publicising the importance of disabled toilets and raising the profile of the DCAF. The Chair and Forum Officer agreed to work on initial ideas and circulate. The concept would be shared with Dartmoor Local Access Forum.

*Action: Forum Officer*

5. Dawlish Warren

Gordon Guest had recently visited Dawlish Warren and discussed gates with the Ranger. A DCAF site visit had taken place in 2017 and, following advice during this visit, different and more accessible gates had been installed. These were still in situ, allaying concerns that they were no longer accessible structures.

**16. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 18 January 2022, details to be confirmed.