



Devon Countryside Access Forum
c/o Public Rights of Way team
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**Minutes of the Sixtieth meeting
of the Devon Countryside Access Forum
held virtually on
Tuesday, 18 January 2022**

Attendance

Forum members

Andrew Baker
Joanna Burgess
Tim Felton
Lucinda Francis
Gordon Guest

Jo Hooper
Sue Pudduck
Lorna Sherriff
Sarah Slade (Chair)

Devon County Council Officers and others present

Richard Walton, Public Rights of Way Manager, DCC
Simon Jessop, GLASS
Tim Spray, Ramblers' Devon
Hilary Winter, Forum Officer, DCC

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Cllr Richard Chesterton, Chris Cole, Cllr Linda Hellyer, Sue Leith, Tino Savvas and Bryan Smith.

2. Declaration of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Fifty-Ninth meeting held on 21 September 2021

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed at a later date.

4. Matters arising

4.1 Teign Estuary Trail

The Teign Estuary Trail planning application (Passage House Inn to Teignmouth) had been approved by DCC's Development Management Committee. This was subject to conditions including prior approval of a landscaping scheme incorporating details of boardwalks, viewing platforms, fencing, signage and seating.

4.2 Lower Otter Restoration Project

Work to create creeks to the northern end of the Lower Otter Restoration Project site was nearly complete. Construction of the new 40 metre long South Farm Road bridge would commence in the spring. Richard Walton, DCC, confirmed that draft construction drawings had been received by Public Rights of Way and were also being reviewed by colleagues from the Materials Laboratory.

4.3 Seaton Jurassic

East Devon District Council's Cabinet had decided that Seaton Jurassic would remain closed until a final decision is made over the preferred option for its future use, and whilst remedial works are being fully scoped. A further report on options would be published in January 2022. The Devon Wildlife Trust's exit from the centre would not impact on its other work and plans.

4.4 Historic Railways Estate

Historic Railways Estate had requested a plan showing potential future walking and cycling routes to allow it to make a note on its database against any HRE structures which may be affected. This had been supplied by the DCC Senior Transport Planning Officer. The list did not include DCC aspirations to extend railway routes which were not available on the GIS database but the information could be created or made available in a different format.

4.5 Soil Association consultation on Forestry England's Forest management

The auditor thanked the DCAF for its response.

The auditor stated that Forestry England had long referenced 'The Countryside for All' good practice guides for providing accessible paths, particularly in its main hub sites such as Haldon Forest Park. This was supplemented by its internal 'Design Guide to Inclusive Woods', produced in collaboration with the Sensory Trust, and the 'Growing our Future' five-year plan. The West Forest District's strategic plan objectives include to 'widen

participation in woodland recreation for all abilities' together with a specific target to review and modify the trail network to improve its useability by all age groups and ability levels.

It was noted that Forestry England also had to focus on maintaining security and deterring unauthorised access by motorised vehicles as misuse of woods and forests for rave parties, unauthorised encampments, poaching and use by off-road motorbikes remained a major issue.

4.6 Northbrook Approach

The Executive of Exeter City Council on 5 October had noted the results of the Northbrook Park public consultation and approved in principle the steps set out to develop the proposals, subject to presentation of more detailed plans at a future date.

4.7 Planning application 21/1392/FUL - car park improvements (Pebblebed Heaths)

Permission had been granted by East Devon District Council in October 2021. The informal pedestrian path to the north of the Joney's Cross site, shown to be blocked up on the drawings, shall remain open and available for pedestrian use in perpetuity in the interests of pedestrian access and safety in accordance with Policy TC4 (Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycleways) and TC7 (Adequacy of Road Network and Site Access) of the East Devon Local Plan 2013-2031.) The Public Rights of Way team is liaising over PROW affected by the planning proposals.

5. Dead Slow campaign and vulnerable users

The proposed addition to the position statement to cover vulnerable users on the highway was discussed. The new hierarchy in the Highway Code had just been released. Suggestions of amended wording to strengthen the statement were made and it was agreed two advisory comments should be included, one on vulnerable users and one on the hierarchy. A revised draft would be circulated for formal sign-off at the next meeting.

Action: Forum Officer

6. Accessibility certificate

Members discussed draft designs for the accessibility award certificate for businesses catering for those with physical/mobility disabilities. It was not thought there were copyrights on the disabled symbols. Including symbols for other forms of disability - deaf British Sign Language users; mental health, learning disability, brain injury and neurodiversity; and sensory disability - was mentioned. Concerns were raised around the criteria or checklist for an award, how businesses would apply and how selection, assessment and monitoring would take place. Other options such as a thank you letter or linking into other award schemes were mooted. The Chair

suggested and it was agreed not to proceed currently. Members were asked to put forward any ideas.

Action: Members

7. Meetings attended by DCAF members

7.1 Natural England launch of the Green Infrastructure Mapping Tool and GI Principles

Jo Burgess had attended the Natural England launch and had produced an agenda report. She emphasised that accurate information would be key to the mapping tool being effective in ensuring green infrastructure is incorporated in planning policy. The importance of GI had been demonstrated during the coronavirus pandemic. The presentation by Essex County Council, one of the trial areas, had been interesting.

Information and mapping data was publicly available on [Home \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

7.2 National Trust Stakeholder Workshop, Killerton Destination Estate

Gordon Guest had attended the stakeholder meeting. The National Trust had spelt out its ambitions for the immediate area around Killerton House and the whole estate, with a proposed new visitor centre in Ashclyst Forest. Proposals tied in with the East Devon Local Plan. He expressed concern that access from the new Cullompton garden Village (7,000 – 10,000 houses) and the possible volume of visitors had not been factored in, urging that liaison with Mid Devon District Council should be increased.

Killerton House had improved access for mobility scooters around the property but not across the wider estate and this had been flagged up.

Richard Walton, DCC, advised that public rights of way considerations had been included within the consultation response coordinated by Liz Holloway, Senior Transport Planning Officer, DCC, and that concerns raised by Cullompton Town Council had been fed back to the Transport Planning Team.

The Chair reminded members that the Forum had no statutory function in relation to the National Trust but could encourage and advise. Other partners associated with the project fell within its statutory remit, such as councils.

8. Correspondence log

The correspondence log was noted. Attention was drawn to the last minute and brief response to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy consultation requesting that local access forums are consulted. LAFs had not been included in the list of organisations yet improving access to greenspace is expected to be included in the guidance.

9. Public questions

No public questions had been received.

10. Minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee held on 25 November 2021

The Public Rights of Way minutes were noted. Meetings were webcast. Richard Walton, DCC, explained that although the meeting was short, councillors on the committee received full reports and that these were read in advance, with opportunity to liaise with Definitive Map Review Officers prior to the meeting.

Members were interested in the DMR process, and the Forum Officer would arrange a future training event, possibly at the SW Heritage Centre (formerly the County Record Office).

Action: Forum Officer

11. Public Rights of Way update

Richard Walton, Public Rights of Way Manager, DCC, gave an update.

Staffing

The Senior Public Rights of Way post was being readvertised with a closing date of 14 February. The vacant Assistant Officer post would be covered by creating a full-time post when one of the part-time Technical Officers retires in March and increasing hours of other part-time staff. There was currently a high volume of work and Richard Walton apologised if he was slow to respond.

England Coast Path

Grant aid had been confirmed for two projects.

- Torcross (Stokenham FP 29). Stone steps would be reinstated together with cliff stabilisation. The indication is that work would commence at the end of February with a £127,000 grant awarded.
- Georgeham (FP 18). A beach 'causeway' path would be reinstated, with a £22,000 grant awarded. The intention is for this to be completed prior to Easter.

Both projects were weather and contract dependent.

Capital improvements

A £1.5m spend was projected on capital improvements to the end of March.

Definitive Map Review

The team was on track to complete all parishes before 1 January 2026 cut-off date. The process was approximately 90% complete. With regard to the cut-off date, the PROW team was liaising closely with interested groups e.g. the British Horse Society, Ramblers' and the Trail Riders' Fellowship. DCC officer advice includes placing focus on more significant claims which have a higher chance of success. However, some organisations were keen to submit all possible claims. Looking ahead, there will be a balance between quality and quantity.

A recent FOI request had produced the following statistics:

- 145 Definitive Map Review modifications had been determined;
- 180 applications were undetermined;
- 2 applications were about to be referred to the Planning Inspectorate; and
- 6 applications were with the Planning Inspectorate (for which decisions had just been made on two).

The number of undetermined applications is likely to rise as applications are submitted for the 2026 deadline. It was noted that the legislation allows for an extension to the cut-off date of up to five years but there was no indication as to whether this will be applied.

Stover Country Park

A progress meeting with the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) was being held at the end of January to review progress on the development phase and discuss submitting an application in May for the delivery phase. Cost estimates had risen significantly for some of the restoration works, alongside constraints on match funding with increased competition. This required a review of project outputs, with some works outside the ownership of DCC potentially having to be taken out of the bid, for example the two historic buildings at Stover School. Initial feedback from the officer at the NLHF is that it will still be a strong project. If certain proposals do have to be omitted from the NLHF bid, these could potentially be considered as a separate project, utilising extensive information collated as part of the development phase project.

Storm Arwen

The storm had caused issues with fallen trees, surface erosion and damage to structures. DCC had set up a specific storm response budget and remedial work was being undertaken.

Kingswear

A meeting had taken place, at the instigation of the local councillor. Tino Savvas had been present in his capacity as Area Representative of the South West Coast Path Association. The group were able to view the erosion on Beacon Road from above, this being the reason for the temporary closure. A Court decision had been made requiring the landowner to do stabilisation works and the road should subsequently be able to re-open to non-vehicular traffic. With regards to Lighthouse Beach, plans for restoring access would be implemented once the designated coastal access rights were publicly available, estimated to be later in 2022. This would provide the powers to negotiate and, if necessary, take action to link the footpath to the beach.

A request was made for a map when any specific location was being discussed. This was noted by Richard Walton.

2026 cut-off date

The Chair would be attending a meeting of the national Stakeholder Working Group at the end of January, the first meeting for some time. It was hoped there would be an update on the 2026 date. Whilst legislation allowed for the deadline to be extended, any extension beyond five years would require primary legislation. Certainty on the date would be helpful.

12. BREAK

13. Presentation by Jamie Hulland, Transportation Strategy & Road Safety Manager, and Liz Holloway, Senior Transport Planning Officer, Devon County Council

Jamie Hulland, Transportation Strategy and Road Safety Manager, and Liz Holloway, Senior Transport Planning Officer, were welcomed to the meeting.

Mr Hulland explained DCC's focus was now on growth, the climate emergency and low carbon forms of transport.

Decarbonising Transport Strategy – Active Travel

The Department for Transport Decarbonising Transport strategy had as priority one 'accelerating modal shift to public and active transport' with a view to making these the first choice with cohesive, net zero public transport designed for the passenger. The intention is that cars will be used differently and less often, helping to reduce our carbon footprint.

Active Travel was a high-level policy with an impact on health and wellbeing leading to reduced premature death, depression and dementia.

Better Quality, Safer and Attractive Infrastructure

Two Department for Transport publications were used. The first, Gear Change, set out a vision for making cycling and walking the natural first choice with half of all journeys in towns and cities being cycled or walked by 2030. The key principles were that routes should be coherent; direct (time and distance); safe (protected space); comfortable (gradients and smoothness of journey) and attractive (scenic with parks and waterfronts). An accompanying Cycle Infrastructure Design note 1/20 provided design principles and was a helpful document to guide work. Key messages were that routes should be accessible to everyone 8 to 80 – the opportunity should be universal (point 1) and that access control measures should not be used (point 16). All new developments were expected to be built around making sustainable travel the 1st choice for journeys.

Local Cycling and Walking Plans (LCWIPs)

The Heart of Teignbridge draft LCWIP had been out for consultation. LCWIPs for Exeter; Barnstaple, Bideford and Northam were in development and DCC is seeking assistance on how to proceed with a Countywide Strategic LCWIP. Funding was currently urban focussed and there were additional developer contributions which can match fund grant bids. DCC had lobbied Government on the importance of leisure and multi-use routes in rural areas. The Countywide strategy would have a prioritised list as there was a lot of demand for routes in the wider community and a long list which will take many years and millions of pounds to deliver.

Expenditure

Between 2015 – 2020, £21m had been spent by DCC on walking and cycling schemes of which £11m was on urban infrastructure and £10m on rural trails, helped by funding at that time through the Granite and Gears project.

For 2020/21 total walking and cycling funding amounted to £6m; of which £2.1m came from the DCC and Local Transport Plan, £3m from developer contributions and £0.9m from Government grant. Rural trails will receive £1.3m with urban

infrastructure £4.7m (£4.2m in Exeter, Newton Abbot and Barnstaple). Funding was now more urban focussed.

Multi-use strategy

A map was shown of the multi-use and strategic cycle network in Devon.

The multi-use strategy had received £10m funding over the last five years and sought to link the 29 market and coastal towns, allowing people to explore the countryside. Flagship, priority projects were the Exe Estuary Trail (26 miles), Wray Valley Trail (Newton Abbot to Moretonhampstead) and the Coast to Coast route from Plymouth to Ilfracombe along the Drake's Trail, Granite Way and Tarka Trail.

DCC was actively progressing improvements:

1. Tarka Trail north between Willingcott and Knowle. Agreements were being progressed with landowners and topographical survey and site clearance was being undertaken. A number of sections will be constructed in 2023, pending funding approval under the Active Travel Fund Tranche 2.
2. Tarka Trail south, Meeth to Hatherleigh. Discussions were taking place with landowners.
3. Roborough to Yelverton. Feasibility design had commenced and options were being considered.
4. Ruby Way: East of Holsworthy. Preparations for pre-application advice were in hand and early discussions had taken place with appropriate environmental teams.
5. Ruby Way: West of Holsworthy. This was being progressed locally with feasibility work underway to identify a suitable on road route utilising quiet ways.
6. Pegasus Way. Work on the final section of the trail which will link from the Ruby Way to the Granite Way was ongoing. The Pegasus Way was a bridleway suitable for mountain bikes.
7. Teign Estuary trail. Planning permission had been received for sections between Newton Abbot and Bishopsteignton. Detailed design was being undertaken and funding sought.
8. Other schemes in progress:
 - a. Clyst Valley Trail. Consultation on the route alignment between Topsham and Pinhoe would take place in May 2022.
 - b. Sidbury to Sidford (Sidmouth to Feniton). Highways and Traffic Orders Committee approval had been given to progressing a planning application for the route.
 - c. Seaton to Colyford (Stop Line Way). A Compulsory Purchase Order had been resolved with the final remaining landowners to fill the missing gap.
 - d. Crediton to Exeter. Design proposals would be progressed in 2023/2024.

There was a long list of aspirations and land negotiations took a long time with some historic difficulties. Instead of trying to achieve the perfect finish to get gaps secured, DCC was exploring alternative approaches. Quiet lanes provided an opportunity as much of Devon's highway network was an underutilised asset.

Explore More.

Working with Naturally Active Devon and West Devon Borough Council a £1m bid had been put into the Community Renewal Fund. The Explore More part of the bid amounted to £138,000. This would be an opportunity to trial quiet lanes and active travel, making routes safer and more accessible. This would build on the 10 Steps Guide and upskill communities to deliver their own improvements. It would connect to the rail network and improve linkages. The bid included network feasibility – feasibility of new routes for users aged 8 to 80.

Warmer Welcome

This part of the bid amounted to £204,000, focussing on:

1. Community and Business. Activation and increasing tourism opportunities created by multi-use trails in market towns.
2. Information and promotion. Promotion of existing trails with accessible information to increase diversity of use and linking with low carbon travel opportunities.
3. Accessibility review. Improving the visitor experience for all – removing barriers and improving places to rest, noting age and ability may mean the need for more stops on a walk or ride.

Unfortunately, the above bids had not been successful in securing funding this time round. These would have brought economic benefits; however, the ideas and proposals were there should a further funding opportunity arise

Quiet Lanes

DCC had been exploring Quiet Lane projects around Exeter through stopping up lanes to through traffic which fits with policies in the Exeter Local Plan and the Local Transport Plan 3.

1. Balls Farm Road, near Ide

This experimental scheme aimed to create a safe route to school and jobs and the station at Marsh Barton through a partial road closure (green lane). The pedestrian increase had been significant. A permanent closure had been approved at the Exeter Highways and Traffic Order Committee on 17 January on the back of a successful trial.

2. Rydon Lane

A similar approach was being considered at Woodbury, making use of a quiet lane to allow links between the village and the Exe Estuary Trail and Avocet Railway Line. This formed part of the Active Travel Tranche 3 bid, on which DCC was waiting for a funding announcement.

Additional Quiet Lane schemes were proposed at Langaton lane and Ludwell Lane.

Highway Code changes

A review of the Highway Code had introduced changes for active travel from January 2022.

Rule H1: New hierarchy of road users so that those road users that can cause the greatest harm in the event of a collision bear the greatest responsibility to take care and reduce the danger to others.

Rule H2: New priority for pedestrians at junctions so that all other users should give way to pedestrians crossing or waiting to cross a road into which or from which you are turning.

Rule H3. New priority for cyclists when cars are turning. Motor vehicle users should not cut across cyclists, horse riders or horse drawn vehicles going ahead when turning into or out of a junction or changing direction or lane. This applies whether they are using a cycle lane, a cycle track or riding ahead on the road.

Rule 163 introduces passing distances and speeds when overtaking motorcyclists, cyclists, horse riders and horse drawn vehicles.

A discussion took place.

It was clear there was an urban funding bias. Multi-use trails provided the capacity to open up areas and a question was asked about the role of horses on trails.

Liz Holloway, DCC, responded stating that the multi-use trail strategy included equestrians and there was a decision-making process to assess the type of route. For example on the Teign Estuary Trail there was no onward route for equestrians and on the Exe Estuary the volume of users was so high that a separate route would be required for horse riders. In North Devon, on the Willingcott to Knowle section, existing agreements with landowners were being reviewed so see whether horses can be accommodated. Each route was assessed individually using flow charts and a decision protocol. Use by horses impacted on design specifications and other considerations such as surfacing.

Jamie Hulland, DCC, said there was a need to promote the Highway Code changes, including horse riders in messages and promotion. A meeting would be taking place with the Department for Transport and the importance of support to progress leisure trails would be made. The significance to health and wellbeing had been demonstrated during COVID lockdown and this was a platform to build on. The Devon Countryside Access Forum could make representations on this point.

It was mentioned that improving active travel and access for all should be for everyone and not just those 8 to 80. It was noted that this range of ages was described in national government documents and that DCC preferred to use 'access for all' as there were younger and older people using the trails.

The difficulties accessing railway stations and trains with bikes or mobility scooters were raised. Either there were no facilities or trains were too crowded and bookings had to be made. A similar situation applied to buses and this served to reduce connectivity.

Jamie Hulland, DCC, said he continued to work with Great Western Railway and Network Rail. Leisure travel created an opportunity when commuter travel was declining. The new Okehampton Station was a prime example where bike space was capped or at the guard's discretion, which did not provide the certainty that people needed. Buses were more complicated, yet the National Bus Strategy referred to the potential for cycles on buses in rural areas.

Funding could be an issue if there was insufficient demand in the winter, for example the Surf Bus in North Devon had been discontinued.

Various examples were cited of how other countries successfully incorporated space for bikes in train carriages or on buses by removing seats, or providing dedicated space within or on the outside of transport.

Photographs in the presentation had included power chairs and motor scooter users and it was explained that these operate differently and users had varying requirements. Wheelchair accessible toilets were very important to scooter users and DCC was asked to encourage businesses along trails to invest in these facilities.

Chicanes presented an issue on some routes, for example at Bideford, Barnstaple and Meeth. Sometimes a step bar to go over a gate presented an additional issue, for example adjacent to a Bristol Gate at Meeth. Removing all chicanes might not be required and was costly but DCC was asked to remove unnecessary obstacles. There was a compromise.

The new garden village development at Cullompton had no coherent cycle plan to link to Exeter and Cullompton Railway Station and Gordon Guest said he would email separately about this matter as a Cullompton Town Councillor.

Jamie Hulland, DCC, confirmed he was in discussions with Mid Devon District Council and developers.

Jamie Hulland, DCC, said it had been a shame the Warmer Welcome bid had been unsuccessful as that would have brought economic benefits.

Jamie Hulland, DCC, confirmed that the Vision Zero SW campaign will complement the new Highway Code hierarchy. The vision is to have zero people seriously injured or killed by 2040 through partnership working with the Police. The Police had increased resourcing around speed and education/training. A campaign was planned to focus on the changing hierarchy in the Highway Code and more details will be shared as this develops. Highway authorities were included in the partnership.

Reference was made to economic data on green tourism that was shared at a workshop event a couple of years ago attended by Sue Pudduck and the Chair. Jamie Hulland, DCC, requested a copy as facts and evidence were useful to put forward compelling arguments.

Action: Sue Pudduck and Chair.

Jamie Hulland confirmed DCC was seeking clarity from the Department for Transport on Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans so that it can progress these. Stakeholder engagement, including the involvement of the DCAF, would be very helpful.

The Chair thanked Jamie and Liz for their presentation and asked them to keep in touch.

14. To note and approve responses and any feedback

14.1 Exe Estuary Management Plan

The response to the Exe Estuary Management Plan was noted and approved. The next draft, following consultation, picked up points made by the DCAF. The Exe Estuary Partnership Committee will be asked to approve the final plan at its meeting on 25 January.

14.2 Heart of Teignbridge Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

The response was noted and approved.

15. Current consultations

15.1 Teignbridge Local Plan Review (Part 3) 2020-2040: Renewable Energy, Gypsy and Traveller and Small Residential Site Options

The DCAF had submitted a response to Torridge District Council on wind farms in 2010. Membership of the Forum had subsequently changed. The Chair reminded members that the Forum's response should focus on access and other comments could be made in a personal capacity.

The draft response was agreed with additions. Reference to the importance of the attractiveness of routes was raised in relation to solar farms. The British Horse Society had an advice note on solar farms which might be helpful.

A revised draft would be circulated.

Action: Forum Officer

15.2 Deep Lane Junction A38 Cycle and Pedestrian Bridge Consultation

The consultation paper was discussed. All routes had positive and negative aspects. It was agreed that Option C was not so desirable or attractive due to safety and isolation factors.

Option B incorporated two signalised crossings over the slip-roads. It was felt that this was potentially unsafe and would exacerbate traffic congestion on the A38.

Option A reduced the potential to feel isolated and a question would be raised as to whether widening or better lighting would improve this route further. There was some concern about the impact of the raised section on the house occupiers in Wolverwood Lane.

The multi-use bridge over the A38 between Newton Abbot and Bovey Tracey was mentioned as a successful project.

It was agreed to respond giving Option A as marginally the best project and making the additional comments on all the options. A draft would be circulated.

Action: Forum Officer

16. Any other business

Glover Review

The consultation on the Government response to the Glover Review on Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks had just come out, with a closing date of 9 April.

There were proposals to change the AONB name to National Landscapes and have an overarching National Landscapes Service partnership. The purposes of the protected landscapes, governance and management plans were under scrutiny. There were additional plans to reform the planning system, strengthen the role of AONBs and permit enforcement powers. Whilst there was a focus on generating additional income, particularly from green sources, funding remained a concern.

The Government response raised the possibility of exploring the expansion of open access rights and there were proposals to bring National Trails into the national landscape family. The consultation survey questions sought specific views about restrictions and exemptions on motorised use of unsealed roads.

The Chair reminded members that the National Park forums would have views on the Parks. The Chair proposed a working group, and a poll of dates would be circulated to members who expressed interest.

Action: Forum Officer.

Killerton Estate and Clyst Valley Regional Park

Gordon Guest requested that the DCAF talk about plans for the wider Killerton area. The Chair suggested this could be part of a Training Day.

Lobbying

Jo Burgess asked whether it was possible to lobby Government. The Chair confirmed that this was best associated with a project or document. The Forum had a statutory function to advise the Secretary of State for any Government Department.

17. Dates of meetings 2022/2023

A change to the proposed September date was requested. The Forum Officer would discuss other dates with the Chair.

Action: Forum Officer and Chair.