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British Standards Institute.

Consultation on the Draft BS 5709 Gaps, gates and stiles – specification

The British Standard currently in place dates to 2006. The BSI consulted on a revision drawing on experience of years of use of the existing standard. The draft was also informed by a trial of self-closing bridlegates, conducted by Natural England in partnership with the British Horse Society in 2015, which looked at ease of use of structures.

The draft revision places emphasis on the requirements of the Equality Act, the safety of path users and the land management needs of landowners.

Following the consultation the BSI will start a process of comment resolution by its panel of experts, followed by any further editorial revisions, prior to approval and publication.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum made the following online comments:

1) General comment

The information contained in the draft BS is useful for discussion purposes. This is an important consultation and there is concern at how inaccessible the draft document was and how costly it will be to obtain the new BS when finalised. As a source of advisory best practice it should be widely disseminated.

It was suggested the BSI should review copyright criteria to ensure membership groups can readily and easily circulate information.

2) Table 1 specified a large number of footpath structures in order of least restrictive preference with performance details.

The performance details for the accessibility of structures are very helpful and the list of structures contributes to widening knowledge of the variety available. This will assist landowners and authorities in discussing and determining the best and least restrictive structures to use. Details of good design conforming to BS are very helpful. It is often structures that do not conform that cause problems, particularly for disabled users, for example kissing gates of inadequate width. Standards provide a baseline which is of value. However, the opinion is that that the precise ordering of structures in least restrictive preference order may not be helpful as it is too prescriptive, does not

allow for local circumstances and might stifle opportunities for creative innovation in the future. It is also a very long list and, in some instances, there is minimal difference between types of structure. It is recommended that Tables 1 and 2 are included as an advisory note in the final BS. There is, in addition, some inconsistency in performance/preference order information between Tables 1 and 2.

It was suggested Table 1 should be included as a guidance note.

- 3) Table 2 presented a similar table of least restrictive structures for bridleways in order of preference with performance details.

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It was suggested Table 2 should be included as a guidance note.

- 4) General comment

A general comment was made to stress how important maintenance is to the accessibility of structures. Badly hung, poorly maintained or stiff latches are a significant impediment to accessibility.

It was suggested an additional sentence on maintenance would be useful.

- 5) The draft suggested that tying open gates when not needed for livestock control for a significant time would be in accordance with least restrictive principles.

It was agreed that, where possible, this would be useful to save wear and tear on structures and improve access.