



Devon Countryside Access Forum

Lucombe House
County Hall
Topsham Road
EXETER EX2 4QD

Tel: 07837 171000
01392 382084

E-mail: devoncaf@devon.gov.uk

www.devon.gov.uk/dcaf

Sidmouth – Disability Access and the South West Coast Path



An example of a disabled rambler on a DVLA class 3 mobility scooter crossing a rope bridge. This gives an indication of the capability of modern Tramper type mobility scooters

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a statutory local access forum, set up by the County Council under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The role of the Forum is to improve public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment. It has a statutory function to give independent advice to named bodies, including the County Council, under section 94 of the CRoW Act and they are required to “have regard” to “any relevant advice given to them.”

The Devon countryside is famous for its varied and beautiful landscape and the Forum helps to ensure that opportunities for access and exploration are fully considered.

The DCAF currently has sixteen members who represent the interests of landowners/managers, access users and other relevant areas of expertise such as conservation and tourism.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum notes Devon County Council’s plans to divert inland part of the access route to the SW Coast Path, replacing Alma Bridge with a new footbridge over the River Sid. It notes the proposed footbridge would have steps and not ramps and so would not provide access for cyclists, parents with prams, elderly walkers, and persons using wheeled walking frames, wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

On behalf of the DCAF, its disability access member, Gordon Guest, has carried out an assessment of the alternative route for those unable to use a new bridge with steps and is concerned at the lack of pavements, the lack of pedestrian refuge spaces to avoid traffic, the difficulty of using the short steep ramps on the existing footbridge and the length of the diversion. These problems may also prevent access by many groups of the public to the SW Coast Path. A detailed report is below.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is required, in accordance with Sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, to provide advice as to the improvement of public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment.

Report on Sidmouth footpath changes.

The SW Coast path is a major arterial walkway. There are 630 miles of walks with more and more sections becoming mobility scooter accessible.

Current access using Alma Bridge (temporary bridge)

The South West Coast Path goes along Sidmouth esplanade, uses a small footbridge to cross the River Sid, climbs the cliff on a wheelchair and mobility scooter accessible zig zag footpath and joins Cliff Road. The footpath continues along Cliff Road, through housing, eventually joining the National Trust land at Salcombe Hill. Salcombe Hill is a large grass field climbing steeply to woods at the top of the hill.

The views from the hill looking back over Sidmouth and the bay are superb.

Picture 1 - view over Sidmouth and the bay from Salcombe Hill.



Picture 2 - view of Salcombe Hill (NT) field.



At present the whole of this route is possible using a mobility scooter. Mobility scooters can cross the temporary footbridge, climb the zig zag path and progress to Salcombe Hill. DVLA class 3 Tramper type mobility scooters can easily follow the footpath all the way up Salcombe Hill and into the woods. Tramper scooters are halted in the woods due to a flight of wooden steps.

The current temporary footbridge has ramps and is fully mobility scooter usable. Because it has ramps it is also usable by elderly walkers, elderly persons using push and parents with prams.

The zig zag path is mostly 1.5 m wide with good large turning circles at each point of the turn. From Sidmouth crossing the bridge and up the cliff zig zag to where it joins Cliff Road is a distance of 0.09 miles. So although the path is steep it is also short.

Though the zig zag path is steep it is well graded and wide. It is similar to the zig zag path in Exmouth leading up to the footpath to Orcombe point. This Exmouth zig zag path is also mobility scooter accessible.

Most DVLA Class 3 mobility scooters can cope with a gradient of 1 in 4 or 25%. This type of scooter has no difficulty using the zig zag path. Many of the DVLA Class 2, the 4 mph pavement scooters, can cope with a slope between 1 in 10 and 1 in 12. So many of these scooters can use the existing zig zag path. (Note: two persons on mobility scooters were observed using the zig zag path by the DCAF member assessing the route)

Slope Conversions:

1:12=8%=5°, 1:10=10%=5.7°, 1:8=12.5%=7°, 1:5=20%=11°, 1:4=25%=14°

Picture 3 - view of zig zag path



Potential future diversion for users unable to use a new bridge with steps

There is the potential to divert the existing footpath away from the temporary Alma Bridge, through the park (called the Ham), along Riverside Road, across a footbridge beside the ford, onto Millford Road, and up Beatlands Road to connect with Cliff Road where the existing footpath connects with Cliff Road. This route is currently used when the Alma Bridge is closed and it is proposed this should continue as a route for people who would not be able to use the new proposed stepped bridge which will be constructed closer to the sea.

This would involve a detour of approximately 0.73 miles for walkers with prams and pushchairs, elderly walkers with walking frames, and all wheelchair, power chair and mobility scooters.

Able bodied persons would be able to use the new footbridge which is likely to have steps but no ramps.

Riverside Road.

Where the footpath exits onto Riverside Road from the park (The Ham) there is no pavement. There are houses fronting the road, car parking all along one side of the road and the road is narrow. With the parked cars the road width is reduced to one car width. As there is no pavement there is nowhere for a pedestrian or mobility scooter to go when a car comes along the road. This poses a health and safety risk.

Picture 4 - chicane fences at the Ham park.



At the exit from the park (the Ham) onto Riverside Road there are two metal fences placed as a chicane. The gap and turning space between these is quite tight for large DVLA class 3 mobility scooters. This gap may need to be widened.

Picture 5 - showing Riverside walk, narrow road with car parking and no pavement.



Mill Street.

Mill Street is also a narrow one lane road with houses on both sides. There are double yellow lines on both sides of the road to prevent parking. Mill Street leads to the vehicle ford to Millford Road.

There is a pavement on both sides of Mill Street. The pavement on the right hand side of Mill Street in the direction of the ford is narrow, in places much less than 1.00 metre wide, and so too narrow for large and medium mobility scooters and power chairs.

The advantage of the pavement on the right side of the road leading to the ford is that users would not have to cross Mill Street, but it is generally too narrow.

On the left hand side of Mill Street there is a wider pavement. Much of this width is suitable, but not all, for mobility scooters and wheelchairs and power chairs, as well as parents with prams. But you need to cross Mill Street at the junction of Riverside Road. You need a drop kerb at that location.

Picture 6 - Mill Street narrow pavements.



Millers Close is a small road off to the left of Mill Street. This would also need drop kerbs to get across.

The footbridge beside the ford is on the right hand side of Mill Street. Therefore in using the pavement on the left you would need further drop kerbs to come off the pavement and cross Mill Street to the footbridge ramps.

Footbridge from Mill Street to Millford Road.

The footpath ramp from Mill Street up to the footbridge is very short and so very steep. A DVLA class 3 mobility scooter can cope with these ramps and gradients quite easily. A lot of the smaller, DVLA class 2, 4 mph pavement scooters and power chairs would have difficulty getting up the ramps because they are so steep even though the distance is short.

Because the footpath ramp faces the wall of a house it would be difficult to make this ramp longer to reduce the steepness.

The ramp going from the footbridge onto Millford Road is also very steep. There is a telegraph pole at the foot of the ramp. This would need to be relocated to improve access onto the ramp and to make the ramp longer and so less steep.

The steepness of the gradient ramps onto the footbridge is such that it is unlikely any person using a push along wheeled walker, or anyone pushing a manual wheelchair, would be able to go up onto this bridge with the ramps as they currently are. It would also be a very hard push up the ramp for a parent with a pram.

Picture 7 - footbridge ramp into Mill Street with house wall at the bottom.



Picture 8 - Footbridge ramp into Millford road. Grass verge allows possibility of extending the ramp.



Millford Road.

From the footbridge at the ford, along Millford Road to the junction of Beatlands Road. This road has no pavements. It has some parked cars at the side of the road and is very wet where vehicles exit the ford.

Again without a pavement of suitable width for a mobility scooter, mobility scooters and pedestrians must walk in the road. The road is not especially wide, but it is wider than Mill Street. The DCAF member observed vehicles having to queue and wait for vehicles to exit the ford and progress down the road. There was no space for the DCAF observer to manoeuvre their mobility scooter away from vehicles. Safe pedestrian refuge areas would be needed along this road.

Millford Road would need to be made safe and mobility scooter accessible, particularly with clearly marked refuge areas for pedestrians.

Picture 9 - Millford Road with no pavements.



Beatlands Road.

From the junction of Beatlands Road with Millford Road there is no pavement.

A few metres from the junction of Millford Road with Beatlands Road, Beatlands Road junctions with Salcombe Road. This is a busy junction with no pavements from Salcombe Road along Millford Road to Beatlands Road junction. Pedestrians and mobility scooters face a problem crossing Millford Road to turn into Beatlands Road due to vehicles coming from three directions and no pavement. (Note the road may not be wide enough to install keep left bollards in the middle of the road as a safe refuge point.)

The distance from the junction of Beatlands Road with Millford Road up the hill to Cliff Road is 0.27 miles.

From the junction of Beatlands Road with Millford Road it is all uphill, in some places very steep, all the way to joining Cliff Road where the existing coast path exits onto Cliff Road.

Picture 10 - Beatlands Road with no pavements.



The first section of the hill has no pavements at all on either side. This part of the hill is especially steep. In places it is also a single track road, with double yellows along both sides of the road.

Picture 11 - Beatlands road going uphill with no pavements.



For approximately 220 metres up Beatlands Road there is no pavement on the steepest part of the hill.

Picture 12 - Beatlands Road no pavements and narrow with a blind corner.



Picture 13 - Beatlands Road steep hill and no pavements.



Beatlands Drive then forks, with Beatlands Drive bearing to the right. This section of the Road does have a pavement along one side and grass verges on the other for the next

200 metres. Mostly these pavements are between 1.00 m and 1.5 m wide. These are wide enough for pedestrians and mobility scooters, except where white vans park on the pavement and obstruct it forcing pedestrians to use the road.

The pavement in front of a house called Sunset is a good 1.5m wide.

Pictures 14 & 15 - upper Beatlands Road with pavements.



This top section of Beatlands Road, whilst still going up hill, is much less steep than the lower part of Beatlands Road.

Where Beatlands Road meets Cliff Road there is a drop kerb. Cliff Road has a pavement about 1.00 m wide up the hill until Cliff Road turns to the left. The pavement along Cliff Road is satisfactory.

DCC footpath bridges.

Over the years DCC have installed many new cycle and multi path bridges, all of these have been fully mobility scooter passable.

- Exe Estuary trail – new river bridge at Topsham beside the railway line, over 100m long with 3 concrete piers in the river
- Granite and gears new footbridge over B3212 at Dousland on the Burrator reservoir to Princetown route.
- Viaduct on the Tarka Trail
- Pedestrian footbridge over the A38 near Stover Country park
- New footbridge over the railway line near Turf Locks on the Exe Estuary trail.

The last two footbridges in particular are very high, are fully ramped and fully wheelchair, pram, bicycle, and mobility scooter accessible. Due to the height of these bridges and the ramping there may be some design ideas that could be used in Sidmouth.

Summary of SW Coast Path diversion inland for those unable to use a stepped bridge

- Most of the diverted route has no pavements; the roads are narrow with regular vehicles going along them. In those sections with no pavements there is no safe refuge for pedestrians or mobility scooters when vehicles come along.
- Where there are pavements, e.g. Mill Street some of these pavements are too narrow.
- In some locations there would need to be clear and safe refuge areas for pedestrians, parents with prams, wheelchairs and mobility scooters to reduce risk.
- The exit from the Ham onto Riverside Road through the chicane of the metal fences may need widening for larger class 3 type mobility scooters.
- Footbridge from Mill Street to Millford Road. The ramps onto this footbridge are very short and so very steep. They would prevent manual wheelchairs and smaller mobility scooters from using the footbridge. Larger class 3, 8 mph scooters should have no problem.
- There is a telegraph pole at the bottom of the footbridge ramp which potentially may need to be relocated.
- In a number of places, depending on which part of the pavement was used, there would be a need for extra drop kerbs.
- The hill steepness on the lower part of Beatlands Road is very steep. There are no pavements, no refuge areas, and some of the road is single track. This section in particular has considerable risk if it remains unchanged.

The diversion of the SW Coast path to use the above mentioned streets raises considerable problems for many members of the public and users and raises a large number of questions in relation to risk.

It is likely that the risk elements, and difficulty of using steep ramps and steep hills whilst facing vehicles would deter many elderly and wheelchair users from using this diverted route. The current route using the temporary Alma Bridge footbridge over the River Sid does avoid these many problems.

Gordon Guest
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