



Devon Countryside Access Forum

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Agriculture Consultation Team
1b - Future Farming Directorate
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
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8 May 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit

The Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF) is a local access forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act). Its statutory remit is to give independent advice "as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area..."

The DCAF currently has seventeen members, appointed by Devon County Council, who represent the interests of landowners/managers, access users and other relevant areas of expertise such as conservation and tourism.

This consultation was discussed at the recent DCAF meeting, held on 26 April. This response focusses on chapters 5 and 6 which mention access and recreation.

Chapter 5: Public money for public goods.

The consultation asks for the six 'environmental' outcomes to be reduced to three options in order of importance. The Forum felt this was inappropriate as all the outcomes are fundamentally important and interdependent (for example, soil health is interlinked with

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a local access forum. It 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.

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improved water quality). To rank them belies the complexity of the situation. Similarly, the consultation asks for the 6 'other' public goods to be ranked. Of these, two might better be classed as 'environmental' outcomes (crop, tree, plant and bee health, and preserving resilience and landscapes in the uplands). Again, many issues are intrinsically interlinked. For example, public access, which is explicitly specified here, can sometimes be at odds with the tighter biosecurity measures that may be needed for better animal and plant health.

The Forum is agreed that access to the countryside should be one of the public goods to be considered in any future agricultural land management system and funding proposals Access to green space, public rights of way and trails is increasingly proven to bring about health and wellbeing benefits. Within the list of environmental goods, access could be considered part of f) Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

It will be important to deliver a wide range of public goods, and to carefully consider the implications of their interacting demands, rather than focusing on a few 'top' concerns.

The Forum did not come to a firm view as to the form such public access should take. Additional permissive access is one option but there are other opportunities to improve and enhance access, whilst supporting landowners in the management of their land. It is a topic which requires more careful consideration and further consultation to ensure optimum benefits. The Forum is aware that provision of public access varies across the country, in its extent and quality, and this also needs to be addressed.

Chapter 6: Enhancing our environment

As with chapter 5, it is inappropriate to select from the range of options. Action across a number of farms or other land parcels has the potential to achieve significant benefits in all these areas and cooperation and joint action is necessary.

An environmental land management system could offer options for recreation; incentivising neighbouring landowners to jointly provide certain types of access could boost health and well-being and also local economies. For example, circular walks or multi-use trails that start and end somewhere and woodland areas with good links to public transport and parking would encourage people to use such areas. In addition, access opportunities that connect to food and drink outlets (for example pubs, cafes and farm shops) and attractions would benefit the economy.

Delivering recreational access at a larger scale has the potential to offer new and improved opportunities for dog walkers and walkers and, where possible, for other access user groups.

The Forum recognises that there are many other types of environmental management and enhancement that would also merit public support. The Forum is not able to advise specifically on such matters, but would note that ensuring a robust farming economy which is able to support a healthy environment provides benefits for everyone, including those who wish to access and enjoy the countryside.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum trusts its views will be considered and would welcome the chance to be involved in additional discussions specifically on public access.

Yours faithfully

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Hilary Winter
Forum Officer

Letter sent on behalf of Devon Countryside Access Forum

Chair: Sarah Slade
Vice Chair: Chris Cole