



Devon Countryside Access Forum
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Dear Sir/Madam

Children's health and physical activity

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 to specified bodies "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.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum has considered the questions posed in the above consultation and has the following comments. This response will be on the agenda for formal approval at the next meeting.

The Forum does not have a statutory remit to advise ukactive so its comments are being copied to Sport England and Natural England, specified as section 94(4) bodies under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act to whom the Forum can give advice.

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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The role of the Forum is to advise on the improvement of public access to land. Such improvements can encourage children and young people to be more physically active. A number of challenges and barriers currently exist and these are highlighted below. Many of these comments are included in the Forum's position statements or have been used in submission to other consultations.

Transport and Travel

Ways of travelling to school should be addressed. Insufficient thought is given to making it possible for young people to travel to school actively, rather than being bussed or driven. This is particularly true in rural areas. Such travel needs to be safe with provision of cycle tracks on school routes an option for future investment. Sometimes modest investment can achieve good results.

In Devon an existing footpath was improved and re-surfaced by Devon County Council and a new 125 metre footpath link was added. This has allowed children to walk safely to school and avoid a stretch of road with poor visibility. This was agreed with a County Farm tenant farmer but similar schemes could be implemented, subject to securing landowner agreement.



The original route to school in Umberleigh and the new footpath



The original footpath stile replaced with a gate and new surfacing

The Built Environment

Planning policy should give more emphasis to sustainable transport infrastructure and the provision of green spaces so that there is greater encouragement to walk and cycle. For new housing developments this is particularly pertinent as fewer new homes have garages or gardens with room for sheds. People only cycle if it's convenient, and having somewhere to store family bikes 'ready to go' is essential. Such storage facilities should be given priority in the development of planning policy and in the design of new developments.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum position statement on planning includes the following comments which are relevant to this consultation:

- The design of new housing sites should identify strategic walking and cycling routes within settlements and ensure these link to surrounding rural areas and the rights of way network.
- Development proposals should include safe and high-quality provision for cycling and walking routes linking housing to schools, shops, employment areas and recreational and sports facilities.
- Where possible, there should be circular routes within settlements to encourage healthier lifestyles and minimise car use.

Natural Spaces

Children and young people need safe access to good quality, well-maintained green spaces within communities or very close to such communities, and encouragement to so engage. Semi-structured or structured activities can persuade younger people to get involved, particularly if there is leadership or an element of team work, for example the successful endurance Ten Tors event held on Dartmoor.

Encouraging participation or volunteering through schools, local publicity and clubs can be a further way of including young people. For example, the newly created Dawlish SANGS country park, 65 acres, (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) has held events for children to raise awareness of the park. Cranbrook new town, in East Devon, has been selected as one of ten NHS 'healthy new towns' and will have an emphasis on increasing physical activity amongst children and young people through encouraging use of green space and cycling/walking. Open Farm Sundays are a further example of getting children out into the countryside.

New green space areas are vital for communities and many have been funded by developer contributions. The Forum has previously expressed concern about the funding for future maintenance of such sites, recognising that they will only continue to be used if they are maintained to a certain standard and perceived as safe.

Public rights of way and multi-use or shared trails linking green spaces can enable young people to explore the countryside and be more active. Safe off-road opportunities for walking, cycling, dog walking and horse riding are essential as the road network is seen as being unsafe by many parents due to the speed and amount

of traffic. In rural areas, such as Devon, the majority of roads outside settlements have no pavements so the need for safe outdoor areas is paramount.

The Exe Estuary Trail in Devon, around the River Exe estuary, is an excellent example of an off-road route that is particularly popular with families. It provides a path for walking or cycling where young children can build up cycling skills over a good distance.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum trusts its comments will be considered and would welcome feedback.

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*