



**Devon Countryside Access Forum**  
Lucombe House  
County Hall  
Topsham Road  
EXETER EX2 4QD

Tel: 07837 171000  
01392 382084

[devoncaf@devon.gov.uk](mailto:devoncaf@devon.gov.uk)

<http://www.devon.gov.uk/dcaf>

## **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

### **Devon Countryside Access Forum**

#### **POSITION STATEMENT Access and Recreation**

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a statutory local access forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Its remit is to provide 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...” Its geographical area of coverage is Devon, with the exception of the Unitary Authority areas and National Parks which have their own forums.

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

The Position Statement on AONBs has been prepared in order to provide a consistency of advice across the five AONBs within Devon. Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act makes it a statutory function of forums to give advice to specified bodies, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Conservation Boards.

The DCAF considers the following aspects to be important in the Management Plans for the AONBs.

#### **Vision Statement**

The Devon Countryside Access Forum recognises the function and primary purpose of the AONBs. It supports a vision conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and landscape of the AONB. Opportunities to appreciate the tranquillity of the AONB and enjoy the scenery through quiet enjoyment should be the focus of chapters on access and recreation.

#### **Essential criteria**

The AONB Management Plan should identify the extent of recreational opportunities in the AONB, within the context of the overall Plan. This should include the length of public rights of way, area of access land, important

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.

recreational trails and routes and other opportunities for recreational access such as beaches, country parks, permissive access and Forestry Commission, National Trust and Woodland Trust land.

The Management Plan should recognise the intrinsic importance of the existing highway network (including public rights of way), verges and heritage features as assets for the public to appreciate the landscape and access other recreational opportunities. These assets are part of a Natural Capital approach, for example Devon is appreciated for its sunken lanes, hedgerows and verges rich in flora.

### **Objectives and Policies**

These are inter-linked. The DCAF has identified the following aspects as key matters which AONBs should include within their Management Plans. AONBs should:

#### *Maintenance and improvement*

- a) liaise with the local highway authority over opportunities to sensitively enhance access and remedy deficiencies for particular groups of users, for example disabled users. The DCAF has developed a [Disability Access Position Statement](#)
- b) refer to the legal role of the local highway authority in maintaining public rights of way, unsurfaced unclassified County roads (uUCRs) and cycle/multi-use routes;
- c) demonstrate how it will develop a partnership with authorities and others to deliver priorities;
- d) refer to the role of Parish Paths Partnership (P3) groups and other voluntary groups in maintaining public rights of way and other areas of land enjoyed by the public;
- e) work with the local highway authority and other partners to identify funding sources to enable access improvements to take place.
- f) liaise and consult with landowners when new routes are proposed;
- g) encourage suitable surfacing of multi-use routes to permit access by all users. Routes should be compatible with the landscape and sensitive to the location.
- h) seek to work with partners to improve the safety of access users, particularly on roads or where rights of way join roads;
- i) refer to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (DCC, 2005) and the Devon Countryside Access Forum. The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a statutory local access forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, with a remit to provide independent advice on the “improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area...” Members of the DCAF represent the interests of access users, landowners/managers and other areas of expertise.

#### *Promotion and economic and health benefits*

- j) work with the local highway authority and other partners to promote quiet, sensitive and sustainable recreational activities within the AONB;
- k) encourage people to spend time in the landscape and spend money in the local economy;

- l) promote activities, including organised activities, which support the physical, psychological and social health of residents and visitors to the AONB;
- m) maximise opportunities to encourage recreational access participation by those with disabilities or health conditions, for example supervised access for those with learning difficulties, dementia walks and improvements to disabled access;
- n) support community involvement and engagement in the work of the AONB, such as in volunteering;
- o) take a leading role in advising and educating the public on responsible use and enjoyment of the AONB, including in new and diverse ways such as digital;
- p) work in partnership with others to help deliver and encourage use of sustainable transport to reach and explore the AONB, for example walking, cycling, horse-riding and public transport;
- q) work with partners to seek funding to promote and deliver economic and health benefits.

#### *Other matters*

- r) recognise the expertise and opportunities available through working with the Local Nature Partnership;
- s) work with planning authorities to secure developer contributions towards green infrastructure and associated facilities;
- t) work with parish and town councils, particularly around neighbourhood planning and its delivery;
- u) ensure website information is up-to-date and accurate and identify links to associated information, for example access guides;
- v) ensure policies within the Management Plan support these objectives and include details on potential partners;
- w) ensure that local distinctiveness of the AONB area is maintained when improvements are sought, for example stone stiles and bridges;
- x) include measurable indicators to measure progress on priorities.

Whilst recognising the local distinctiveness of each AONB, the DCAF would value and encourage AONBs to adopt a unified format for their AONB Management Plans.

The DCAF has developed statements on planning related priorities for public rights of way and access; liaison with landowners/managers when new routes are proposed; disability access and Neighbourhood Plans. It has also done work for Devon County Council on developing a policy for multi-use of routes and associated design standards.