



Devon Countryside Access Forum

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Protected Landscapes Review

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.

This response will be on the agenda of the next Devon Countryside Access Forum meeting on 24 January 2019 for formal approval.

Comments have been confined to the question relating to access and recreation as this area of concern falls within the statutory remit of the Forum.

What views do you have about the role National Parks and AONBs play in supporting and managing access and recreation?

The importance of Protected Landscapes

Devon benefits from five AONBs (the Blackdown Hills, East Devon, South Devon, North Devon Coast and Tamar Valley) and two National Parks (Dartmoor and Exmoor). The Blackdown Hills AONB, Tamar Valley AONB and Exmoor National Park cut across highway authority boundaries. These Protected Landscapes are important for the opportunities they provide for quiet enjoyment, contemplation and reflection through use of public rights of way, trails, access land and woodland.

The intrinsic importance of the existing highway network (including public rights of way), verges and heritage features is crucial. These are also assets from which the public can 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.

The Protected Landscapes offer places where local residents and visitors can be encouraged to enjoy the landscape and spend money in the local economy.

Within the context of Protected Landscapes, it is important to recognise the value that designated links play in enhancing access to and through those landscapes, for example the South West Coast Path, National Cycle Network routes (such as the Devon Coast to Coast NCN 27 and South West Coast NCN 2) and recreational trails such as the Two Moors Way and East Devon Way.

Management of Access and Recreation

Access and recreation should be tailored to the aspirations for the National Parks and AONBs, within the constraints of legislation and having regard to the value of existing rights of way. The Forum would encourage:

- a) effective management of 'honeypot' sites as these can take pressure off more sensitive wildlife areas. This would include car parking provision and facilities (where appropriate) and sympathetic maintenance of the site.
- b) access that is appropriate to the landscape. Wilderness areas are valued as areas with less intense recreational pressure. The DCAF would not expect to see waymarking or hard surfaces in these areas. Many modern mobility scooters e.g. Trampler can travel easily on grass or rough ground
- c) partnership working with highway authorities, landowners and other relevant stakeholders to ensure good access links which are well-signed and consistent, particularly in areas where there are multiple categories of right of way.

Sustainable access

It is important for people to be able to reach Protected Landscapes in sustainable ways to enhance the experience and reduce the potential impact. This includes not just public and private transport initiatives but also walking, cycling, mobility scooter use, horse-riding and carriage-driving.

Health and wellbeing

The staff teams associated with the Protected Landscape areas have a key role to play in promoting activities, including organised events, which support the physical, psychological and social health of residents and visitors. They can also 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 mobility scooter and wheelchair access or for those with a range of sensory or other disabilities.

Staff also have a crucial role to play in supporting community involvement and engagement in their work, particularly through volunteering. This is a very successful part of their activities.

Protected Landscapes should work with partners to seek funding to promote and deliver economic and health benefits.

Responsible access

The Forum would like to see Protected Landscapes take an even stronger lead role in advising and educating the public on responsible use and enjoyment of these

landscapes, including in new and diverse ways such as digital messages through Facebook and Twitter and use of Apps.

Areas outside the Protected Landscapes

From a macro-perspective, the DCAF does have some concerns if these areas are valued and financed to the detriment of other surrounding areas which may be equally valued by the public for the doorstep access and recreation opportunities they provide. Other areas can deliver similar benefits but may not have the same resources.