

# Shared Use Paths

## Discussion paper for the Devon Countryside Access Forum

### Introduction

Over the past thirty years several off-road trails have been developed in Devon and there has been considerable investment by DCC, plus grants from bodies such as the Department of Transport. The Exe Estuary Trail, for example, cost £17.5m and has taken ten years to build.

150 miles of off-road trails in the County are now available. Some of these routes such as the Pegasus Trail are very rural and use is recreational but on other routes, such as the Exe Estuary Trail and parts of the Tarka Trail, commuting is important.

Trails are used by different groups of people including walkers; runners; cyclists; dog walkers; families; people with pushchairs, mobility scooters and wheelchairs and, on some routes, horse riders. Multi-use paths offer off-road opportunities for recreation and commuting with associated benefits for health and well-being and road congestion.

There is no uniform signage locally or nationally to promote safe use and the variety of land ownership and legal definition makes it more difficult to put bylaws in place.

A small minority of people are not considerate of other users and there is an increasing perception that trails are not a relaxing and enjoyable place to be. The increasing popularity of routes near centres of population means that some issues have arisen.

### What are some of the issues?

1. Dogs off leads or on extendable leads;
2. Cyclists going too fast and/or not using a bell or calling to warn people they are approaching or passing. There is no requirement to have a bell on a bike, although it must be sold with one.
3. Walkers/dog walkers who make it difficult to pass and are unaware of other users;
4. Users who are inconsiderate of mobility scooters and wheelchair users;
5. Numbers of users on some routes. (A recent survey in July 2019 before the school holidays showed a weekday use of the Exe Estuary Trail of 1000 cyclists a day (7 a.m. to 7.00 p.m.); 60% men and 40% women and at the weekend 1400 cyclists; 70% men and 30% women, many accompanied by children) <https://twitter.com/breezedevon/status/1157179186861264897>
6. Cost of maintenance to ensure widths are maintained and vegetation is cut-back.
7. Conflict hotspots e.g. the on-road section through Lypstone where increased numbers of cyclists have changed the character of the community and there are reports of dangerous and inconsiderate behaviour.
8. Signing as the National Cycle Network (NCN) may give the wrong impression that a trail is for cyclists primarily and not a shared path.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum was involved at Lypstone in 2014, following representation from the Lypstone Trail Action Group. The DCAF made a site visit and subsequently advised DCC on potential speed reduction and calming measures that might alleviate some of the problems arising from an increased number of cyclists in the village. Suggestions were made on possible off-road options. The Lypstone Trail Action Group continues to seek solutions and some work has been done by DCC in the village to calm traffic.

The Exe Estuary Partnership is seeking to address some of the issues that have arisen through increased use of the trail. Several complaints have been received about inconsiderate users and other incidents may be unreported. As links are developed to Teignmouth and potentially up the Clyst Valley, numbers will increase further and developing solutions to encourage considerate use is vital to ensure people can enjoy the route.



Photos © Devon County Council

## **Other matters**

### ***Disabled facilities***

Trails are ideal for access by those with disabilities but the lack of disabled facilities along trails can reduce use by wheelchair and scooter users.

### ***Multi-use***

The equestrian community feels increasingly vulnerable on the roads and would welcome increased opportunities to use trails in Devon.

## What are some of the current solutions?

### Share this Space



Devon County Council uses this message on many of its trails and through promotional work. The message:

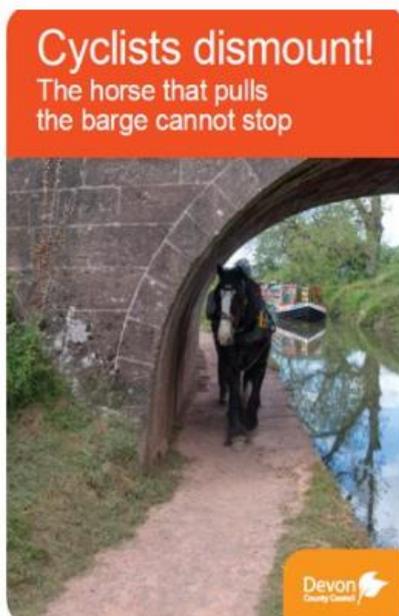
- Encourages all highway users to be polite, courteous and take responsibility for their actions.
- Provides clear and simple visual signing to remind people of the other users they may encounter on shared paths

This message is shared through bike shops, hire shops, Devon County Council's Cycle Devon website, cycle maps and newsletters and through social media. The Share this Space message is incorporated in National Standard cycle training programmes.

Reports of conflict and actual collisions are rare but the numbers now using trails means that sharing the space in a considerate manner is more important.

More information on Share this Space can be found on <https://www.traveldevon.info/cycle/safe-cycling/share-this-space/>

### Grand Western Canal



Two pioneering new safety initiatives have been introduced at the Grand Western Canal Country Park to make the towpath safer for everyone, particularly under bridges where cyclists may be unaware that they might meet the barge horse, dogwalkers; children; or an adult with a pushchair or a mobility scooter. Many cyclists do not dismount and walk and there is no possible legal restriction.

New signs explain the dangers to cyclists using photo-based illustrations of vulnerable towpath users with a clear message to slow down, take care or dismount.

Elsewhere efforts have been made to encourage responsible use of shared paths, for example in the South Downs National Park <https://behaviourchange.org.uk/case-studies/using-social-norms-on-shared-paths> and on urban towpaths <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/news-and-views/our-campaigns/share-the-space-our-towpath-code/drop-your-pace> The South Downs National Park uses a video of a man and his dog interacting with other users and the Canal & River Trust's video explains initiatives and fun messages to encourage people to 'drop your pace'.



© South Downs National Park



© Canal & River Trust

### **What could be explored in Devon?**

1. Increased liaison with Sustrans volunteers or a friends' type group.
2. Terminology around shared use. What words convey the right message?
3. Social media and dedicated sites.
4. Targeted messages at particular points where there is perceived or real conflict.
5. Maintenance options.