



Devon Countryside Access Forum

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Mr T Taylor
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Dear Mr Taylor

Consultation on proposed extended grazing area – Fire Beacon Hill / Fire Beacon Plantation and Core Hill Wood sites

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...” Section 94(4) of the Act specifies bodies to whom the forum has a statutory function to give advice. This letter is being copied to the Town Council and Forestry England as above-mentioned bodies and owners of some of the land affected.

The DCAF currently has fifteen 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 discussed this consultation at its recent meeting on 19 September.

Forum members welcome positive management of this access land site which is a valuable recreational area on the outskirts of Sidmouth, crossed by the East Devon Way, several footpaths and bridleways and an unsurfaced unclassified County road.

Some of the survey questions were considered, as below.

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.

Question 1 – Having looked at the proposals, what are your thoughts?

The Devon Countryside Access Forum welcomes proposals for positive management of Fire Beacon Hill Local Nature Reserve and common land, and the adjacent Fire Beacon Plantation (Forestry England) and Core Hill Wood (Woodland Trust) sites. This should result in benefits for recreational access, the landscape and biodiversity.

Question 2 & 3 – What type of livestock would you like to see on site and which time of year would you like to see land grazed?

To reduce poaching, it was agreed that stock should graze in the spring, summer and autumn and not in the winter. Devon cattle are regarded as a docile breed and suitable for grazing management on the common and surrounding areas.

Question 4 – Which type of fencing do you prefer?

Members of the DCAF agreed that use of invisible fencing, one of the options, would control stock well if now sufficiently reliable. The Forum advises that contact is made with organisations who have used this type of fencing, for example the National Trust and Ashdown Forest. Invisible fencing would have the added advantages of reducing the need for additional path furniture and providing better wildlife corridors, as well as minimising the visual impact. Use of such fencing would be preferable to the temporary electric fencing used currently.

The Forum would like confirmation that invisible fencing has no adverse effect on people with pacemakers accessing the site and advises this should be checked with the system manufacturer.

If traditional fencing, rather than invisible fencing, is the option ultimately used, this would appear to reduce or limit access to the woodland beyond the eastern Core Hill boundary as no gates are marked on that section. This is also an area used for recreational access including walking and orienteering.

Question 6 – In plans for the extended grazing area, we would blur the organisational boundary lines between the LNR/common land and Fire Beacon Plantation (Forestry England) to the west and Core Hill Wood (Woodland Trust) to the east. How do you feel about this? Would you prefer to know the separation of ownership?

As raised in its earlier response, partnership working between the different agencies involved with Fire Beacon Hill area is seen as a positive development. The blurred boundaries between different areas of landownership are welcomed.

General points

Dog matters and other public information

The issue of dog control and management was not included on the consultation questionnaire. The DCAF previously raised the matter of differing dog legislation and members thought this should be mentioned again and specifically in relation to fouling and

cattle issues, for example worming of dogs to reduce cattle disease and dog control in the vicinity of stock.

Members of the public should be made aware at access points that they may encounter cattle (or other livestock) and how to walk their dog responsibly and safely, as well as being made aware of the management system in place to control cattle if invisible fencing is used. A contact telephone number should be made available.

Disability access

Any new or improved path furniture should have regard to accessibility requirements. The overall site offers opportunities for disability access with fine views over the surrounding countryside. There are several wide tracks and unsurfaced roads, usable by people with tramper buggies.

Gates that are 1.5m wide, open two-ways with a handle or easy latch system, have a strengthened base and are self-closing are suitable. The Centrewire Aston or Milton Keynes gates, or those of a similar design, would be most appropriate. The Forum's Disability Access Position Statement is attached and further information can be provided.

The Forum would welcome feedback on its advice.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Hilary Winter.

Hilary Winter
Forum Officer

Letter sent on behalf of the Devon Countryside Access Forum

*Chair: Sarah Slade
Vice-Chair: Chris Cole*