

North Devon Pioneer Environmental Land Management Trial
Beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment theme
The Public Access Network sub theme

Response from the Devon Countryside Access Forum

Questions

Should this (enhanced access to and engagement with the natural and historic environment) be a particular priority for this area?

Enhanced access to and engagement with the natural and historic environment should be a priority in delivering an ELM trial.

In May 2018, the Devon Countryside Access Forum responded to the Defra consultation; Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit. It made the comment that “the Forum is agreed that access to the countryside should be one of the public goods to be considered in any future agricultural land management system and funding proposals. Access to green space, public rights of way and trails is increasingly proven to bring about health and wellbeing benefits.

If Yes, what aspects of this ELM objective do you think should be prioritised in this landscape area and why?

Public access should be one of the priorities in this landscape area.

The maps for public access are helpful but it would be very useful if these could differentiate between different types of rights of way: footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. The type of existing public right of way will influence suggestions for improvements and have a bearing on what could be achieved for different user groups. Maps should also show the on and off-road recreational trails which may not have public right of way status and are not depicted as such, for example significant sections of the Tarka Trail are not on the maps and nor are some unsurfaced county roads which also have public access. Similarly, some land open to the public owned by other organisations is not included but these areas are very relevant if improvements are to be discussed. For example, Halsdon and Meeth Quarry nature reserves managed by the Devon Wildlife Trust and Wistlandpound Reservoir operated by the South West Lakes Trust.

Enhancing and improving access and, at the same time, supporting land managers financially is supported by the Devon Countryside Access Forum. If people can be encouraged to use their local access network this is beneficial for health and wellbeing.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum has produced several position statements (Local Development Frameworks and Major Developments 2015; Neighbourhood Plans 2016; Liaison with Land Managers rev.2016; Disability Access 2017 and

Greenspace 2019). Priorities taken from these highlight the aspects of this ELM objective where focus could be directed.

1. Consider the improvement or upgrading of routes, for example through surface improvement; design or improvements to meet the requirements of those with mobility needs; and upgrading to permit horse riding and cycle use. Where possible routes should be multi-use, allowing access for all users, in accordance with Devon County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan. <https://www.devon.gov.uk/prow/rights-of-way-improvement-plan/> (Multi-use means use by all users: walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and those using wheelchairs, mobility scooters or buggies). Surfaces and use of materials should be appropriate for the intended use and respect the character of the surrounding environment. For example, it may be appropriate to have a hard-tarmac surface for key routes for all users, including cyclists and disability users. Elsewhere, softer surfaces more in keeping with the environment could be adopted and allow use by other recreational access users such as horse riders;
2. consider improved links and connectivity to existing rights of way, trails and greenspace;
3. consider creating off-road routes within and between communities and to schools or other facilities to reduce car use;
4. seek to develop circular routes of varying lengths to encourage healthier lifestyles and minimise car use;
5. seek to secure the safety for rights of way users where routes meet or run alongside busy or dangerous roads;
6. give adequate consideration to the requirements of those with mobility needs in the design of new walking, cycling and multi-use routes, and in the improvement of existing routes;
7. provide new areas of greenspace and seek to improve biodiversity alongside such provision; and
8. protect and enhance heritage assets within new greenspace areas.

Whilst it is not anticipated that the provision of facilities associated with increased cycling to schools, places of employment and other community amenities will be included in the ELM scheme, it is nonetheless important to recognise these will influence take-up of cycling and could be encouraged as part of overall thinking about any project. These include safe and secure storage; changing, drying and hot drink facilities; and arrangements in schools to assist safe and regular cycling. Funding might be available through other sources.

The Forum has previously discussed access for dog owners, the most significant group. In some areas, dogs may need to be excluded for conservation reasons but equally there is a need for areas where dogs can be exercised off lead.

Landscape considerations should be thought about when developing new routes or any associated car parking.

Please list any key datasets or reports that evidence your view

Please find position statements attached.

Rationale for targeting areas and/or any thoughts on whether appropriate/feasible to identify target areas for this particular ELM outcome. If not, should delivery be targeted in some other way?

It would be inappropriate for desire lines or target areas to be drawn on maps without first consulting landowners.

It should be possible to identify parishes where the level of access provision, either linear or area, is poor or where the connectivity between routes could be improved to provide a better experience.

Landowners need to be aware of the legal possibilities and options, for example whether to create a permissive path; dedicate a route through agreement with the Parish Council (Highways Act, section 30) or seek a Creation Agreement with Devon County Council under the Highways Act 1980, section 25. As outlined in the position statement there are other things to be considered such as impact on any grants previously received; maintenance and insurance liability; land management considerations; farm tenant matters and so on. Whether landowners or land managers are interested in an ELM scheme will much depend on the financial options available for installation and maintenance and the legal and liability criteria that are established. From a land management and environmental perspective there might be a maximum capacity on certain routes/areas, or restrictions might be needed at certain times of year.

A clear methodology needs to be established for determining access priorities and funding. This should include not only new access, but existing access and the public benefits gained from that.

Please identify how you feel the priorities you have identified above could best be delivered in the local area. We are not looking for a high level of detail here, more for general principles or ideas (for example where you feel landscape scale projects are required to deliver the required outcome, or if there are sites/situations where land management could be particularly effective in delivering multiple outcomes).

The priorities could best be delivered by liaison with appropriate groups, for example Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Plan or Parish Paths Partnership (P3) groups, where these are active. Improvements to access might already have been identified at a local level. The earliest possible discussion with landowners is imperative in this process.

Encouraging a group of landowners to work together on a landscape scale has potential, as was identified in the DCAF response to the Health and Harmony consultation. This could offer new and improved opportunities; longer circular or multi-use routes, or routes linking places to eat or tourist attractions. New access which extends over parish or holding boundaries or which links to urban centres could deliver enhanced opportunities.

From the functional access perspective, safe routes to schools and other facilities could assist in reducing car use and encouraging physical activity.

Where possible, enhanced access should seek to deliver the maximum benefits for health and wellbeing, different user groups and the economy, whilst balancing other considerations such as environmental and land management requirements and health and safety needs.

How do you think local stakeholders should be involved in setting local priorities for ELM?

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