



Devon Countryside Access Forum
c/o Public Rights of Way team
Great Moor House
Bittern Road
Sowton
EXETER EX2 7NL
Tel: 07837 171000

hilary.winter@devon.gov.uk

www.devon.gov.uk/dcaf

Mr D Roberts Bsc (Hons) MRTPI
Principal Planning Officer- Central Team
East Devon District Council
Blackdown House
Border Road,
Heathpark Industrial Estate,
Honiton, EX14 1EJ

15 November 2020

Dear Mr Roberts

20/2089/MFUL – Lower Otter Restoration Project

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 and this includes East Devon District Council and the Environment Agency.

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.

This response will be on the agenda for formal approval at the next Devon Countryside Access Forum meeting on 21 January 2021. The Forum’s position statements, and previous advice, support the following observations.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum notes and welcomes the fact that many of its comments made in 2014 have been taken on board in the proposals for this project. The Forum recognises that without action some of the important and very popular recreational routes could be lost in future due to rising sea levels.

The Forum is not commenting on the environmental, habitat and landscape changes which are likely to be significant and will provide a different experience. It is

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.

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nonetheless important that people's overall enjoyment of this area from the recreational access perspective is not diminished.

Scheme access improvements

The Devon Countryside Access Forum has some suggestions which could improve the recreational access benefit of the project and these are outlined below. The numbers refer to the scheme overview graphic:

1. Shingle bar (number 10)

This circular walk is relatively level and enjoyed by people who cannot walk far as it gives both sea and estuary views. The Forum notes the intention to remove the path on the rear of the shingle spit and to shorten the path on the crest. It would be appreciated if a way could be found to provide a short circular walk at this point.

2. New South West Coast Path footpath bridge

The Devon Countryside Access Forum welcomes the accessibility of this bridge and the proposed gradients to join it. However, the graphic 3.6 – Pedestrian footbridge parapet detail - looks too enclosed for children or people using wheelchairs or mobility scooters to enjoy the views. The Forum requests that consideration is given to 'vision ports', gaps in the cladding, or use of see-through materials to overcome this.

3. Viewing areas

The erection of viewing areas at several locations is supported. However, it is unclear whether these will include seating areas. This would be helpful for people wishing to sit and enjoy the views

4. Gates

The changes proposed provide an opportunity to ensure that all gates are accessible. The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that widths should be 1.5m and gates should open easily on the correct alignment. Correct hinges should be used plus, preferably, trombone handles to facilitate easy opening. Gradients approaching the gates should permit easy access and surfaces compacted enough to allow use of pushchairs or wheeled mobility vehicles. The Devon Countryside Access Forum's position statement on disability is attached (Appendix 1) and, as cited in the statement, the Disabled Ramblers' website has comprehensive information on standards. [Disabled Ramblers - Least Restrictive Access](#)

Reference is made to a 'pedestrian gate' north of South Farm Road at the start of Otterton FP 1. It is important that this meets accessibility standards, taking into account land manager's concerns about livestock.

5. South Farm Road chicanes

The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that the chicanes should be of appropriate design to allow mobility vehicles through

6. Budleigh Salterton FP 12 (FAB Link route) (number 27)

The Devon Countryside Access Forum notes the proposals to increase the height of this route and make it 'an all-ability' surface. It would be helpful to

define 'all-ability'. The addition of boardwalks or raising the ground levels may be required to ensure this route is available more frequently and not just in "the majority of tidal conditions".

The Devon Countryside Access Forum notes that the National Cycle Network route crosses South Farm Road before using the road network to approach Budleigh Salterton. As part of this significant project, it would seem an ideal opportunity to assess whether cyclists could be provided with an off-road route through this new landscape. The Forum recommends that Budleigh Salterton FP 12 could be a cycle/shared use route linking South Farm Road at the western end to Lime Kiln car park, with a safe exit onto Salting Hill/Granary Lane, subject to consideration of design and width and involvement of project partners and Fab Link. The Cycle Tracks Act 1984 could be a mechanism to achieve this. Cyclists could be directed this way on an improved path, rather than the current situation where cyclists attempt to use Budleigh Salterton FP 2 as an illegal cut-through.

7. Otterton to White Bridge

Although it falls just outside the planning application area, the Devon Countryside Access Forum aspires to create an accessible route along Otterton FP 1 to exit at Otterton.

Matters in the planning application requiring further consideration

The Forum has some concerns which it feels need to be addressed or expanded on.

a) Planning application processes

To minimise disruption to the public rights of way network and the South West Coast Path, the Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that it is imperative for the Lower Otter Valley Restoration Project and the Fab Link Project to work closely together and, in particular, to ensure the continuity and resilience of Budleigh Salterton FP 12. The Forum has made suggestions to improve this route in point 6, above. All works relevant to this area of land should have been presented for consideration at the same time, so that consultees and members of the public could assess the overall impact and have confidence that proposals in the application could be achieved.

b) Car park (number 9)

The footpaths along this valley are particularly well-used and some of the most popular in the County. The Devon Countryside Access Forum welcomes the new car park but is not convinced that it will provide the number of spaces required, particularly if new visitors are attracted by the new landscape and parking is no longer permitted on South Farm Road. At certain times of year provision of car parking may be insufficient and the Forum suggests that additional car parking could be made available on a section of the old landfill site.

c) Breach of the Big Bank and Little Bank (numbers 3 and 4)

The resilience of the footpath network across the banks is unclear. The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that the proposals to lower the footpaths at these points could lead to significant amounts of fluvial and high tide deposits. The accumulation of mud and other debris at regular intervals

will add significantly to maintenance costs as well as meaning that the routes could be impassable, particularly for pushchairs and mobility scooters/wheelchairs. The current tidal footpath near Topsham is unusable for much of the time.

The use of higher-level boardwalks, allowing water underneath, could be one option to explore although the Forum recognises these would also have to be maintained. These have been used on the Exe Estuary trail. Long term maintenance funding should be explored and incorporated as part of the project cost.

d) East Budleigh FP 3, western edge of Northern Big Marsh (number 20)

The Devon Countryside Access Forum has concerns about the provision of refuges in times of high tide. Some members of the public may not read emergency warning notices or be aware of how quickly tide levels can change or the speed of water. Many people are unaware of tide times. It is not clear whether the refuges would be required every high tide or only in exceptionally high tides. Equally, it is unclear whether the raised path levels will accommodate the highest projected levels of freshwater and tidal water.

Securing safe higher ground access routes over private land will need to take into account land management requirements and be extremely well-signed. Gates would need to be suitable for all users.

e) Temporary diversions

As previously stated, these are very popular paths, with 250,000 people annually using the South West Coast Path (SWCP) at this point. The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that temporary diversions during construction work need to be well-signed and promoted and kept to the minimum possible time.

The Design and Access Statement states that the diversion of the SWCP route during construction of the new pedestrian bridge will be along Budleigh Salterton FP 12 and FP 3. It is not entirely clear how the timing of the restoration project and the FAB Link project work on these footpaths will occur to facilitate this.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum would welcome feedback on its comments.

Yours sincerely



Hilary Winter
Forum Officer

Response sent on behalf of the Devon Countryside Access Forum

*Chair: Sarah Slade
Vice Chair: Chris Cole*