

CLYST VALLEY REGIONAL PARK MASTERPLAN QUESTIONNAIRE

East Devon District Council

Devon Countryside Access Forum response – submitted online

A. VISION

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with our vision and values for a Clyst Valley Regional Park. If anything less than strongly agree, please tell us how you would improve the vision and values.

Strongly agree	
Tend to agree	x
Neither agree or disagree	
Tend to disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

The Devon Countryside Access Forum welcomes the aspiration to provide additional green space and linear routes in the area to the East of Exeter and connectivity between different projects. The overarching intention and initiatives are worthy of strong support and the Masterplan includes good objectives. The Forum's comments relate specifically to the access elements which fall within its remit.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum does have concerns about the term Regional Park. It feels this is a misnomer and could lead to high expectations from the public who may expect to access all the area and have a park type experience. Much of the area is private land including working farms, some tenanted. It is also problematic if not all projects are achievable. The coronavirus pandemic has led to many new users accessing the countryside so the concept, and where land is accessible, needs to be clearly understood.

The core values should be amended to include one focussing on community and personal health and wellbeing and how this should influence and guide project development.

The Vision needs to be long term and include an ongoing investment in education and community engagement and ensuring all open spaces and routes in the area are well maintained in perpetuity.

It would have been helpful to have the separate delivery plan for the Clyst Valley Trail at this juncture.

B. OBJECTIVES

2. Do you agree or disagree with our objectives for the Clyst Valley Regional Park. If you disagree with any of the objectives, please tell us why and how you would improve them. For more information see the draft Masterplan 2020 – 2040

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
To enhance the health and well-being of residents by creating a network of walking and cycling routes linking home, work, school and high-quality green space.			x
To protect internationally important wildlife sites, increase the amount and quality of high priority natural habitat, and the populations of key species.			x
To increase the absorption of greenhouse gases through land use management and change.			x
To achieve good water quality in the River Clyst and tributaries and enhance natural flood storage.			x
To restore landscape character and promote local distinctiveness and to maintain the high landscape setting of Killerton.		x	
To protect historic sites, buildings and landscapes and restore them for public enjoyment.		x	
To increase and sustain jobs through diversification of rural businesses.			x

As a whole the objectives are laudable, but the Devon Countryside Access Forum would welcome additional information and a survey question about outcomes and precisely how success will be measured, rather than vague performance indicators. The objectives are written more tightly than the Vision and Core Values, but some big questions remain unanswered.

The projects include little by way of new land but include plenty of new footpaths and connections. The Devon Countryside Access Forum disagreed with the statement about Killerton and the one on protecting historic sites, buildings and landscapes as it felt these were current projects in progress that were not being provided specifically by this project. These might need to be re-worded. For example, it is not entirely clear whether the statement about landscape and Killerton refers just to Killerton or the whole Masterplan area.

It is vitally important that people are able to access the network of walking and cycling routes directly from communities such as Cranbrook.

3. Please tell us about any objectives you would add.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that the objectives should include one about educating users in responsible use of the countryside. This could be added to the 'People' objective.

C. FUNDING STRATEGY

4. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with how we're proposing to pay for the Clyst Valley Regional Park. If anything less than strongly agree, please tell us how you think it can be funded differently.**

Strongly agree	
Tend to agree	X
Neither agree nor disagree	
Tend to disagree	
Strongly disagree	
Don't know	

The list incorporates the main agencies available to fund whole or part projects in the area.

5. **Please tell us about any other sources of funding that you think we've missed in our funding strategy:**

The document does not necessarily miss sources of funding, but it is important to ensure that applications for funding do not miss essential elements. As the Devon Countryside Access Forum has mentioned on many occasions, the future maintenance of both green space and linear routes is critical to their success as outdoor space that people will enjoy using over a long period of time. Standards need to be good and consistent. The maintenance is critical, particularly for boardwalks, surfacing and other access scheme elements within flood plain areas (40% of the proposed park area). It is often easier to get capital money to develop a project, but mechanisms need to be considered for long term maintenance, whether this is a Trust Fund, some form of management company or local authority involvement. This needs to be established at the outset.

It would be interesting to know how many projects will be funded by developer contributions and whether some of the projects are in fact providing green space which should be part of developer contributions. The Devon Countryside Access Forum visited Cranbrook in 2016 and at that time there was talk about a link north to Killerton.

The funding strategy should include consideration of any interpretation projects and works agreed with landowners who allow a route across their land.

6. **We're thinking about setting up a not-for-profit organisation to help support delivery of the Clyst Valley Regional Park. This might help us to create and manage more greenspace and trails for the public. How much would you be willing to pay per year to support this not-for-profit organisation?**

It is not possible to answer this question but it does convey the message that there is a cost. A not-for-profit organisation is useful in accessing funding.

D. THE PROJECTS

7. Please tell us the codes of the projects that you think should be our top priority:

It is difficult to answer without overarching principles to determine which projects have the greatest impact in terms of aspirations and delivery, enhancing quality of life and other important considerations. There is a need for some kind of filter or sieve to try and work through the projects and prioritise them to ensure the best access to quality green space and routes. The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that there is the danger that what's deliverable is achieved, rather than necessarily the best projects to fulfil the key criteria.

8. If you disagree with any of the projects, please:

- give the project code
- tell us why you disagree
- tell us of any improvements you would make to that project

No answer

9. Please tell us about any comments you have on any of the other projects. Please make sure you include the project code.

The purpose of the Masterplan states that "*it does not describe projects in detail but lists potential projects.*" In fact, there is a lot of detail.

The access elements of the Masterplan include the Clyst Valley trail which will be achieved through permissive paths, quiet lanes, minor roads and upgrades to existing footpaths. The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that a road safety audit and multi-use audit is required to ensure that the Clyst Valley Trail route is safe and usable for all users, including disability users and horse-riders. One of the core values refers to the proposals being "inclusive for everyone" and "multi-use where practical and achievable." The projects should seek to achieve the highest possible benefits for all users and this should be made clear in funding applications and in negotiations with affected landowners and tenants. Equally, a multi-use audit is required on other land, such as Daneshill Wood, Ashclyst Forest and Bishops Court to ensure these sites are accessible and issues of access are resolved. Where multi-use cannot be achieved there needs to be confidence from the public that it has been assessed.

The principle of a Clyst Valley Trail from Topsham to Killerton is a great aspiration. There are some concerns about practical issues, for example the narrowness of some paths, where paths meet roads, concrete ramps on farmland and path furniture such as stiles and gates which would impede disability access and horse riders. The Forum expects that these matters will be resolved in the course of compiling the Clyst Valley Trail delivery plan. Paths on the National Trust land at Ashclyst will require work to provide a good standard for the potential volume and different type of user. Use of Ashclyst Forest would undoubtedly be significantly higher than at present.

The connectivity between access routes is key and fundamental to the success of this. Some projects are very aspirational, some are readily achievable, and others have already been completed.

Not all routes have legal status as public rights of way or any certainty of prolonged use. A number of permissive paths are suggested; projects CA1, CCC2, BC and PPC. Where these can be agreed with landowners, they can be helpful in filling gaps in access where it cannot be achieved through other means. Discussions should take place with landowners / managers at the earliest stage in the process. It is very important that agreements are made about standards and maintenance on permissive paths to try and achieve consistent standards.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum notes the large number of routes termed 'traffic-free'. To ensure that expectations are not raised, it would be helpful for much greater clarity on these routes as 'traffic-free' would indicate a complete absence of motorised traffic. If routes are to be promoted to the public seeking to access green space, trails and public rights of way in the 'park' area, then people need confidence about what to expect and that routes are of a consistent standard. Details on how improved access and shared use has been pragmatically assessed to ensure safe and inclusive use would be helpful. The project should aim to benefit the maximum number of users including walkers, cyclists (including family groups), dog walkers, disability access users and horse riders. Those 'traffic-free' routes need to be audited accordingly to ascertain whether they can be segregated multi-use 'off-road trails' or, if horse use cannot be accommodated, segregated cycle/walking lanes. The Sustrans guide <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/for-professionals/infrastructure/walking-and-cycling-infrastructure-design-guidance/> and existing good practice for multi-use trail development within Devon County Council will assist in this process.

Several projects mention footpaths or bridleways and, in some instances, upgrades to a bridleway or to form part of the Clyst Valley Trail (projects CCC5, LC, CA2). The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that consideration needs to be given to the legal process and aspects such as surfacing to ensure access for all users. Projects should not seek to benefit individual businesses which might not be sustainable in the long run, for example the proposed bridleway WLM.

The projects mention Quiet Lanes (Projects BASH, CA1, CA2, CB1, CRAIR, CWH1, KASH, PSC, SP and WEX). This is a legal process allowing speed limits and signage and can be objected to. Many of the minor roads in that area are used as 'rat runs' and not necessarily safe routes for a promoted trail. This is where a Road Safety audit would be particularly helpful.

One of the projects (SL) refers to green lane when it is in fact an unsurfaced, unclassified, county road which is ambiguous as that route would be available for motorised users too.

The Forum advises that the Masterplan should make the connections between projects clearer.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that elements of the projects overall could potentially lead to anti-social behaviour on routes and land. This aspect has not been fully considered and there is no mention of dog ownership and responsibilities. Encouraging use

by the public and campaigns aimed at health improvements and general well-being, as well as responsible use of the countryside and trails, could be assisted by a warden/ranger. A warden was previously in post in Cranbrook and this type of initiative should be long-term.

10. If there are any other projects you'd like to see added in, please tell us about them:

No answer.