



**Devon Countryside Access Forum**  
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## **Natural England Countryside Code refresh**

### **Devon Countryside Access Forum response – January 2021**

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a statutory local access forum set up under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000. Its members are volunteers, appointed by Devon County Council, to provide independent advice on “the improvement of public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment”. Section 94(4) of the Act specifies bodies to whom the Forum has a statutory function to give advice, one of which is Natural England.

The DCAF currently has fifteen members 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 the Countryside Code refresh at its public meeting on 21 January. This response constitutes formal advice from the Forum and Natural England is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the CRoW Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this Forum in carrying out its functions.

Forum members agreed to submit some specific points and not answer the many questions in the survey.

#### **1) Awareness of the Countryside Code**

It was agreed that the Countryside Code is not terribly well-known. Even amongst Forum members there was a varying degree of knowledge about the short and long code.

#### **2) Respect-Protect-Enjoy**

On balance, the Devon Countryside Access Forum thought the strapline should be abandoned. The language is unclear and people may interpret words in several ways. Users of the countryside are not necessarily sure what they are supposed to ‘respect’ or ‘protect’ and those words have different connotations for

different people. A short list of 'dos and 'don'ts' was felt necessary because there can be huge ignorance about how to behave in the countryside and getting people to enjoy it is not really the issue. Enjoy may be the overriding message in people's minds. Unfortunately, the phrase 'right to roam' has also been taken out of context and is now interpreted as going where you want.

### **3) Education and promotion**

The starting point in reviewing the Code should be how people will learn about it, how it will be communicated, and what key messages should be put across to ensure an enjoyable time in greenspace (linear and area) that minimises impacts on landowners/managers and their crops and livestock, and nature. Given that it is estimated that 9m adults in the UK are functionally illiterate, it is essential that ways of promoting the Code are examined initially by Natural England. Good graphic messages, as in the earlier collaboration with Aardman Animations, are useful.

A short simple code should be the initial aspiration, which provides very clear and focussed messages about what behaviour is acceptable and the need to behave with courtesy and responsibility. This should be easy to read in a clear font. Members thought the original Country Code in 1981 with its twelve key messages is less confusing than the newer short and long Countryside Code versions. There is a danger that if the refreshed code tries to incorporate too many themes it will be too lengthy and just not read.

One of the Devon Countryside Access Forum members, who has been an assessor at all levels for the Duke of Edinburgh scheme for many years, always has a pre-expedition session with every group which includes questions about the Country Code. He has never had a group unable to quote from the 1981 version of the code and, moreover, they understand why the points are important.

The beauty of some short, simple messages is that they can be affixed to a post on site or easily read on a mobile device. As an aspect of citizenship education, schools could be encouraged to ensure children know key messages. Social media and influencers, as well as TV programmes about the countryside, are all ways in which a clear code could be communicated to the public.

The 1981 Country Code messages were:

- *Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work*
- *Guard against all risk of fire*
- *Leave all gates as you found them*
- *Keep your pets under close control*
- *Keep to public paths across farmland*
- *Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls*
- *Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone*

- *Take your litter home*
- *Help to keep all water clean*
- *Protect wildlife, plants and trees*
- *Take special care on country roads*
- *Make no unnecessary noise*

These remain good essential messages but might have to be modernised with some changes to wording to be clearer and less ambiguous for example 'do not cause fires' instead of 'guard against all risk of fire' and 'do not damage wildlife, plants and trees' instead of 'protect wildlife, plants and trees'.

Feedback on the Devon Countryside Access Forum's comments would be appreciated.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to make contact.

Hilary Winter  
Forum Officer

*Response sent on behalf of the Devon Countryside Access Forum*

*Chair: Sarah Slade*

*Vice Chair: Chris Cole*

Revised Countryside Code (front and reverse)  
April 2021

The  
Countryside  
Code



Your guide to enjoying parks and  
waterways, coast and countryside

### Respect everyone

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- be considerate to those living in, working in and enjoying the countryside
- leave gates and property as you find them
- do not block access to gateways or driveways when parking
- be nice, say hello, share the space
- follow local signs and keep to marked paths unless wider access is available

### Protect the environment

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- take your litter home - leave no trace of your visit
- take care with BBQs and do not light fires
- always keep dogs under control and in sight
- dog poo - bag it and bin it - any public waste bin will do
- care for nature - do not cause damage or disturbance

### Enjoy the outdoors

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- check your route and local conditions
- plan your adventure - know what to expect and what you can do
- enjoy your visit, have fun, make a memory

[www.gov.uk/countryside-code](http://www.gov.uk/countryside-code)



# The Countryside Code



## Follow advice and local signs

In some cases, additional higher rights of access or permissive access could exist.

### Footpath



### Bridleway



### Restricted Byway



### Byway open to all traffic



### Permissive Path

Follow advice on local signs as landowners voluntarily provide access to these paths and choose who can use them. Some open access areas are also made available in the same way.



### National Trail

National Trails are created for walking, with horse-riding and cycling possible on some trails or trail sections.

[www.nationaltrail.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk)



### Open Access

You can walk and explore away from paths.

[www.openaccess.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.openaccess.naturalengland.org.uk)

For further information visit [www.gov.uk/countryside-code](http://www.gov.uk/countryside-code)