



Devon Countryside Access Forum

c/o Public Rights of Way Team
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Ms A Oliver
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30 April 2021

Dear Ms Oliver

NORTHBROOK APPROACH CONSULTATION RESPONSE

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 City Councils.

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 considered this consultation at its meeting on 27 April. The Forum welcomed the excellent consultation document and its laudable objectives, particularly the number of potential initiatives and evident benefits for health and well-being. The proposals for mixed use and the proposed ‘range of features’ to make the park as attractive as possible to a broad cross-section of people and the local community are welcomed. Northbrook Approach also provides

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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an important strategic link to Ludwell Valley Park and Riverside Valley Park and therefore offers considerable potential to achieve wider gains.

Detailed planning of the site, and development of specific projects, provide an opportunity to ensure that lessons are learnt from other green spaces in the City and elsewhere.

The Forum advises that the following should be considered as part of further deliberations on the future use of the site:

1. Disability access

The consultation document makes brief reference to more accessible paths but does not specifically make reference to mobility scooter and wheelchair access. It is important that the design of gates and bridges is factored in at the outset, together with funding to change any existing structures or obstacles. A mobility scooter route could be part of design proposals and improvements.

Kissing gates prevent access to much of Ludwell Valley Park yet Northbrook Park offers the potential to create new mobility scooter routes from the River Exe up to this area.



Inaccessible kissing gate

It is estimated that by 2030 one in five people in the UK (21.8%) will be aged over 65. In Exeter the estimate is 18.4% but adjacent authorities have figures going up to 33.8% (East Devon) (Office for National Statistics Subnational population projections for England - Office for National Statistics) More people will be using modern mobility scooters with increased range and durability for a wide range of reasons including recreation. The Forum advises that Northbrook Park should have minimal kissing gates or other obstructions and that improvements to path furniture should be made at adjacent parks to provide greater accessibility.

The Forum's position statement on Disability Access is attached for information.

2. Finance

There are clear initial and long-term funding implications for this project but there are no indications as to the sources of this funding. The Forum advises that it would be helpful to identify not only funding but also potential partnerships and timescales for works.

3. Health and wellbeing

The COVID-19 lockdowns encouraged people to exercise locally and numbers using local parks and rights of way have increased significantly. Such benefits should be available to all sections of the community, including the physically disabled.

4. Education

The project provides an excellent opportunity to educate users about responsible use of green space.

The Forum would recommend that on-site rangers are part of the project plan to assist in realising the ambition of “engaging with hundreds of thousands more people in greenspaces around the city.”

5. Public Rights of Way and the Green Circle

Plans for improving Northbrook Park should recognise the existing public rights of way and the Green Circle route.

6. Wildlife and access

The Forum recognises that people may have different wishes with regard to the proportion of wildlife areas and more tidy or developed parts of the park. The Forum advises that there should be a balance between re-wilding and ensuring good public access through dedicated space. With the evident growth of interest in the countryside it is important that the park and its paths are not urbanised. The more natural areas and wildlife corridors present part of the experience and enjoyment.

7. Dog walking

Providing and improving green space areas inevitably means that the park will be very popular with dog walkers, particularly as dogs have increased in number during lockdown. The Forum advises that there may be scope to have areas in the park where dogs are less welcome.

8. Connections

The Forum welcomes improved and strengthened connections between Northbrook and the adjacent valley parks, including safe crossing of Topsham Road.

The Forum looks forward to seeing further plans for the area. In the meantime it would appreciate feedback on its comments.

Yours sincerely



Hilary Winter
Forum Officer

c.c. Exeter City Council

*Letter sent on behalf of the Devon Countryside Access Forum
Chair: Sarah Slade
Vice Chair: Chris Cole*