

Response ID ANON-WMVF-C55P-W

Submitted to Government response to the Landscapes Review
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About you

1 Do you want your responses to be confidential?

No

If yes, please give your reason::

2 What is your name?

Name:
Devon Countryside Access Forum

3 What is your email address?

Email:
hilary.winter@devon.gov.uk

4 Where are you located?

South West

5 Which of the following do you identify yourself as?

Other

If other, please identify below::

Devon Countryside Access Forum (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 list includes district councils. 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.

A stronger mission for nature recovery

6 Should a strengthened first purpose of protected landscapes follow the proposals set out in Chapter 2?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer: :

7 Which other priorities should be reflected in a strengthened first purpose e.g. climate, cultural heritage?

Please give us your views:

Agricultural transition

8 Do you support any of the following options as we develop the role of protected landscapes in the new environmental land management schemes? Tick all that apply.

9 Do you have any views or supporting evidence you would like to input as we develop the role of protected landscapes in the new environmental land management schemes?

Please give us your views:

The new environmental land management schemes need to address more than protected landscapes. Access should be an important component of such schemes.

A stronger mission for connecting people and places

10 Should AONBs have a second purpose relating to connecting people and places, equivalent to that of National Parks?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer: :

Devon has five AONBs which already provide important recreational access opportunities.

However, strengthening the purposes of AONBs would mean that staffing and funding would need to be increased to ensure that there are people on the ground with the appropriate skills to educate people in understanding and enjoying AONBs. These areas and landscapes require different messages to be conveyed as they often lack substantial open access areas. Understanding the cultural heritage of AONBs is vital as these are living, working environments, albeit set in outstanding landscapes. It is critical that funding comes from central Government and that individual AONBs and associated trusts are not responsible for raising core funding.

The Government response to the Landscapes Review specifies working with the Probation Service and schools. The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that many others need to be included such as user groups and organisational bodies from students to U3A groups, including those who do not traditionally use the countryside, as everyone needs educating regardless of age or other defining criteria. There needs to be much more joined-up working so that the same messages are conveyed on websites and in other material. Responsible user groups are in a position to lead on some aspects of education.

The AONBs would need to have the capacity to carry out enforcement, as in National Parks. The Devon Countryside Access Forum is concerned that the Ranger role has become more confrontational and this needs to be addressed in accompanying bylaws and regulations.

It is important that there is the appropriate level of support and funding to ensure that there are not unintended consequences of any changes to purposes.

11 Should a strengthened second purpose of protected landscapes follow the proposals set out in Chapter 3 to improve connections to all parts of society with our protected landscapes?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer: :

12 Are there any other priorities that should be reflected in a strengthened second purpose?

Please give us your views:

While the document refers to removing barriers to access, the detail is not given. This is an essential part of opening up the benefits of the National Parks and AONBs to people who do not currently access these landscapes. Barriers to access include:

- Physical barriers such as path furniture which may impede use by those with mobility issues.
- Sustainable travel. Funding of public transport and safe routes to these areas to allow people to travel by non-motorised means are critical.
- Lack of awareness. Communication, marketing and promotion are very important to ensure people are aware of National Parks and AONBs and how they can access these areas. Education about use of the countryside, respect for its people, environment and animals and understanding of the countryside code is vital in any efforts to encourage greater use and minimise conflict. Knowing how to use the countryside is where confidence comes to use it.
- Financial, psychological and cultural barriers.

Managing visitor pressures

13 Do you support any of the following options to grant National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority greater enforcement powers to manage visitor pressures? Tick all that apply.

Please give reasons for your answer: :

Currently no-one in AONBs has the authority to impose the above as these are responsibilities of local authorities and their governance process. If AONBs are to acquire the same status as National Parks, then this matter needs to be considered. This would require additional funding.

The role of local authorities and National Parks currently works well in applying Traffic Regulation Orders. This is an established system and could be improved where there are some imperfections. To grant National Park Authorities greater enforcement powers could mean that this relationship breaks down, particularly as National Park boundaries are arbitrary, and a TRO imposed by the NPA could have impacts across a wider area that were unintended.

In terms of whether NPAs should be granted additional powers is a matter for the National Park Local Access Forums to consider.

14 Should we give National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority and local highway authorities additional powers to restrict recreational motor vehicle use on unsealed routes?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer: :

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is of the opinion that there is currently adequate provision in controlling use in National Parks as it stands. The issue is frequently not use of legitimate roads but on areas that are not roads, for example use of moorland by motorbikes. This use is difficult to stop.

Responsible recreational motor users try to exert an influence over less responsible users.

Motor vehicle users in Devon have access to around 50 miles of byways open to all traffic and about 365 miles of unsurfaced unclassified county roads (uUCRs). This is out of a total network of public rights of way and uUCRs of around 3,479 miles.

If greater use is made of Traffic Regulation Orders this is likely to displace people to other routes which could then experience greater problems.

It is important to keep the dialogue open with motor vehicle user groups

15 For which reasons should National Park Authorities, the Broads Authority and local authorities exercise this power? (select all that apply)

Other (please state):

Traffic Regulation Orders were initially designed for roads not in good repair. The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that there may be gaps in the TRO regulations which could offset some problems, where these are real and not perceived. For example, use of TROs on a seasonal basis, to restrict larger vehicles or for reasons of safety.

16 Should we legislate to restrict the use of motor vehicles on unsealed unclassified roads for recreational use, subject to appropriate exemptions?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer::

The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that a more nuanced approach rather than a blanket one is required. Responsible users should not be disadvantaged by those less responsible.

User groups should be encouraged to get involved in maintenance and repair, in partnership with highway authorities. This engenders more responsible use and a sense of ownership and is helpful in educating others.

There might need to be changes specifying the circumstances in which restrictions should be applied and how.

17 What exemptions do you think would be required to protect the rights and enjoyment of other users e.g., residents, businesses etc?

Please give us your views:

It is important that any use of power to restrict rights continues to protect the rights of those who legitimately need to go down those routes for example landowners, residents, and other recreational users such as horse riders and walkers.

The role of AONB teams in planning

18 What roles should AONBs teams play in the plan-making process to achieve better outcomes?

Please give us your views:

19 Should AONB teams be made statutory consultees for development management?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer::

20 If yes, what type of planning applications should AONB teams be consulted on?

Not Answered

Other (please state):

Local governance

21 Which of the following measures would you support to improve local governance? Tick all that apply.

Other (please state):

Please give reasons for your answer: :

A clearer role for public bodies

22 Should statutory duties be strengthened so that they are given greater weight when exercising public functions?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer: :

23 Should statutory duties be made clearer with regards to the role of public bodies in preparing and implementing management plans?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer: :

General power of competence

24 Should National Parks Authorities and the Broads Authority have a general power of competence?

Not Answered

Please give reasons for your answer: :

Overall

25 If you have any further comments on any of the proposals in this document, please include them here.

Please give us your views:

Sustainable transport

The Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that much greater joined-up thinking on public transport is required to ensure that barriers in terms of cost and distance do not preclude significant sections of the population from enjoying protected landscapes. This may require public subsidy to achieve this.

There are substantial housing developments currently taking place just outside Protected Landscapes and there should be greater thought given by planning authorities and developers to how these link to these areas, in terms of public transport and connecting trails for use by walkers, cyclists, horse riders and mobility scooter/wheelchair users. In some areas, particularly National Parks where public transport is less economic, it may be possible to link to commercial operators to encourage more transportation of walkers as well as cyclists.

Open access land

The Devon Countryside Access Forum has concerns from the land management perspective in extending open access uses that can place on such land. The behavioural problems and lack of responsibility evidenced during CoVID-19 could exacerbate issues for landowners.

In some areas, extending use may be both possible and desirable but the issue is how messages can be conveyed if there is not a blanket change in policy. Some areas may not be suitable for horse riding all year round for example. Communication is critical.

There is already much confusion over access land, exacerbated by the term 'right to roam', and changes are likely to be fraught with problems. Deciding on which additional uses to permit or exclude could also present issues. Regulation is needed to both protect and enforce activities on access land, with the necessary financial resources.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is unclear about how any changes will conflict with coastal access legislation. Again this is an area where there could be considerable confusion and people require simple, unambiguous messages to ensure use is legal and responsible.

The revised Countryside Code has been released and the Devon Countryside Access Forum would be interested to know whether any research has been done into whether this has raised awareness of its existence and impacted on behaviour.

National Trails

The Devon Countryside Access Forum would strongly support including the National Trails charity as a member of the new national landscapes partnership. This would improve communication and ensure the National Trails have a voice at the highest level.

Sustainable tourism

The Devon Countryside Access Forum supports initiatives to promote sustainable tourism. It notes the difficulties of achieving access to historic heritage. Cultural heritage should include consideration of the people who live and work in the Protected Landscapes.

Again, funding and support is required to deliver sustainable tourism at a significant level.