



**Devon Countryside Access Forum
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Planning Team
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5 May 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

Lower Otter Valley – planning application 22/0804/VAR

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 district councils and the Environment Agency.

The DCAF currently has nineteen 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.

Devon Countryside Access Forum members discussed the proposed project at the meeting held on 25 April.

Budleigh Salterton footpath 12 and East Budleigh footpath 3 are very popular footpaths in the Lower Otter Valley. The application states that the variation to the planning condition, raising the height of the footpaths, will reduce the tendency to flooding from an estimated 300 occasions per year to 20 occasions per year. This will significantly improve accessibility, particularly when accompanied by improved surfacing, path levelling and increased width.

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.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum notes that it is only proposed to establish a path width of 1.5m. The proposed improvement works provide an opportunity to be more ambitious by increasing this to at least 2m. The paths are very heavily used and likely to become more so, especially with the increase in dog ownership. Increasing the width to its maximum, rather than reducing to the minimum, would also help disabled users walking with others. For example, the Royal National Institute for the Blind recommends a minimum width of 1.5m for an adult with a guide dog. Allowing people to pass each other more easily would be beneficial.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum would like to register some concerns about the life of the sheet piling in a saline environment, and ongoing maintenance costs and work resulting from residual silt and mud and erosion on the path.

The Forum recognises that environmental permissions and constraints may change in the future, and this may affect the ability to maintain, repair or replace the engineered section of path. Ensuring that the proposed works have an extended lifespan would help mitigate these concerns. The proposals should explain how this would be achieved.

It is hoped that both the Lower Otter Restoration Project and the FAB project can be completed within the existing closure period of this footpath (to May 2023) to minimise further disruption and lack of access.

While not directly relevant to this planning application, the Devon Countryside Access Forum would encourage the Lower Otter Restoration Project to improve accessibility for mobility scooters/wheelchair users by removing or installing appropriate accessible path furniture on paths going north towards Otterton.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum would welcome feedback and updates on the development of this project.

Yours faithfully



Hilary Winter
Forum Officer

Letter sent on behalf of the Devon Countryside Access Forum

Chair: Sarah Slade

Vice Chair: Chris Cole