



**Devon Countryside Access Forum
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Ms L Holloway
Senior Transport Planning Officer
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Dear Ms Holloway

Clyst Valley Trail consultation

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 county and district councils, Natural England 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.

A small group of Devon Countryside Access Forum members visited locations associated with the Clyst Valley Trail proposals on 23 May. Discussions on site informed this response which has been circulated and agreed by the Forum. The response will be on the agenda for formal approval at the next meeting on 19 September.

The Forum has several general and site-specific comments which need to be taken into account in considering the route and more detailed design criteria.

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.

General comments

- Obtaining landowner consent to the trail and accommodating land management requirements is critical.
- The information refers to “a recreational trail for walkers, cyclists, mobility scooters and, where feasible, horse riders.” The design needs to reflect this laudable aspiration. A tarmac surface is less appealing for recreational access users and in particular horse riders. Furthermore, a tarmac surface is visually highly intrusive in the landscape and the Forum advises that a softer appearance is much more desirable, for example compacted bound stone. This would also reduce cycling speed which can be an issue on some trails.
- Additional detail is required on how the route fulfils multi-use objectives and not just commuting by experienced cyclists.
- Bridges, boardwalks and similar structures will need to be designed for all users, including horse riders, and the height and ramped sections are likely to more intrusive than in the past due to Environment Agency stipulations.
- Any path furniture, for example gates to meet land management requirements, will need to be fully accessible to meet disability needs and those of horse-riders. The Devon Countryside Access Forum’s Disability Access position statement is attached for information.
- Future design should consider the increasing size and width of mobility scooters that are coming on the market. Changes to existing Government regulations may need to be kept under review. Mobility scooters are not permitted to go on cycle paths marked ‘cycle only’. Scooters currently have width and weight restrictions. [Mobility scooters and powered wheelchairs: the rules: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mobility-scooters-and-powered-wheelchairs-the-rules-overview)
- The design of crossings is critically important to ensure safety and perceptions of the trail. There will need to be sufficient time to cross, possibly facilitated by countdown timers. This would be particularly helpful for family groups or inexperienced cyclists and mobility scooter users.
- As the trail is part of the Clyst Valley ‘Regional Park’, the proposals should extend wider and have the vision to include environmental improvements and areas of accessible green space alongside the trail so that it has a country park feel like the Grand Western Canal. This will also encourage people to use the trail for recreation, helping to meet legal requirements imposed on the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee to protect the internationally recognised sites of the Exe Estuary, the Pebblebed Heaths and Dawlish Warren from recreation pressure. If the emphasis of the trail is on commuting – invaluable though this is in reducing the carbon footprint – it will not achieve this wider ambition.
- There is a lack of clarity about widths and exactly where the additional grass verge of 2 metres will be put in place. While the grass verge is welcome, consideration needs to be given to the cost of maintaining this on a regular basis so that it can be used as an extension of the trail width.
- Although there are no linking bridleways, the Trail would provide opportunities for horse riders in the area to have new and valued access to off-road routes and quiet lanes provided traffic is appropriately managed.

- The proposal, especially the Clyst St Mary to Topsham section, is likely to incur very high maintenance costs and it would be helpful to clarify how the ongoing maintenance costs are being planned and budgeted for.
- It is disappointing that the trail vision was not incorporated in development plan proposals affecting the area east of Exeter and inbuilt from the outset.
- From the information provided, it is not entirely clear how the trail will link further north to Killerton and Ashclyst Forest.
- As part of overall budgets for the trail, it would be very helpful to include the appointment of a ranger to liaise with landowners and help to educate users about responsible use of the trail and the Countryside Code. This role could cover the Exe Estuary trail too.
- The trail should be clearly signed with occasional information boards where there are points of interest or to provide information on the trail and using it safely and responsibly.
- The online response form is not helpful as the questions refer mainly to route proposals and not more specific details such as surfacing. It would also have been useful if the maps had included public rights of way so that people could see the overall picture.

Site specific comments

Map 1

1. The Forum recognises that increased use of Mosshayne Lane, a private road, could lead to conflict with land management. The proposed diversion should reduce that. The diversion would require a legal application for an upgrade to bridleway status to permit cycling and horse use.
2. The Forum is disappointed that identified development land at West Clyst and Mosshayne has not included routes for this trail as part of the planning conditions for these sites. One option for the trail would be to proceed south, keeping west of the motorway and crossing under the motorway to join the existing cycle route along Tithebarn Lane.
3. The southern section of Mosshayne Lane (highway maintainable at public expense) is very narrow. Consideration needs to be given to reducing potential conflict with motor vehicles.
4. Comments about incorporating green space apply to this section, for example the areas closest to the railway line and woodland. The route will need to be sufficiently attractive to encourage people to use the diverted route instead of Mosshayne Lane.

Map 2

1. There did not appear to be easy options to divert the trail away from the farmyard. The proposed small diversion of the existing right of way is sub-optimal as it crosses water drains twice and these will need to be bridged by intrusive structures to ensure safe passage by all users and avoid flooding.
2. The existing footpath (Sowton FP3) currently provides a pleasant countryside walk through to Bishop's Clyst. A surfaced tarmac trail, whilst more usable by commuting cyclists, will impact on enjoyment and the visual appearance of that part of the Clyst Valley. A compacted, bound stone surface would be preferable.

Map 3

1. The Forum has serious concerns about the proposals for this section. The crossing at Winslade Park is deemed to be unsuitable without very significant investment in road design. There is insufficient space in the middle of the road for users to wait. If the trail is multi-use, the crossing should be a Pegasus Crossing and not a Toucan Crossing with a holding area or separated space for horses away from other users. Given the volume of traffic at this point from both directions, and an increasing quantity of traffic likely to emerge from the planned Winslade Park development, this is a dangerous crossing point. It is also likely to increase traffic congestion if additional signalling systems are introduced for non-motorised users.
2. The proposed route runs through the Clyst Valley following an undulating and windy route. The section of boardwalk to the north is at high risk of flooding and will be subject to increasingly high maintenance costs. Ensuring the entirety of the route is resilient for the future will be a high cost.
3. The Forum is of the opinion that the cycling options from Topsham to Exeter are well-provided for. There is the opportunity to take the route on the other side of the A376, thereby linking Clyst St Mary to the Exe Estuary trail through Clyst St George. This would avoid crossing at Winslade Park and would be a much cheaper option than the route across the floodplain. The Forum recommends that an alternative route through Bishop's Clyst, crossing the main Sidmouth Road into Church Lane is thoroughly investigated. This would link to an existing footpath (Clyst St Mary FP2). Minor roads lead to Clyst St George and a Pegasus Crossing could be put in place at this point, potentially going onward through the Fire Services site. This could pick up additional users from Woodbury and Woodbury Salterton. Where opportunities exist to create more off-road sections these should be explored.
4. It is likely there are more horse riders to the east of the A376 than along the Clyst valley and in the Topsham area. The British Horse Society will have information on the number of riders.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum strongly advises that consultation takes place on a revised scheme with additional information on surfacing and other design elements, such as traffic calming on on-road sections, before proceeding to Cabinet and the planning application stage.

The Forum would appreciate feedback on its comments.

Yours sincerely



Hilary Winter
Forum Officer

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