



**Devon Countryside Access Forum
c/o Public Rights of Way team
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Mr D Hayes
Level Crossing Manager
Network Rail
Weston-Super-Mare Depot
Station Approach
Weston-Super-Mare
BS23 1XY

20 February 2024

Dear Mr Hayes

Crossing at Sandy Lane, Rewe

Thank you very much for coming along to the Devon Countryside Access Forum meeting on 22 January. It was very helpful and useful to understand how Network Rail is improving the Sandy Lane crossing and the constraints and delays associated with this. Thank you for your message on 8 February confirming that the crossing has opened following assessments by the Civils and Telecommunications teams.

As you know, concerns were expressed at the meeting about the lack of a process to assess the suitability of Sandy Lane and any other crossing for disability access. On occasions it might well not be safe to permit disabled use, but the Devon Countryside Access Forum advises that Network Rail should adopt an agreed process and policy to explore this from the outset, including best practice procedures such as local consultation. This is in line with the duties under the Equality Act 2010 to anticipate the need to make reasonable adjustments for disabled users. The process should provide the evidence to support, or otherwise, the installation of accessible gates and appropriately timed warning mechanisms. If there is already such a policy document within Network Rail it would be helpful to have sight of this.

It would be appreciated if you could respond and also let the DCAF know whether this advice has been forwarded to the Network Rail policy or safety/risk assessment team.

At the meeting, the lack of consultation and liaison with the local community and in particular the Parish Council was noted. This would appear to be contrary to Network

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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Rail's published document entitled 'Enhancing Level Crossing Safety 2019-2029'. In the section on crossings (page 23), the importance of working with the community is highlighted in the following extract. "However, we must recognise the importance of community, and how our level crossings do, in some circumstances, allow communities to remain connected. We will continue to work with communities, private landowners and local authorities to find safer ways to cross the railway." The need for prior consultation at an early stage before closing or making changes to crossings is critical, and it would be appreciated if you could advise the Devon Countryside Access Forum, parish councils, community groups and landowners, as well as the highway authority, about any proposals affecting passive footpath, bridleway and user worked crossings and level crossings on roads. As part of these discussions, it is vital that Network Rail is open about the information and data used to justify changes/closures of crossings. Such evidence would have been particularly pertinent to the Sandy Lane crossing. This is important as it builds trust and confidence.

Members noted the length of time that this particular crossing has been closed. Given the importance of crossings to the access network, Network Rail should endeavour to close paths for the minimum period and should ensure that as much public access as possible remains open during any works. Where there are unavoidable delays, Network Rail should liaise with the groups consulted to advise them of the situation, providing a revised timetable of works.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum looks forward to receiving your comments.

Yours sincerely



Hilary Winter
Forum Officer

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

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 the Secretary of State for Transport.

The DCAF currently has seventeen 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.