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Devon Countryside Access Forum

Greenspace Position Statement

Introduction

The Devon Countryside Access Forum has developed this position statement to inform planning applications and planning policy.

A number of defined green spaces are recognised by Government. In the context of the Devon Countryside Access Forum's remit the main areas are:

- parks and gardens – including urban and country parks;
- natural and semi-natural green spaces – including woodlands, access land, grasslands, wetlands, areas of open and running water, beach and foreshore;
- green corridors – including canal and river banks, cycle ways, recreational trails and rights of way;
- amenity green space – including informal recreation spaces, green space in and around housing and town or village greens; and
- accessible countryside in urban fringe areas.

The National Planning Policy Framework identifies that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places. Green infrastructure is defined as a network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.

Greenspace is important for health and wellbeing, providing physical, psychological and social benefits. These benefits are increasingly researched and demonstrated, alongside economic benefits and savings to the NHS. Figures suggest that investing in accessible green space yields health and wellbeing benefits to residents and visitors that exceeds the cost of provision. For example, the former Fields in Trust commissioned research to value the benefits - see [fields-in-trust-revaluing-parks-and-green-spaces-summary.pdf](#) (greenflagaward.org) Public Health England advises that interventions that improve access to green spaces are likely to help local areas reduce health inequalities – see [Improving access to greenspace: 2020 review](#) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

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.



Greenspace provision

- a) Developers should seek to include a variety of greenspace that caters for different types of users.
- b) High quality walking and cycling routes should link housing to schools, shops, employment areas, recreational and sports facilities and rights of way.
- c) Circular routes within settlements should be developed to encourage healthier lifestyles and minimise car use.
- d) There should be a high degree of connectivity between greenspace areas.
- e) Where possible, the character and amenity of existing greenspace of good quality should be incorporated into the development.
- f) Maintaining and seeking improvements to biodiversity, alongside provision of greenspace, should be a key target.
- g) Heritage assets within greenspace areas should be protected and enhanced.
- h) Surfaces and use of materials should be appropriate for the intended use and respect the character of the surrounding environment. For example, it may be appropriate to have a hard tarmac surface for key routes for all users, including cyclists and disability users. Elsewhere, softer surfaces more in keeping with the environment could be adopted and allow use by other recreational access users such as horse riders.
- i) Greenspace should be perceived as safe with good lines of visibility. Lighting may be appropriate along certain paths. Areas should not encourage crime, fly-tipping or anti-social behaviour.
- j) Places for children, areas for quiet enjoyment and a variety of spaces such as woodland and water bodies should be incorporated.
- k) Dog walkers are the major access group. Consideration should be given to planning for dogs in new developments to reduce fouling issues. A useful reference for planning for dogs is [planningfordogownership.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](#)
- l) Any path furniture, such as gates, should be suitable for disability users. See the DCAF's position statement on disability access. www.devon.gov.uk/dcaf
- m) Resting places, such as benches, are an important part of 'furniture' and help to make green space more accessible and enjoyable to those with health/mobility challenges.
- n) Greenspace does not have to be fully accessible to provide health and well-being benefits as landscape views still have value.
- o) Provision of greenspace should consider the impact on adjoining areas not designated as amenity areas. For example, implications for farmed land which may experience trespass or dog incidents.
- p) The Management Plan for any development should recognise the intrinsic importance of the existing highway network (including public rights of way), verges and heritage features as assets for the public to appreciate the landscape and access other recreational opportunities. These assets are part of a Natural Capital approach, for example Devon is appreciated for its sunken lanes, hedgerows and verges rich in flora.

Amount of greenspace

Developers should aspire to meet the Natural England standards for accessible natural greenspace. These were revised in 2023. [Green Infrastructure Standards for England Summary \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

The Green Infrastructure Headline Standards states everyone should have access to good quality green and blue spaces close to home for health and wellbeing and contact with nature, to meet the Accessible Greenspace Standards, with an initial focus on access to green and blue spaces within 15 minutes' walk from home.

The Accessible Greenspace Standards define good provision based on different size proximity, capacity and quality criteria as set out below.

| Category of Accessible Greenspace | Actual walking distance | Name of criterion | Accessible Natural Greenspace | Size criteria (minimum) | Approximate walking/cycling time |
|---|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Small greenspace close to home: either a Doorstep or Local Greenspace | 200m | Doorstep Greenspace | N | 0.5 ha | Less than 5 minutes |
| As above | 300m | Local Natural Greenspace | Y | 2 ha | 5 minutes |
| 2. Medium sized greenspace within 1 km | 1 km | Neighbourhood Natural Greenspace | Y | 10 ha | 15 minutes |
| 3. Medium large Greenspace within 2km | 2 km | Wider Neighbourhood Natural Greenspace | Y | 20 ha | 35 minutes |
| 4. Large greenspace within 5km from home | 5 km | District Natural Greenspace | Y | 100 ha | 15 – 20 minutes cycling from home |
| 5. Very large Greenspace within 10km from home | 10 km | Sub-regional Natural Greenspace | Y | 500 ha | 30 - 40 minutes cycling from home |

Notes:

- Distances given are actual walking distances. Actual walking distance will be measured through network analysis in due course. However, in the meantime, the Green Infrastructure Mapping

uses a straight line distance from home to the boundary of the greenspace in analyses of the AGS standards.

- Where possible all greenspaces should be accessible by public transport and or safe active travel routes.
- The Accessible Greenspace Standards do not cover formal sports provision, for which Sport England is responsible; nor play provision, which is covered by Play England.
- The above figures use a walking speed of 60 metres per minute, which is the average for people of 60 years and teenagers. It uses a cycling speed of 20 kilometres per hour as an average for inexperienced cyclists.

Linear routes connecting areas of greenspace, or crossing greenspace that might not be accessible, are also important.

Future maintenance and use of greenspace

Developers and local authorities should seek to ensure that areas of greenspace can be maintained in good condition for the future. Initial funding through section 106 or the Community Infrastructure Levy may not include maintenance. Ongoing financial contributions or a ring-fenced fund will be required.

Residents, particularly in new developments, may be unfamiliar with accessing greenspace. Financial provision for mentors and rangers to initiate events and encourage responsible use of greenspace may be required and this should be included in funding proposals. Groups who do not traditionally access greenspace could be a focus, for example teenagers.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a statutory local access forum set up under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Its members are volunteers, appointed by Devon County Council, who provide independent advice on “the improvement of public access to land for the purposes of open-air recreation and enjoyment”. The Forum currently has nineteen members who represent the interests of landowners/land managers, access users and other interests such as tourism and conservation.

DCAF

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