



Devon Countryside Access Forum

Lucombe House
County Hall
Topsham Road
EXETER EX2 4QD

Tel: 07837 171000
01392 382084

devoncaf@devon.gov.uk

www.devon.gov.uk/devon_countryside_access_forum

Devon Countryside Access Forum Disability Access Position Statement

Introduction

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

The Forum recognises that everyone should be able to enjoy recreation in the natural environment and Devon provides many opportunities for residents and tourists to do so. Research has demonstrated that disabled people are one of the groups that visit the countryside less frequently. This position statement sets out areas where improvements could be made to facilitate access by those with physical disabilities or frailty; a significant group whose numbers are increasing. The Equality Act 2010 seeks to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against. Early consideration can ensure that the **least restrictive** options are considered when new routes or improvements are being planned, thus enabling disabled users to go out with family and friends. For health and economic reasons facilitating access brings widespread benefits.

Making improvements for Tramper and wheelchair access

In the last ten years huge changes in development have taken place with electric mobility scooters and electric wheelchairs. This revolution is ongoing. Where once these scooter/ wheelchairs could not access the countryside they now can and many have ranges of 20 to 40 miles and can cope with more challenging gradients and path surfaces. Major modifications to routes using very specific criteria are often inappropriate or very expensive but relatively minor changes can often result in a much more accessible route, particularly for people with all-terrain scooters.

All plans and improvements should be subject to detailed negotiations with landowners to ensure an appreciation of disability issues and to make certain that any stock control matters are assessed in choosing path furniture. Equally, there may need to be a balance between disability access and restricting vehicular access.

Barriers to access include stiles; steps; narrow gates; narrow entrances and exits; difficult handles and latches; steps up to footbridges rather than ramps; log or earth barriers; and gradients and cross-gradients.

- In planning or designing *new* routes a number of organisations have good practice guides to ensure disability access standards can be implemented and links to these are below.

The Devon Countryside Access Forum would advise that the highest standards possible are incorporated and considered from the outset.

- Improvements to public rights of way in parishes are often considered as part of Neighbourhood Plans. The Forum advises that making modest changes to path surfacing to minimise puddles, roots and ruts; removing stiles in consultation with the landowner and installing appropriate two way self-closing gates with accessible latches or handles could make many routes more accessible to the community.
- The Forum would encourage landowners to consider the needs of disability users and, where possible, use two-way self-closing gates with good latches. Poor latches are one of the main issues affecting accessibility.
- The Devon Countryside Access Forum would encourage site managers to explore options for facilitating access for tramper buggies or making these available for hire, as has been successfully developed by Countryside Mobility South West.

For photos showing good practice see the DCAF website www.devon.gov.uk/dcaf

For more comprehensive information on standards, particularly when establishing a new route see:

- The Fieldfare Trust – www.fieldfare.org.uk
<http://www.fieldfare.org.uk/countryside-for-all/countryside-for-all-good-practice-guide/>
This site includes information on the BT Countryside for All project.
- Natural England's 'Trail of self-closing bridlegates: 2015'
' <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4580441024102400>
The summary and conclusions make recommendations for disability access
- Sensory Trust information fact sheets
<http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/factsheets/>

For more general information on current initiatives in Devon which benefit disability access see:

- Countryside Mobility SW (tramper buggy hire project)
<http://www.countrysidemobility.org/>
- Living Options Devon Heritage Ability project www.heritageability.org