



Devon Countryside Access Forum
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Minutes of the Fifty-Fourth meeting
of the Devon Countryside Access Forum
Norman Room, The Kenn Centre, Exeter Road, Kennford, Exeter EX6 7UE
Thursday, 19 September 2019

Attendance

Forum members

Andrew Baker	Sue Pudduck
Chris Cole (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Philip Sanders
Sean Comber	Tino Savvas
John Daw	Sarah Slade (Chair)
Tim Felton	Bryan Smith
Charlie Lloyd	Maggie Watson

Devon County Council Officers and others present

Helen Clayton, Senior Officer, Public Rights of Way, DCC
Ros Mills, Public Rights of Way Manager, DCC
Hilary Winter, Forum Officer, DCC

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Jo Hooper and Gordon Guest. Councillor Tony Inch was absent. Bryan Smith was welcomed to his first meeting.

Simon Clist was elected to Mid Devon District Council in May and his appointment on the DCAF had been terminated as the legal number of councillors had been exceeded. The Chair paid tribute to Simon for his contribution.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2019

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April were approved and signed.

4. Matters arising

4.1 Membership (2. 25.04.19)

The apprentice due to join the DCAF had left DCC. The Chair led a discussion on ways to engage with young people which might be informed by research work at colleges or universities. Sue Pudduck offered to contact her networks to see what informal links could be made. Charlie Lloyd offered to assist.

Creating a social media presence on Facebook or an Instagram feed were suggested. DCC had a corporate twitter account. Other proposals put forward were developing contact with Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme participants or uniformed groups, such as the Guides, and using young people as a sounding board on particular issues. Some young people might volunteer through community service, for example with the North Devon Biosphere. It was noted the Forum would need to identify the limits of what it could achieve.

It was agreed young peoples' use of public rights of way was often peripheral and many in that age group sought more adventurous activities.

Action: Sue Pudduck, Charlie Lloyd and other members to liaise with the Forum Officer.

4.2 Annual Report (17. 25.04.19)

The Annual Report was on the DCAF website. Attention was drawn to a typographical error which would be amended.

Action: Forum Officer

5. Public questions

There were no public questions.

6. Correspondence log

The log was noted. Changes to the East Devon Forest Plan were highlighted. Item 5 referred to the Network Rail consultation on Parson's Tunnel (Teignmouth) and it was confirmed an initial meeting had been held between Network Rail and Devon County Council. Monthly meetings are planned to discuss and mitigate implications for public rights of way. The DCAF is likely to be consulted on further detail. The SWCP Association are also discussing the project.

Changes to the SW Marine Plan affecting access were noted.

The Neighbourhood Plan Position Statement was sent in response to draft plans, with points of amendment or clarification as required. Otterton had engaged with young people in preparing its Plan and this initiative was welcomed.

7. Meetings attended by DCAF members

7.1 Training Day

The Forum Officer and members of the Public Rights of Way team were thanked for an interesting day. It demonstrated how working with landowners could achieve recreational access improvements.

7.2 Accessibility visit to East Devon Pebblebed Heaths

Gordon Guest and members of the Wheelchair Access Group had initiated a meeting with the Pebblebed Heaths Site Manager. Jo Hooper had attended. A range of problems were discussed including steep cross slopes; deep gulleys; earth bunds around car parks; gates that were too narrow and access requirements required around the side and rear of vehicles to get trampers/scooters out. Off-road scooters and trampers had higher capability than manual wheelchairs and shopping scooters. Improvements to access points were discussed. Gates on the Pebblebed Heaths are being replaced with 1.5m bridleway gates with long handles.

Stock grazing requirements and the Royal Marines' use of the common are part of management considerations.

Woodbury Common provided large flat areas and paths. In the long term, improvements could be made to provide short paths for manual wheelchair access and access from car parks.

Following the visit one of the earth bunds was removed.

7.3 Devon Local Nature Partnership Communities Conference

Sue Pudduck had attended the Local Nature Partnership conference in Chagford. The day included many workshops with a focus on community engagement. Naturally healthy and social prescribing were included with an emphasis on supportive networks to build confidence. The key speaker was Sasha Dench who spoke on Bewick Swans and her mission to reduce hunting of the swans on their migratory path. The strong message of this was the importance of creating a story to change behaviour in a positive and imaginative way.

7.4 Turf cutting, Alma Bridge, Sidmouth.

Jo Hooper and Ros Mills, PROW, had attended the turf cutting ceremony for the new Alma Bridge in Sidmouth. This is being built inland to reduce the risk of coastal erosion and will be part of the South West Coast Path. The bridge would include ramps and a viewing platform and input from the DCAF on accessibility had been taken into account.

8. Exe Estuary Trail and countywide trails

The Chair explained the Training Day had covered some aspects related to trail management and accessibility of trails.

Ros Mills, DCC, had set up a working group meeting, between DCC (Public Rights of Way Manager and the Safer Travel Officer) and two representatives from both the Exe Estuary Trail Partnership and the Devon Countryside Access Forum, with the aim of understanding the user feedback of real/perceived conflict on the Trail. Three meetings are planned with the aim of making recommendations to improve the situation on the Exe Estuary Trail and also to consider findings in the broader strategic context of the family of Trails county wide. The initial meeting had explored some issues and a further couple of meetings will be held. At the next meeting it was hoped to invite members of the public who had written in to raise problems they had experienced. The final meeting will be to agree the recommendations.

The Exe Estuary Forum Stakeholder meeting, held at Powderham Castle, was attended by Sarah Slade and Jo Hooper. Ros Mills, DCC, had given a presentation on codes of conduct and share this space. Comments on maps were being fed back in. The current perception is that problems are more evident on the Exmouth side. Issues are related to different user groups and not just cyclists. The feedback from this event will inform the working group discussions.

Ros Mills, DCC, confirmed that use is likely to increase on the westward side of the Exe as the trail is extended. The western side was physically less constrained than the east and allowed more scope for design options.

It was noted that the Camel Trail does not suffer from the same sort of issues, despite high usage, possibly due to the softer surfacing. Users had become self-policing with different user groups avoiding certain times of day. Sections of the Drake's Trail were used at high speed due to downhill stretches and the harder surface. The Strava App promoted 'personal best' times.

It was noted the Teign Estuary Trail was going ahead. This was welcomed as the current route through Bishopsteignton to Teignmouth was dangerous for cyclists/walkers.

Discussion took place on a number of issues:

Financing

Financing of trails frequently meant more resilient surfaces as little budget was available for long term maintenance.

Route standards could not always be consistent. The E4 route into Exeter from Cranbrook was paid for by developers. Two bridges had been built over the motorway for walkers and cyclists, but once in Exeter it is a mixture of designated on-road space/shared footway and off-road parkland and could be seen as less safe due to existing physical constraints.

Solutions should be sustainable, not just infrastructure but associated facilities and

branding. For example, the Tarka Trail had art works but there was insufficient finance to replace or maintain these.

Signing

It was agreed 'share this space' conveyed a good message but there was a need to consider how best to manage people on the route and slow people down.

On the Grand Western Canal photographic signs had been put in place on a trial basis to ask cyclists to dismount under bridges where visibility lines were poor and dog walkers, the barge horse, children and groups of users might be under the bridge. This was a site-specific solution.

Future trends

Due to the growth of electric bikes a wider group of people were accessing trails, and this was likely to expand further as sales increased.

Electric bikes had a restricted speed of 15 mph but could go faster on downhill sections. Concentrations around towns will increase cycling numbers, with the emphasis on the health dimension.

The growth in number, size and power of tramper buggies is likely to present future issues. Currently electric scooters are not permitted but this use could also grow, subject to legislation.

Future measures to improve the situation were discussed and these were focused around the following matters.

Engineering Design

- Different routes serve different functions. More thought could be given to splitting quiet enjoyment from commuting by using a change of surface or widths on certain sections to offer variety for people with different requirements
- Road commuting could be improved to allow cyclists a safer road space. It was noted the road between Exeter and Exmouth provided little room for dedicated cyclists.
- There was a need to identify potential conflict areas. These were likely to be small in number but significant at particular points. Rumble strips and other calming measures might be one solution to reduce speed, subject to health and safety considerations.
- Engineering design elements could reduce speed, such as divided tracks e.g. near Totnes, although this was not always seen as good practice.
- Car parking and the provision of toilet facilities are aspects which should be considered alongside the trail itself.
- Trails should be accessible and multi-use.

Codes of conduct and signage

- Share this Space was regarded as a good message about being considerate. It raised awareness that people need to think more about other users.
- 3D imagery or signs on the ground were an option. Signs needed to have an impact and could be used where people join the route or at identified potential conflict points.

- It was noted that signage is effective initially but can become part of the scenery. Signage could be varied from time to time.
- Too many signs could be intrusive or have implications on the landscape, particularly on more rural routes.
- Collaboration with businesses about signs would be worth exploring.
- An awareness campaign could be funded where there are particular issues. This could include someone to liaise with users.
- Share this Space could be extended to other rights of way, e.g. byways, as people may not know which users they might encounter.
- There was no uniform signage nationally. National Cycle Network (NCN) signs implied use was solely for cyclists and could be supplemented with additional signs.

Evidence base and project solutions

- Solutions needed to be proportionate. The DCC Safer Travel Team seeks evidence and has an online survey form.
Action: Ros Mills, DCC, to provide link. [Survey link](#)
- The Changing Lanes project presented the opportunity to downgrade roads, in consultation with the parish council, if a property was not affected. It was noted such roads became the responsibility of the PROW team and maintenance could be onerous due to drainage and deteriorating tarmac.
- It was suggested that different options should be trialled at conflict points with publicity to explain what is happening with a feedback opportunity. This would provide a learning experience and an evidence base to inform future management. Best practice from elsewhere could inform this process.
- The Quiet Lanes project was raised and it was agreed it might be appropriate to revisit this or a similar type of project. Quiet enjoyment remained important.
- It was noted that Sustrans volunteers are out on the trails and engage with users. It was suggested that liaising with Sustrans might help to get messages across to trail users.
- Friends' groups could sometimes attract funding and it was agreed such trail groups could be useful, not only to raise funds but to raise awareness of local issues.
- Marketing and social media campaigns around soft messaging could assist alongside upfront website information.

Consideration of user groups

- Young people, without access to cars but increasingly independent, were not safe on the roads.
- Some user groups required very low-key access.
- Multi-use trails should consider all user groups.

Legal aspects

- Discussions had taken place nationally over extending footpaths to cycle use. (In 1968 cyclists were allowed to ride on bridleways). A landowner could give permission for use of a footpath by cyclists.
- There were a lot of issues with car drivers. In the EU they were legally more accountable.

- The message about giving cyclists sufficient width seems to have been taken on board. There remained an issue about road cyclists disliking stopping at junctions when using designated space alongside roads.
- Management of trails was often complicated by the underlying legal definition and ownership which could impact on potential solutions to issues.

It was agreed the DCAF could consider some management solutions which might assist forward planning. It could not deal with societal problems. It should identify who needs to be drawn in and how the Forum can assist DCC.

It was proposed and agreed that the DCAF should prepare a draft with actions and recommendations. This should endorse multi-use as an explicit statement and include the need for quiet recreation.

Action: Forum Officer to circulate draft.

9. To note minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee held on 4 July 2019

Minutes of the Public Rights of Way Committee meeting were noted. The meeting had been non-contentious.

10. Public Rights of Way update

Ros Mills and Helen Clayton, DCC, reported:

- Plans for the Teign Estuary Trail were on track.
- Wardens were receiving ash-dieback training, with a particular emphasis on land owned by DCC.
- Discussions were taking place with Network Rail about the Teignmouth Parson's Tunnel resilience project.
- Money is being bid for from the Department for Transport Challenge Fund to replace boardwalks on the Exe Estuary Trail.
- Both Stover and the Grand Western Canal had been awarded Green Flag status. Stover would be submitting its revised bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and a support letter from the DCAF was requested.
Action: Forum Officer
- Approval had been received for appointment of a full-time Public Rights of Way Assistant Officer to process Public Path Orders (PPOs) and deal with temporary closures. This was income generating work. This followed the retirement of an officer in Land Charges who had previously dealt with PPOs.
- Several parish reports were being compiled through the Definitive Map Review process.
- A change of policy would be put to the next Public Rights of Way Committee to extend the County completion date for the Definitive Map Review (DMR) to 2025. The current target date is January 2020 but legal changes resulting from the Deregulation Act are not yet in force. Amending the date would provide policy back-up should an appeal against non-determination be submitted. 83-84% of the County had been completed
- In the parish of East Down a restricted byway had been confirmed based on documentary evidence.

- Some unopposed orders had yet to be confirmed. The DMR team had a target of eight parishes a year and had met that plus additional Schedule 14 appeals.
- P3 workshops would be held in Spring 2020 instead of late 2019.
- Building work was planned for County Hall which would impact on the location of the public rights of way team for a prolonged period from April 2020.

The Chair thanked the Public Rights of Way staff.

11. To note and approve responses to consultations and any feedback

No responses, other than itemised on the Correspondence Log, had been submitted since the last meeting.

12. Current consultations

12.1 Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site Management Plan consultation

The summary paper was considered. The policies and associated priority actions were seen as well-written and precise. In response it was agreed to submit comments on the following issues:

1. The Jurassic Coast should have a more lively and inspiring priority action on education so that young people can learn from the coast.
2. The linear nature of the Jurassic Coast underlines the importance of public transport so that people can explore and return to their starting point.
3. Links should be made with specific groups to consider accessibility. Villages are the access point to many trails and the Jurassic Coast yet many have lost toilet provision. Parishes should be made aware of the economic benefit. People should have ready access to information about parking and toilet facilities along the coast.

Action: Forum Officer to circulate draft response.

Fire Beacon Hill

A consultation had been launched by the RSPB on Fire Beacon Hill. The DCAF had responded to the earlier consultation. The Forum Officer had attended a site visit to view the proposals and maps were passed around. The proposals recommended a fenced area which would include an area of Forestry England land to the west (Fire Beacon Plantation) and Woodland Trust land to the east (Core Hill Wood). The area would be grazed to improve biodiversity and access and achieve enhanced heathland and a wood pasture habitat. Some new path furniture was marked on the consultation map.

The DCAF had received an email from a member of the public expressing some concern about the use of temporary electric fencing restricting access to open access land and raising questions about use of livestock with horns.

Members of the DCAF agreed that use of invisible fencing, one of the options, would control stock well. Added advantages were reduction in the need for additional path furniture and better wildlife corridors, as well as minimising the visual impact. To reduce poaching, it was agreed that stock should graze in the spring, summer and autumn and not the winter. Devon cattle were regarded as a docile breed and suitable for grazing management on the common.

As raised in its earlier response, the partnership working between the different agencies involved with Fire Beacon Hill was seen as a positive development. The blurred boundaries between different areas of landownership were welcomed.

The issue of dog control and management was not included on the consultation questionnaire. The DCAF had previously raised the matter of differing dog legislation and members thought this should be mentioned again and specifically in relation to fouling and cattle issues, for example worming of dogs and control in the vicinity of stock.

The area to the east of Core Hill Wood, outside the proposed boundary, could become less accessible unless the invisible fencing option was chosen. This would be included in the response.

It was not known whether invisible fencing affected people with pacemakers and this specific question would be asked.

Action: Forum Officer to circulate a draft response.

13. Forthcoming consultations

13.1 Pebblebed Heaths Visitor Management Plan

The Forum Officer agreed to contact members once details of the consultation had been published.

Action: Forum Officer.

13.2 Coastal access

The update from Natural England was noted. It was agreed a working group would be required to consider the reports, when published, in order to meet the consultation deadline. Andrew Baker, Tim Felton, Charlie Lloyd, Sue Pudduck, Tino Savvas and Sarah Slade put their names forward. Members not present would be invited.

Action: Forum Officer.

14. Dates of meetings 2020

Meetings for the coming year were agreed. These would remain at 10.00 a.m. for the time being.

Thursday, 23 January 2020
Thursday, 23 April 2020
Thursday, 24 September 2020
Thursday, 21 January 2021

15. Any other business

1. Fly-tipping

Sean Comber reported that he would be attending a conference on Fly-tipping, organised by the Chartered Institute of Waste Management, on 29 October. He would report back on any access-related issues.

Action: Sean Comber

2. DCAF papers

Tim Felton raised the importance of archiving DCAF papers and it was agreed he should discuss this with the Forum Officer.

Action: Tim Felton and Forum Officer.