

DEVON LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of the Fourth Public Meeting of the Devon Local Access Forum (Devon LAF)
held at County Hall, Exeter from 10.00 a.m. to 1.20 p.m. on

Tuesday 28 October 2003

1. ATTENDANCE

1.1 Forum Members:

Bob Harvey (Chairman)

Terence Ayre

Terry Faull (Vice Chairman)

Christine Ingram

Jenny Parsons

Sarah Slade

Mareth Adams

Michael Bickell

Tim Felton

Gretta Madigan

John Skinner

George Whitfield

Apologies for absence were received from Charles Fane Trefusis and Mary Turner

1.2 Devon County Council (DCC) officers:

Hilary Winter, Local Access Forum Secretary

Heidi Cruickshank

Rosalind Mills

Mike Jenkins

Roland Pyle

1.3 Observers/visitors

Jeff Haynes, Dartmoor National Park Authority

James Maben, Exmoor National Park Authority

Geoffrey Burgess

Ron Hale

Alan Taylor, Dartmoor Local Access Forum

Jo Bishop, BBC Radio Devon

Micheline Green

Francine Tullis

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2003 were signed as correct.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Letterhead and Webpage

The letterhead had been printed. An interactive webpage would be considered once improvements to the Devon County Council network were complete. A counter had been put on the Devon LAF website at the end of August which showed the site had been accessed 308 times up until 27 October.

3.2 Feedback by members from other meetings

Terry Faull had visited the Ruby Country rural regeneration project, based in the Holsworthy/Hatherleigh area. This initiative included developing a series of trails for walking, cycling and riding.

John Skinner had spoken on the CroW Act at a Women's Institute/Townswomen's Guild Conference and would be speaking to the Okehampton Area Committee of Parish Councils.

Bob Harvey reported that he and Terry Faull had attended the Cornwall Local Access Forum meeting. The Cornwall LAF was developing in an independent and proactive manner, meeting in a variety of locations every two months. The forum saw itself as championing the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and challenging improvement within the County Council.

Christine Ingram had been to a DCC working group, chaired by Cllr Gretta Madigan, on 18 July looking at the provision of access for horse-riders in the Holsworthy/Hatherleigh area. Discussion centred on conflict with cycleways, shared use and safety aspects. There was a need for linear routes to link into existing rights of way. Sheffield Hallam University had since been commissioned by Devon County Council to undertake a study into shared use and this report would be available in Spring 2004.

The Chair and Vice Chair had met with Brian Greenslade, Leader of the Council, to acquaint him with the independent role of the access forum in representing users and land owners/managers and supporting the Environment Directorate. They had highlighted the issue of resources to enable the Devon LAF to be proactive in taking things forward and it was possible that DCC might be able to provide additional services in kind. The idea of a Regional Conference for LAFs to meet and explore common issues was floated and encouraged. Brian Greenslade suggested increased contact with District Councils and South West Tourism. **Action: Secretary/Chair.** The Chair and Vice Chair had suggested a formal meeting with Edward Chorlton, County Environment Director, to discuss the Local Access Forum and its input to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. One issue for discussion might be promoting positive use of the countryside and how Devon County Council could look at its portfolio of land in this connection. Heidi Cruickshank, DCC, stated that she had already done work on the County farms and was exploring this angle.

Tim Felton had attended the Land Between the Moors Conference, an initiative to develop a framework for reconnecting landscape, economy and community in the area between the moors. He had also been on the DCC Rights of Way stand at Mid Devon and Honiton Shows.

It was suggested by a member of the public that the work of the Devon LAF should be publicised and include information about how the public could feed into the process. **Action: Secretary**

3.3 Presentation Pack

Handouts, a PowerPoint presentation and acetates for use by members were now available.

3.4 Devon LAF budget

£3800 was available in the budget to cover Devon LAF members' travel costs, stationery and printing and other costs. As at 28 October £2500 remained in the budget and members were reminded to claim travel costs promptly.

3.5 Draft Access Maps

A response to Devon LAF's submission had been received from the Countryside Agency, a summary of which was given to members. If there was uncertainty about the classification of any area as mountain, moor, heath or down, a site inspection would be carried out by Black & Veitch staff. Priorities in Devon would be to resolve issues on coastal land, the edge of the National Parks and Culm grassland. The Provisional Maps were expected in Spring 2004. Over 500 appeals had

been received in the area adjacent to Devon, Area 3. Parliament had the discretion to include coastal land and foreshores at a later date following advice from the Countryside Agency.

3.6 Work Plan

Discussion on this item was held over.

4. CORRESPONDENCE

4.1. Dartmoor National Park

In response to a letter from the Devon LAF, Dartmoor National Park had stated that it was exploring options for securing a reinstatement of access to Vixen Tor, prior to the CroW Act rights coming into effect, and hoped for a negotiated solution.

4.2 Ordnance Survey

The Ordnance Survey had responded to the Devon LAF letter. It was now proposed to retain National Park boundaries in a way that would not reduce the clarity of the boundaries of Open Access land. Parish Council boundaries would be shown in magenta. National Trust, Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust boundaries would not be shown, a decision made in agreement with those organisations. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty would be shown on the map cover. This seemed a sensible compromise. Jeff Haynes, Dartmoor National Park, commented that, following discussions with the OS mapping team, the National Park boundary would be shown with a thick 5mm broken line in magenta, an outcome significantly more noticeable than anticipated.

4.3 DEFRA Consultation on Regulations relating to the Removal or Relaxation of General Restrictions on Access Land under Part 1 of the CroW Act.

A majority response from members had been sent and was circulated with the agenda.

4.4 Countryside Agency Consultation on Open Access Symbols. Proposed Guidelines for Use.

A response from members, circulated with the agenda, had been sent. This highlighted the difficulty of consulting members and achieving a consensus view between meetings. There was a unanimous view that local access forums should be given opportunity to respond within a reasonable time limit and have comments and advice taken into account. Any consultation exercise should not be a rubber- stamping one.

5. Report on progress on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Heidi Cruickshank, Rights of Way Improvement Plan Officer, reported on the RoWIP. The closing date for the public consultation was 31 October. Forms had been distributed at local agricultural shows, libraries and tourist information centres and were available on-line. 3050 had been printed and to date 812 had been returned, including 297 website responses.

Consultation was currently taking place with 350 organisations and Parish Councils. Neighbouring authorities would be consulted shortly. The RoWIP would be a policy document to highlight issues and this would be accompanied by Annual Business Plans, which would detail specific plans and look at funding and priorities. There was no statutory duty on the County Council to implement the RoWIP but the Council had some funding which it could use to lever money from other funding

sources. The RoWIP had to be an objective process. Heidi thanked the Local Access Forum for acting as a conduit for information. Heidi was thanked for her comments.

The question of potential payments from DEFRA to landowners for access schemes was raised. Current Countryside Stewardship and the European Rural Development Fund schemes were narrow in their interpretation of access and had limited accompanying payments. The National Countryside Access Forum was in discussion with DEFRA about funding and further details would be obtained.

Action: Secretary

5.1. Rights of Way Improvement Plan questionnaire

Following discussion by Devon LAF members **it was agreed** that the draft response, prepared by the Secretary, should not be finalised and sent to Heidi Cruickshank. Members were unsure whether the LAF was yet in a position to provide a definitive view to the County Council. It was felt the Devon LAF's role should be to monitor and comment throughout the RoWIP process, taking a strategic overview. Individual organisations would present the views of their membership. Heidi had identified 11 main user groups of the countryside.

It was agreed to hold an additional workshop, date to be agreed, to discuss **agenda items:-**

3.6 Work Plan

5. Rights of Way Improvement Plan - monitoring

6. Working Groups

7. Dates, venues and topics for meetings in 2004

Any items for inclusion in this should be sent to the Secretary.

8. Presentation by Roland Pyle

Roland Pyle thanked Devon LAF for the opportunity to speak to the forum. The local authority had a statutory duty to implement Local Transport Plans and submit annual reports under the Transport Act 2000 (Department of Transport). This was part of a new longer-term approach that gave local government more freedom, discretion and certainty. The current Local Transport Plan, submitted in July 2000, covered the period 2001-2006 and was prepared in accordance with Government guidance. The Plan set out the transport strategies for the County and put in a bid for an allocation of capital expenditure or borrowing approval to implement these objectives and targets. The Local Transport Plan had nine objectives (integrated transport, safety, accessibility, economy, environment, health, lifelong learning, social inclusion and tourism) and these included walking, cycling, road safety, travel to work and school, highway maintenance and regeneration.

The local authority had been assessed as well above average for its Transport Plan and the Annual Progress Report (Devon on the Move) was assessed as second in the country. Devon County Council had 25 headline targets to meet plus various national targets and the Annual Report showed progress towards these. The Programme for the current year included 559 schemes within a budget of £24 million, of which £14.5m will go on highway maintenance, £400,000 on the National Cycle Network and £250,000 capital for Public Rights of Way to spend on improvement schemes and to achieve the Public Service Agreement (PSA). There was some additional funding from other elements in the transport plan for public rights of way.

Highway and Traffic Order Committees provided the local elements of programmes and worked with towns and villages to improve transport in those local areas.

Roland Pyle responded to a number of questions: -

- ◆ The Local Transport Plan included the approach to ports, shipping and waterways. Schemes such as the Bideford partnership had contributed to a number of different and mutually compatible objectives.
- ◆ The LTP included accessibility and accessibility planning. The Government Social Exclusion Unit had established eight pilots to look at how Local Authorities might improve access to services. In Devon's case this was Access to Learning.
- ◆ The 'Quiet Lanes' project came under the Countryside Agency and Devon County Council had tentatively expressed an interest in it but did not get involved.
- ◆ The DCC worked closely with the train operating companies to improve infrastructure. Integration was not always easy to achieve in a deregulated environment.
- ◆ Provision for horse-riding was not currently in the Government Guidance but should feature more strongly in the 2nd 5 year Plan, through the community travel plan process.
- ◆ Additional funding for PROW included £130,000 for strategic walking and riding routes and £224,000 revenue money for the maintenance budget.
- ◆ There was a role for the LTP to develop and assess schemes that improved safety for vulnerable road users. These can be assessed using an economic rate of return, looking at the accident savings and benefits. Equestrian schemes could potentially fall into that category.
- ◆ The LTP budget increased at the start of the five-year plan scheme from £3-4m to £24m annually.
- ◆ The Regional Assembly is revisiting the regional transport strategy and looking at regional transport priorities. There was the expectation that these will be taken into account in the second five-year plan.

It was up to the Devon LAF how it chose to respond to consultation on the 2nd Plan. Roland Pyle would be happy to advise the LAF or any Working Groups or provide more information. **It was agreed** it would be useful for the Devon LAF to contact central Government and suggest issues to be included the next guidance note, out for consultation in March 2004. **Action: Secretary/Chair** Tim Felton proposed a vote of thanks.

8. Discussion on issues affecting access to the countryside

Mrs Yvonne Pope, representing those with limited mobility

Mrs Pope said she was associated with various access groups including Dartmoor and had done work for the National Parks, Sandford Millennium Path and Living Options. She acted as a Disability Awareness trainer for the visually impaired and deaf. She used an off-road manual wheelchair.

Mrs Pope made the following points as part of her presentation and in answer to questions: -

- ◆ The environment had to be taken into consideration. She did not expect tarmaced paths in the countryside but would expect a higher specification in an urban situation.
- ◆ Certain path widths were needed for wheelchair users and guidelines were available.
- ◆ Passing places were needed

- ◆ Maintenance was a big issue, particularly on single-track roads, and poorly maintained paths presented difficulties for those with mobility problems. It was important vegetation did not encroach whilst keeping paths as natural as possible.
- ◆ Gates needed to be accessible for those with wheelchairs. Surfaces at gates were often churned up by farm traffic and gates were sometimes padlocked. Hunter self-closing gates were accessible.
- ◆ Physical barriers such as stiles, chicanes, cattle grids or narrow bridges with sleepers presented problems. (DCC commented that gates could only be put in with the landowner's agreement. Under the Parish Paths partnership (P3), a local approach was used to encourage landowners to replace stiles with gates. A lot of stiles were being replaced with kissing gates, now rectangular, which allowed a wheelchair to manoeuvre around).
- ◆ Multi-use was not a problem provided that people understood and respected other users.
- ◆ Disabled people were realistic and did not expect every route to be accessible. 'The Trampler' vehicle could, however, go over any terrain.
- ◆ With visual impairment signage was important and alternative formats included tactile and braille signs.

It was important that the new Country Code incorporated the needs of disabled people. The Devon LAF would look into this. **Action: Secretary**

Mrs Pope said it would be useful to identify suitable paths across the County *provided* they were tried out first to fine tune any assessment, for example gradients up to a gate often made it difficult to open or close gates. The DCC website currently identified a number of easy access paths. Mareth Adams thanked Yvonne for her useful and informative talk.

Mr Jeff Bolton, representing cyclists

Jeff Bolton, a keen cyclist, explained he worked for Trans-Send, a sustainable living and renewable energy project in Ilfracombe. He was also a ranger on the Ilfracombe to Braunton stretch of cycleway for Sustrans. He mentioned the following points in his presentation and in response to questions:-

- ◆ Cycle parking was an important issue. His group lost a bid for cycle parking in Ilfracombe
- ◆ Sustrans pushed forward campaigns for cyclists and provided a lot of information and backup and, in addition, had a good website.
- ◆ Cycling organisation were selective in what they promoted, operating mainly through clubs and magazines. It would be good to improve media coverage.
- ◆ Cyclists required a smooth tarmaced path though keen cyclists would use other terrain. Old railway lines were ideal and did not scar the landscape.
- ◆ The Knowle to Morteheo stretch of a cycle path took cyclists off the railway track and down a bridlepath, which was unsuitable for cyclists. There needed to be a greater understanding of other users.
- ◆ Multi-use presented many safety issues and problems, particularly in busy areas. It might be possible to divide certain cycle paths for multi-use. There needed to be consensus on what the track should be like and the needs of different groups. Horse dung was a hazard. All users should have responsibility, both for themselves and others.
- ◆ There should be no differentiation between leisure and commuting to work as cycling provided a sustainable form of transport. If more were available off-road more people would cycle.

Increased numbers of people were cycling and this presented greater problems in terms of multi-use and safety. The recreational side had increased and, where facilities linked to main roads, hundreds more cyclists were using these for commuting.

- ◆ DCC was thanked for doing a fantastic job in promoting cycling.
 - ◆ Responsibility and shared access should be incorporated in a country code.
- George Whitfield thanked Jeff for his straightforward and informative remarks. There was a need to achieve a common purpose for access users.

10. Any other business

10.1 National Countryside Access Forum

The Devon LAF needed to explore its relationship with the NCAF. **Action: Secretary**

10.2. Countryside Focus

Members were provided with a photocopy on the RoWIP from the recent Countryside Agency publication, Countryside Focus.

10.3 Ramblers' Association

John Skinner provided members with a copy of the RA report on the 'Economic and Social Value of Walking in England'.

10.4 DEFRA letter

Members were provided with a copy of the letter from DEFRA to access authorities giving details of their functions under Part 1 of the CroW Act.

10.5 Creation of New Public Rights of Way. A draft code of practice for local highway authorities paying compensation

Members were given a copy of the above.

10.6 Park & Ride

Members mentioned the lack of a Park & Ride bus to County Hall.

10.7 Lost Ways

This Countryside Agency project would be investigated to ascertain whether the LAF could usefully have an input. **Action: Secretary**