

## **Recommendations arising from the multi use report and Devon County Councils response**

As a result of the research a number of recommendations were made (section 6 of the report). The following contains the recommendations as made and the Devon County Council response to those recommendations (in bold type).

### **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

As a consequence of the findings from both the literature review and the primary research we recommend that Devon County Council consider the following recommendations to inform its policy towards horse riding and multi-use of off-road routes.

**1. Devon County Council should take the opportunity to formulate a clear and evidence based policy towards horse riding and equestrian use of multi-use routes.**  
There has been no update of the authority's position towards horse riding since the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 and the authority has not yet responded to the central government pronouncements of 2002 and 2003 concerning ROWIPs and improved access for equestrians. Furthermore, there is the possibility that Devon County Council's existing equestrian policies were based on flawed data collected by the BHS in 1997/8. Using the literature available in the public domain and the results of this research, the scale of horse riding in Devon is at least twice that suggested by the British Horse Society in 1997/8.

An example policy or position statement from Falkirk is reproduced below to illustrate the approach of a pragmatic but essentially pro horse authority.

Falkirk Council recognises the lack of provision for safe, off-road local horse riding opportunities and the perceived conflict with other path users. The co-operation and establishment of a local riding group will be encouraged to assist in the assessment of existing riding routes and the identification of missing strategic links. Priority will be given to developing existing tracks and quiet rural roads. New paths created will be shared use whenever possible within financial and physical restrictions. Therefore, where these restrictions apply, use by foot or cycle will be a priority, In certain situations, particularly in more rural locations or close to centres of demand i.e. livery yards, specific horse riding facilities may be feasible.

*[Falkirk Council Countryside Access Strategy p15]*

**Devon County Council is considering all users, including equestrians, in the preparation of the ROWIP, which will form part of the Local Transport Plan.**

**2. Devon County Council should acknowledge that there is a very important equity dimension to horse riding which is often overlooked.** Unlike walking and cycling which are both dominated by male adults, horse riding is unique in that the majority of its participants are women and children. The views of this significant minority of the population are often not heard because the main equestrian representative group, the British Horse Society, is not truly representative of all horse riders.

Devon County Council has an active equality and diversity policy within which all Officers must operate. These findings help to inform more inclusive policies through the ROWIP and related policy documents.

3. As a consequence of the first two recommendations, Devon County Council should consider establishing and supporting a horse riding forum which is more representative of the equestrian community than the BHS in isolation. The BHS and indeed the British Driving Society (BDS) should be positively encouraged to be part of this forum. The purpose of the forum will be to help formulate an authoritative assessment of riding routes in the county and to identify the needs and concerns of local equestrians. A model of how an equestrian forum might operate can be found in Hampshire where a strategy for Safe Riding Routes in South East Hampshire has led to the creation of a riding forum. The members of the forum have shown considerable willingness to get involved in self help and to motivate others to get involved in improving access. The success of the scheme was recognised by the BHS who awarded the Hampshire County Council officer behind the initiative a BHS 'Good Guys' award for her work with horse riders and carriage drivers.

**Devon County Council has given consideration to such a forum and feels that at this time it is better for more inclusive consultation and involvement. Whilst we have an aspiration to develop local consultative groups this is resource intensive and not possible at the present time.**

**We host both the Joint User Group meeting, to which the statutory consultative bodies are invited, and the Local Access Forum, which has representatives from the broader range of interests. We will continue to support these consultation mechanisms as well as developing further feedback, such as an e-mail newsletter.**

**We will continue to monitor and take forward best practice for consulting and involving all our stakeholders in the development of access improvements.**

4. The process of consultation should be valued as highly as the product of consultation. The consultation process should be integral to the development and management of multi-use routes within the county. This is particularly important in the context of being clear about who the routes are being developed for and why they are being developed. For example, are routes primarily tourist facilities, facilities for local people or a combination of the two? Are the routes being developed to meet the needs of local people or to attract / re-circulate tourist spending? Groups who feel (rightly or wrongly) that they are being excluded, or that their concerns are being ignored will become disenfranchised. This in turn may lead to a loss of goodwill and a resistance to co-operate with the authority in the future. Where applicable, contemporary conflict resolution techniques should be used as described in the literature review.

**As noted above we will continue to look for mechanisms to develop and improve consultation and involvement for stakeholders in access improvements.**

5. The overlap between participants which has been demonstrated in surveys in Devon and Hampshire has some important implications for staff recruitment and training. In terms of recruitment, posts such as walking, cycling and horse riding officers should recognise the overlap between users groups. Single user 'officers' might more properly be titled 'access officers' and have a wider portfolio of access related responsibilities. In terms of training and career development for existing staff, it would be advisable to ensure that staff are brought up to date with the issues relating to participation overlap and equity. The notion that walkers, cyclists and horse riders are hermetically sealed groups with no overlap is flawed and should not be an assumption upon which policy is driven.

**Devon County Council recognises that there are broad differences within groups as well as similarities between them. Staff involved in the development of access opportunities will continue to update knowledge and share data, ensuring that decisions are reached through best practice. The post of Cycling Officer has arisen in response to Central Government recommendations regarding the development of utility/commuter routes but the potential user overlaps are recognised in this rural county.**

6. There is a considerable information deficiency concerning the users and usage of multi-use routes. This deficiency exists at both national level and local level. At national level there needs to be clearer guidelines about the carrying capacities of routes so that more transparent and less subjective decisions are made about the user groups permitted to use given routes. At local level, research needs to be integral to the monitoring and evaluation of routes and the objectives they have been designed to achieve. Research should not be a knee jerk reaction to solving a problem or a bolted on after thought. Systematic evidence is required about variables such as users, usage, peak and off peak flows, seasonality trends and so forth. It is a requirement of ROWIPs that local authorities are required to conduct usage and demand surveys and thus now is a good time to take a strategic approach towards trail monitoring. Considerable research effort is required to help understand the economic impact of multi-use trails - one of the key reasons why Devon has invested so heavily in cycle tracks.

**The collection and use of such information needs to continue in the vein already started by the cycle monitoring - we would like to extend this across the network qualitatively as well as quantitatively, gaining information about all types of user.**

7. There is very little evidence of actual conflict on multi-use routes in Devon or indeed nationally. Most conflict which does occur is caused as a result of the behaviour (or 'evidence' of behaviour) of users rather than environmental factors such as path width and surface condition. Most of the conflict resulting from behaviour has the potential to be resolved by providing relevant information to users. This information should take two forms. First, a provision of on site information at the starting points and 'honey pot' areas of trails to include the following non-exhaustive list of points:

- permitted users of the route and in particular at places where there are changes in the mix of permitted use;

- advisory notes on responsible behaviour when on the trail;
- guidance on the availability of dog litter waste disposal facilities, for example red bins every half mile;
- any local byelaws of conditions such as certain sections of a path being a permissive route at the discretion of the landowner;
- emergency procedures in the event of an incident / accident;
- key telephone numbers;
- contact details for the authority in charge of the route.

Second, the development of a multi-use code which will give people (especially visitors and new users) the confidence to know that they are following the correct protocols for use of a given route. This guide should emphasise the 'soft' aspects of responsible behaviour such as keeping to the left when trails are busy, fixing and using a bell on bicycles, clearing up after users' and being considerate to fellow users. A revised Country Code is currently being prepared and it may make sense for the development of a parallel multi-use code to be developed at national level so that there is some degree of consistency across the country. Where there are facilities such as cycle hire shops on routes, the proprietors should be encouraged to distribute copies of relevant codes to hirers.

**We are continuing to monitor and develop simple information to help users based on best practice already in place in Devon and in other counties. This helps to increase peoples' confidence and encourage them to use routes responsibly, taking account of the needs of others.**

8. There are differences in perception about conflict and attitudes towards multi-use when interviewing current users of trails and the general public as a whole. Actual trail users report lower levels of conflict and are significantly more tolerant of multi-use than the general public. The creation of multi-use trails in isolation will not influence non-users to suddenly take up walking, cycling and horse riding. Therefore, a more sophisticated approach is recommended. For existing users a fairly light touch is required as it is clear that this group use trails without any difficulties. For potential new users, steps need to be taken to overcome perceptual barriers which might be preventing them from using trails. Initiatives to help overcome perceptual barriers include outreach work, 'taster' sessions, ranger led walks and rides, greater publicising of the benefits of trails, and greater publicising of the fact that the incidence of conflict and crime on trails is much more perceived than actual.

**We will continue to develop ways to encourage potential users to get walking, get on their bike, or ride a horse. We already work with several District Councils on 'Walking the Way to Health' initiatives and will look for further mechanisms to encourage people to get out and enjoy our countryside.**

9. Finally, it is recommended that Devon County Council does not attempt to adopt a standardised approach towards multi-use routes. The countryside is an ever changing and complicated resource which does not suit hegemonic solutions imposed by 'professionals'. An appropriate way forward is to use a contingency approach whereby each potential development is considered on its merits and that

the people who will be affected by a development have had a full and fair involvement in the decision making process.

**We must continue to develop, monitor and use best practice in developing access. Proposed developments will be considered from the point of view of all potential users in the first instance.**