

Devon Countryside Access Forum Annual Report 2006/7

Chairman's comments

Another enjoyable year, both for the variety of issues requiring our attention and for the unflinching good humour of Forum members. I am truly grateful that the Forum members, and their supporting officers in Devon County Council, are genuinely dedicated to finding reasonable solutions in providing public access to "Your Devon".

This report, prepared by Hilary Winter, our invaluable Secretary, is thorough in its coverage of our activities during the year, so my reflections are more personal. For me, it is most memorable for my involvement in a DEFRA conference a year ago, which initiated a thorough revision of the official Guidance from the Secretary of State on the operation and responsibilities of Local Access Forums. This will provide much clearer guidance on how we exercise our statutory role and clarifies our unique status when presenting our advice.

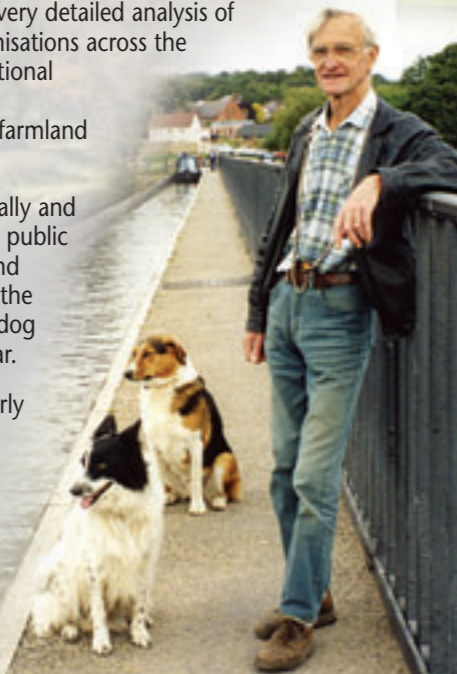
The complicated and difficult issue of access to and on water has become so involved that we have formed a special working group to prepare recommendations. In defence of the Forum, I should comment that we have had very little clarification of what the Government requires of us in this issue. On the other hand, we have had a thorough background document on access to woodland, with a very detailed analysis of responses to that document from individuals and organisations across the country. The landscape impact and potential for recreational activities in woodland is significant, quite apart from its environmental contribution, but it does not qualify for farmland support grants.

Dogs are a problem. They contribute both psychologically and physically to healthy living, but if uncontrolled can foul public spaces, damage wildlife and endanger farm animals. And worse. We have noted a fascinating research report on the psychology of dog walkers, and will be examining the dog problems as particular to Devon during the coming year.

Finally, we are not operating in isolation. We are regularly in contact with neighbouring Access Forums including Cornwall, Plymouth, Dartmoor, Torbay, Dorset, Somerset and Exmoor. Our Secretary has also been appointed by Natural England to co-ordinate our work on a regional basis so we meet with representatives from the whole South West region at least once a year.

Next year? Who knows?! New challenges - certainly; changes - inevitable; but the same commitment to serving the best interests of Devon residents - and visitors.

Bob Harvey
Chairman
2006/7



What is the Devon Countryside Access Forum (Devon CAF)?

Now completing its fourth year, the Devon Countryside Access Forum was set up by Devon County Council under sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000. The Forum has a statutory role to advise specified bodies on improving access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment.



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Guidance recently published by Defra prescribes the bodies (Section 94 (4) bodies) to whom the Forum can give advice. These are:

- Devon County Council
- District and Borough Councils
- The Secretary of State for any Government department
- Natural England
- The Forestry Commission
- English Heritage
- Sport England
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Conservation Boards
- Parish/Town Councils



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Who are the members?

Member	Role	Interests
Philip Brock (resigned Oct.06)	County Councillor	Vice-Chairman of the Public Rights of Way Committee
Alison Clish-Green	Borough Councillor	Teaching, walking
The Hon. Charles Fane Trefusis	Landowner	Estate management, business, forestry, cycling, walking
Terry Faull (Vice-Chairman 2006/7)	General interests	Landscape history, countryside interpretation, walking, environmental/community
Tim Felton	General interests	Barrister, lecturer in law and estate management, horse-riding, walking, running
Peter Grainger	Access user	Cycling, health, disabled access and environmentally friendly travel
Bob Harvey (Chairman 2006/7)	Landowner	Landscape conservation, woodland regeneration, dog walking
Robin Head	Landowner	Farming, farm tourism
Patrick Healy	Access user	Access for all, disability interests
Christine Ingram	Access user	Horse-riding, multi-use, tourism
Julie Rudge	Access user	Walking, riding, cycling, art
John Skinner	Access user	Walking, cycling, CROW access issues, rights of way
Sarah Slade	Landowner	Rural surveyor, farming, horse-riding, walking
Peter Thorn	Access user	Canoeing and water access, youth issues
Joe Tucker	County Councillor	Chairman of the Public Rights of Way Committee, walking, rural communities

Further details on members' interests and involvements can be seen on www.devon.gov.uk/devon_countryside_access_forum

The Forum provides strategic advice and, "in giving advice, forums should aim to influence section 94(4) bodies and thereby contribute more effectively to the quality and robustness of decision-making. Influence will be enhanced where a forum provides independent, constructive, relevant, inclusive, incisive and informed advice which takes account of a broad range and balance of local interests and which assists section 94(4) bodies in carrying out their functions." (Guidance on Local Access Forums in England, 2007)

The Forum covers the whole of Devon with the exception of the National Parks and Unitary Authorities which have their own local access forums. During 2006/7 the Forum held four public meetings (one during an evening) and also had a number of site visits, working groups and a training day.

During 2006 the Forum agreed to change its name to the Devon Countryside Access Forum, a title which reflects its purpose.

Who is on the Devon Countryside Access Forum?

The Forum has a membership of fifteen and its members represent a balance between those who own or manage land and those who use it for recreation. Members represent particular interests (not organisations or geographical areas) and other more general interests such as conservation, law and tourism are also represented. Members are all volunteers, receiving standard travel expenses but no other payments.

In April 2006, Devon County Council reappointed The Hon. Charles Fane Trefusis for a further three year term and appointed new members: Alison Clish-Green, Robin Head, Patrick Healy and Julie Rudge. During the year Cllr Philip Brock's position as a councillor

representative was taken over by Alison Clish-Green, a councillor with West Devon Borough Council. In April 2006, Bob Harvey and Terry Faull were re-elected as Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

What has the Devon CAF considered during 2006/7?

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

We held a Working Group to discuss a scoring system to compare and prioritise access improvement schemes being considered under the RoWIP annual business plan. We were anxious to ensure there would be a fair and transparent method of looking at proposals for funding. Comments made by the group have been incorporated and the RoWIP Officer will trial a points system.

Multi-use continued to be a theme and Devon County Council (DCC) was asked to clarify its position on wider use of cycle ways by horse-riders. DCC will be reporting back to the Forum.

We have continued to ensure that consultation procedures carried out in respect of a number of major schemes, such as the strategic bridleway proposal at Thorndon Cross and a package of



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rights of way improvements in the Lee Moor area, have been appropriate. We have been involved in ensuring that a consultation day for Phase 2 at Thorndon Cross will take place, should Phase 1 proceed satisfactorily

An article encouraging parishes to include Parish Plan questions on current and potential access provision was printed in Village Green, the Community Council of Devon newsletter.

Public Rights of Way Consultative Group

We advised that the annual joint user group meeting, for access groups and other stakeholders, should be reconvened by Devon County Council. This provides an opportunity for such groups to discuss operational matters affecting rights of way. Two Devon CAF members joined the group.



Disability issues

A meeting was held in the North Devon AONB area with Northern Area Coast and Countryside Service to discuss access for all. We looked at 'easy to use' website information. We made comments on the detail and noted with concern the lack of a common national grading system for paths. We visited the 'easy to use' path at Westward Ho! and advised on improvements to path furniture, the car park surface and path entrance.

Training Day

This was held at the UNESCO World Heritage site in the Tamar Valley and we discussed permissive paths, new rights of way and provision for active sports. The old mining heritage area is likely to become a significant recreational area.



Consultations

We wrote to Defra suggesting clearer summaries of consultation documents and this was acknowledged by Defra. We have responded to a number of consultations including:-

Outdoors for All, Draft Diversity Action Plan, Defra.

We supported initiatives opening up opportunities for access to groups who do not currently visit the countryside or urban green space. We undertook to ensure diversity objectives were included in relevant policy documents. Proposals to develop the Action Plan are awaited.



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England's Trees, Woods and Forests, Defra. We highlighted the importance of a national policy on recreational access for walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and those with limited mobility and made suggestions on access facilities and financial incentives.

Regional Spatial Strategy, Regional Assembly (in conjunction with other LAFs in the SW). Our response addressed the serious deficiencies in the document, which concentrated on urban areas to the exclusion of tourism and failed to give greater emphasis to rural areas and, in particular, rights of way, access land, the National Cycle Network and the economic benefits of these.

District Councils

We have continued to respond to a number of key Local Development Framework (LDF) documents including Core Strategies and the South Hams Public Space Strategy. We have sought to raise the profile of rights of way and recreational opportunities through written submissions and attendance at various strategy meetings. The response from District Councils has generally been positive and some changes have been incorporated.

A proposed golf course development drew members' attention to the effects of development on rights of way and we wrote to all District Councils to remind them of the importance of recognising and protecting rights of way from adverse development. This aspect is likely to be considered in later LDF policies.

Presentations

Water access

Following a presentation by the British Canoe Union last year, Roger Goulding, National Policy and Process Adviser with the Environment Agency, gave a talk on the results of a feasibility study into improving canoe access by voluntary agreement, focussing on four inland rivers. A pilot strategy for the SW is planned for 2007, building on this initial work. Humphrey Wood (Chairman) and Roger Furniss (Secretary) of the SW Rivers' Association spoke about the relationship between fishing, property rights and canoeing interests. Following these presentations, members agreed to form a Water Access Working Group to look at the issues in further detail. The Group will be reporting back shortly.



© British Canoe Union



© Devon Wildlife Trust

Devon Wildlife Trust

Matt Boydell, Nature Reserves Manager for Devon Wildlife Trust gave a presentation at the February meeting on how nature reserves are managed to promote both conservation and access provision. The Trust manages 1500 hectares within the County, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest and some unique habitats such as caves. The reserves are places for people to visit, interact and learn about Devon's biodiversity.

Particular management issues include dogs, livestock, visitor safety and access for all. Individual site management plans allow the Trust to assess the conservation requirements and identify access potential, either for full, partial or permit-only access. Information panels and resources are focussed at people friendly and promoted sites, including those with easy-to-use paths.

Liaison and networking

- During the year some members attended meetings of adjacent local access forums and sub-regional meetings.
- Three members attended a regional LAF meeting in Taunton, an opportunity to network with LAF members from across the region. Keynote speakers were Jim Clarke, Regional Director of Sport England and Roger Goulding, National Policy and Process Adviser (Recreation) with the Environment Agency. Mr Clarke outlined the work of Sport England and how links with local access forums could be developed. Mr Goulding referred to work done by the Environment Agency in establishing voluntary agreements for canoe access on four rivers and outlined the consultation process for the SW water related sport and recreation strategy. Useful workshops were held on:-
 - running an effective LAF and the importance of agenda planning, sharing good practice and working groups
 - the new LAF Guidance and its role in assisting LAFs to fulfil their statutory role

CAF responses to consultations, agenda papers and minutes can be viewed on www.devon.gov.uk/devon_countryside_access_forum

This site also includes details of members, terms of reference and other information. Please contact the Secretary if you require any documents on paper.

Members of the public are welcomed at Devon CAF meetings. These are advertised in the press and on the website.

Members of the public may send in questions, provided these reach the Secretary three days before a meeting. The Chairman, at his discretion, may invite members of the public to comment or ask a question during a meeting.

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- working with Rights of Way Improvement Plans and funding access improvements
- Local Development Frameworks and the critical importance of early involvement in the process.
- Members attended local agricultural shows; meeting and discussing rights of way issues with members of the public and DCC staff.
- The Forum was formally represented at the following meetings:-
 1. South Devon AONB
 2. Exmoor Moorland Forum
 3. Launch of Natural England
 4. Land Between the Moors
 5. South West Coast Path
 6. Parish Paths Partnership (P3) workshops
 7. Toll Rides Off-road Trust
 8. Forestry Commission/IMBA/ CTC off-road cycling conference
 9. Highway Users Consultation



Devon Countryside Access Forum

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The Devon CAF is funded by Devon County Council. The LAF operates within a yearly budget of £3200, plus a part-time secretary

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