



Chairman's comments

The ways in which people use the countryside and the rights of way network are changing. When footpaths and bridleways were first set down on definitive maps in the 1950s, they recorded mainly off-road local track ways; since then, modifications and updating of these maps has been carried out but the basic pattern reflects the original, individual parish approach. More recently the growing demand for longer distance routes has been reflected in the development of trails such as the Two Moors Way, the Tarka Trail and the South West Coast Path. Today there are new pressures on the network as people are encouraged to walk for health, the need for circular routes, for dog walking, for safe off road links to work and school and especially opportunities to get out of our cars and explore our towns, villages and countryside on foot or in the saddle.

In Devon the rights of way network is generally in good condition (figures from the Audit Commission place Devon amongst the best performing counties for easy to use footpaths). However, budgetary pressures, the need to respond to new activities and leisure pursuits and to central government countryside policies, all mean that difficult choices have to be made by the County Council, local authorities and other public bodies.

The Forum's statutory remit is to advise on matters which arise in or affect Devon but, increasingly, local issues are influenced by regional and national policies. To reflect this, we have changed our structure with Bob Harvey our Co-Chairman, having the specific role of representing the Forum regionally and as a member of the England Access Forum. Events during the year have shown how important it is to have an input at this level.

We have an excellent working relationship with our colleagues in the County Council and I would like to thank them and especially our Forum Secretary, Hilary Winter, for her commitment and hard work without which we would not function so effectively. I also pay tribute to the members of DCAF for the many hours of voluntary work which they have given this year in attending meetings and commenting on detailed consultation documents.

This report outlines some of the work of the DCAF, which I believe will help to ensure that Devon's countryside can be enjoyed by future generations.

Terry Faull
Chairman
2008/9

What is the Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF)?

The Forum is an independent statutory body set up by Devon County Council under sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 with the responsibility to advise on ways of improving public access to land and water for open-air recreation and enjoyment. The legislation requires the Forum to give advice to the following organisations which must have regard to its advice:

- 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 and town councils

The Forum provides strategic advice in order to influence the policy decision-making processes of those organisations and, in doing so, considers the broad range and balance of local and wider interests.

What is the composition of the Devon Countryside Access Forum?

The Forum has a membership of fifteen, representing a balance of interests between those who manage land and those who use it for recreation. Other more general interests such as health, law and tourism are also represented. Members are all volunteers, receiving standard travel expenses.



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In April 2008, Devon County Council reappointed Tim Felton, Peter Grainger and Christine Ingram a further three-year term. New members Tom Holway and Dr Justin Robbins were appointed. Terry Faull was elected Chairman and Tim Felton Vice-Chairman. Bob Harvey was elected Co-Chairman to reflect his role on the England Access Forum.

What has the Forum achieved in 2008/9? Consultations

During 2008-9 the Forum responded to a number of key consultations, the most significant being:-

National

- *The draft Marine Bill*

The Forum expended considerable time in making responses to the consultation on the draft Marine Bill, specifically Part 9 of the draft Bill dealing with

Coastal Access and the proposed right to walk around the English coast. The Forum responded to Defra and, in addition, to the House of Commons/House of Lords Joint Parliamentary Committee and the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into Coastal Access Provisions. Key points highlighted for examination were the need to provide improved access rather than solely increased access, the concept of spreading room around the coastal path and how this would be interpreted, and the need for landowners to have a right of appeal. Compensation for landowners and businesses, liability issues and achieving access rights for cyclists and horse riders, where possible, were also raised.

- *Natural England – Review of Trails and Routes*

Natural England is reviewing the designation of National Trails and routes and how these might be marketed and developed in the future. In addition to the South West Coast Path there are ten regional routes in Devon (e.g. the Tarka Trail), eight strategic linking routes (e.g. the Exeter Green Circle) and a number of day and circular routes. The Forum highlighted the need to ensure funding was not diverted away from existing public rights of way in an attempt to promote certain longer distance trails. The Forum made comments on potential national standards for such routes, the information which could be usefully put on a promotional website and how volunteers could be encouraged to participate in work on National Trails.

South West

- *The South West Draft Regional Spatial Strategy*

The Forum commented on this document, emphasising the importance of ensuring landscape and green infrastructure (the planned and managed

network of green space and environmental features) are not compromised in housing and development growth targets. High quality landscape and recreational areas provide the basis for much of Devon's strong tourist economy.

- *Environment Agency – draft strategy for water based recreation in the South West*

Following on from earlier work on water access, the Forum made comments on the need to reconcile differences between competing water uses and identify areas for potential improvements throughout the region – both large and small scale. Consideration was given to opportunities for water access adjacent to existing rights of way and raising the profile of water recreation in Local Development Framework and other spatial planning documents.



Devon

- *Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans*

The Forum agreed responses to all five AONB draft Management Plans. Advice covered the rights of way network, circular routes, access land and green infrastructure and use of AONBs by those with reduced mobility. The Forum confined its comments to relevant vision statements and policies in theme chapters associated with access, recreation, tourism, transport and highways. The Forum was particularly interested in commenting on how AONBs intended to measure progress in achieving recreational and access aims.

- *Local Development Framework strategies*

The Forum commented on a number of Local Development Framework strategies during the year, largely focusing on the need to incorporate and link rights of way and green infrastructure in new housing developments.

- *Multi-use*

The Forum continued to advise on Devon's multi-use policy (shared use of routes by cyclists, horse riders and walkers). It advised on design criteria for a shared-use route near Dawlish. The Forum was pleased to note that an Equestrian Project Officer is being appointed by DCC to develop horse-riding, initially in East Devon, the Tamar Valley AONB and the Ruby Country area. Part of the brief will be to explore multi-use and this initiative is very much welcomed.

Public Meetings

During 2008/9 the Forum held three public meetings and an extraordinary working group meeting. Members were involved in a number of site visits, working groups and a training day. DCAF members maintain close contact throughout the year.

Training and Information for Members

Members receive regular briefings by e-mail and post and a monthly newsletter. These provide updates on what is happening in Devon and nationally.

A training day is held each year and in 2008 members visited the Grand Western Canal Country Park to examine recreational opportunities in an urban/rural environment. The group was accompanied by Mark Baker, Head Ranger of the Park, who discussed how the park is managed and funded and provision of access opportunities for walkers, cyclists, water-craft users, anglers and those with limited mobility.



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Presentations at meetings

The Forum received training presentations at each of its meetings.

- *April 2008*

Edward Chorlton, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Environment, Economy and Culture, Devon County Council, highlighted recent developments in Devon. As well as significant investment in maintaining the Public Rights of Way network and increasing 'easy to use' figures on paths from 54% in 2002 to 95% now, key successes were identified as strategic walking routes, the National Cycle Network, the Exe Estuary Trail, promotion of 'Naturally Active' opportunities and addressing road safety issues for access users. Mr Chorlton noted the multi-use aspirations of the Forum, now being adopted in parts of Devon, and stressed the importance of Forum involvement in Local Development Framework consultations.

- *October 2008*

Simon Chapman, Project Manager of the Country Mile Project, Devon County Council, spoke to the Forum about the initiative to reduce road death and injury in the area between Exeter, Tiverton and Barnstaple. An area between Crediton, Bickleigh and Exeter has been identified as a potential Green Zone area where it is hoped experimental signing can be used to raise driver awareness of horses, cyclists and walkers.

Who are the members?

Forum members	Expertise	Interests
Alison Clish-Green	Borough Councillor	Teaching, environment, conservation, walking
The Hon. Charles Fane Trefusis	Landowner	Estate management, business, forestry, cycling, walking
Terry Faulk (Chairman 2008/9)	General interests	Landscape history, countryside interpretation, walking, environmental/community
Tim Felton (Vice-Chairman 2008/9)	General interests	Barrister, lecturer in law, horse-riding, walking, running
Peter Grainger	Access user	Cycling, walking, health, disabled access and environmentally friendly travel
Bob Harvey (Co-Chairman 2008/9)	Landowner	Landscape conservation, woodland regeneration, dog walking
Robin Head	Landowner	Farming, farm tourism
Patrick Healy	Wheelchair user	Multi-use, access for all, disabled access
Tom Holway	Access user	Walking, parish paths and rights of way, motor sport and vehicular access
Christine Ingram	Access user	Horse-riding, multi-use, tourism, cycling, dog walking
Dr Justin Robbins	Access user	Health, dog walking, leisurely cycling, canoeing, access rights
Julie Rudge	Access user	Walking, riding, cycling, art, the coastline, researching lost ways
John Skinner	Access user	Walking, cycling, CRoW access issues, rights of way
Sarah Slade	Landowner	Rural surveyor, farming, horse-riding, walking
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

• February 2009

Ian Tearle, Head of Health Policy, Devon Primary Care Trust, addressed the Forum about enhancing opportunities to improve health through accessing the countryside and green space. He drew attention to the physical and mental benefits of access to green areas and the need to improve activity levels of both adults and children. Obesity figures for Devon are broadly in line with England's average of 23.6% of adults but there is variation over the County. Devon County Council achieved above average figures for activity levels (24% of adults in 2007/8), based on Sport England activity surveys where levels are

measured on the basis of people engaging in moderate intensity exercise for 30 minutes, three days a week. Engaging with the 76% of adults who do not exercise sufficiently is the challenge. The Primary Care Trust, with other partners, is active in a number of schemes to promote healthy lifestyles and is also developing a number of key policy strategies.

At all meetings Public Rights of Way staff from Devon Council Council keep members up-to-date with progress on the Public Rights of Way Action Plan and Rights of Way Improvement Plan projects.



DCAF members at February 2009 meeting



Liaison and networking

- Some members attended meetings of adjacent local access forums.
- The Chairman and Co-Chairman attended a meeting of SW LAF Chairmen, attended by Duncan Graham, Chairman of the England Access Forum.
- Members supported the Public Rights of Way team at local agricultural shows and discussed rights of way issues with members of the public.
- Members attended Parish Paths Partnership (P3) workshops.
- The Forum was represented at:
 - a Shoreline Management Plan meeting
 - West Devon SCS: Environment Theme Stakeholder Event

England Access Forum

The England Access Forum was set up as a non-statutory body by Natural England in 2008 and has held three meetings. Two local access forum members from each region are on the EAF, in addition to Natural England Officers. Bob Harvey, Co-Chairman, is one of the South West members. EAF aims to discuss items of national interest to LAFs and enhance LAFs' influence on national policy developments.

DCAF agenda papers, minutes and responses to consultations 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 DCAF 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.



Devon Countryside Access Forum

The DCAF Secretary, Hilary Winter, can be contacted at:
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The DCAF is funded by Devon County Council and operates within a yearly budget of £5,150 plus a part-time officer. A report on the effectiveness of the DCAF during the year and the advice it has given can be found on the website.

Front cover picture: The East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust
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