

## Devon Local Access Forum Annual Report 2005/6

### Chairman's comments

*This was the third year of operation and has developed our identity with greater clarity. The first year was dominated by the preparation for Open Access to mountain, moor, heath and down; the second by the formulation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). The third year has clarified the way forward in the scope and operation of the Forum.*



*As more people are demanding activity recreation, access to the countryside is inseparable from the operations of "Sport England" and the drive for healthier lifestyles. We now have to consider wider access to coastal land and water, and to inland water and rivers. These are challenging new fields, and uncharted waters.*

*The proposal to establish a multi-use right of way along the disused railway line from Thorndon Cross to Halwill Junction offered a prime example of where we could examine a site-specific issue to advise on strategic policies. The fact that some aspects of our advice were publicly criticised, and some aspects have been accepted for action by Devon County Council, demonstrates that we are able and prepared to give advice which is impartial even if unwelcome.*

*The Forum is not a rubber stamp for the authorities nor does it sacrifice integrity for public popularity. 2006/7 promises to be even more interesting.*

*Bob Harvey  
Chairman  
2005/6*

### What is the Local Access Forum (LAF)?

Now completing its third year, the Devon Local 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 on improving access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment, a remit recently extended to include water access. It provides strategic advice and, in doing so, strives to achieve a consensus voice, taking into account statutory guidance, the needs of both landowners and access users, as well as wider conservation, landscape, social, economic and educational factors.



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The Forum covers the whole of Devon with the exception of the National Parks and Unitary Authorities which have their own LAFs. During 2005/6 the Forum held three public meetings (one during an evening) and also had a number of site visits, working groups and a training day. A fourth public meeting, scheduled for Okehampton in November, was cancelled due to bad weather.

### Who is on the Local Access Forum?

The Forum increased its membership to fifteen in 2005 to accommodate a wider range of interests, particularly expertise in water access and disability issues.

Members represent a balance between those who manage land and those who use it for recreation. Other more general interests such as conservation, law and tourism are also represented. In April 2005, Devon County Council reappointed Chris Ingram and Tim Felton for a further three-year term and appointed new members Peter Grainger, Peter Thorn, Kate Wass and Graham White. Following local government elections in May 2005, Cllr Joe Tucker and Cllr Philip Brock came onto the Forum as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Public Rights of Way Committee.

In April 2005 Bob Harvey and Terry Faull were re-elected as Chairman and Vice-Chairman.



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### What has the Devon LAF achieved during 2005/6?

#### Open access

In August 2005, 12,111.68 hectares (29,927.96 acres) of moorland, heathland, downland and registered common land in Devon (excluding Dartmoor National Park) were designated as 'access land'. Although much of this land was previously open to the public, some new areas have been made available. This had been the focus of much work over the past two years.

*During 2005/6 the Forum:-*

- Heard a presentation by Tom Sunderland, Access Project Officer, English Nature SW, on the role of English Nature. We were pleased to note that English Nature favoured a positive approach to access land using management measures such as controls on dogs, and way-marked routes, with seasonal or permanent exclusions as a last resort.

- Attended an informative Country Land and Business Association roadshow on the legal aspects of open access and the implications for landowners.
- Investigated some of the difficulties of signing and implementing open access during a Training Day at Little Haldon.
- Supported an application from Devon County Council for grant-funding from the Countryside Agency for a post to assess and implement open access.
- Requested regular reports from the Access Land Officer. She has been able to negotiate successfully with landowners to open up sites. These have been prioritised with the most sizeable ones being signed by early 2006.

#### Further Action

- We shall continue to discuss small/island sites with the County Council.
- We shall be consulted on any restrictions over six months duration (to date, none have been applied for).
- We shall continue to monitor and advise on any problems as they arise.
- We shall continue to take opportunities to publicise access land and ensure the public are more aware of the new access opportunities shown on the revised OS maps.
- We shall contribute to future consultations on extending open access to coastal land, currently being explored.

#### Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

We made extensive comments on the draft RoWIP during 2004/5 and it was pleasing to see much of this advice included in the final plan, published in July 2005.

In the autumn we advised on a proposal to create a bridleway from Thorndon Cross to Halwill Junction (near Okehampton). As many former railways could potentially become rights of way, it was felt we could usefully look at the strategic principles. This work focussed our minds on the many, and often conflicting, issues at stake. We made comments on the overall scheme and on the consultation process. We shall be involved in production of a guidance note on consultation to accompany the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.



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#### Working Group

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a statutory requirement but does not come with automatic funding. We held a Working Group to discuss a Rights of Way section funding bid for central Government money from Devon County Council's Local Transport Plan. The outcome of our advice is awaited. The following key objectives were supported:

1. Strategic long distance walking and riding routes
2. Improving the safety of those using the network by schemes to protect vulnerable users – walkers, riders, cyclists - where routes interconnect with A roads
3. Development and improvement of a high quality rights of way network through the creation of circular routes around communities
4. Wider opportunities for use of the network by all sectors of the community to improve health and well-being

We made additional comments, including stressing the vital importance of local participation through the Parish Plan and Definitive Map Review processes, the possible difficulties of achieving projects within time-scales, and the consequent need for flexibility, and the need to ensure smaller towns, villages and rural communities had opportunities to secure rights of way improvements.



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#### Who are the members?

Forum members	Status	Expertise and interests
Mareth Adams	Access user	Green lane and long distance trials motorcycling, horse-riding, walking, youth work
Terence Ayre	Landowner	Farmer, countryside management
Philip Brock	County Councillor	Vice-Chairman of the Public Rights of Way Committee
Charles Fane Trefusis	Landowner	Estate management, business, forestry, cycling, walking
Terry Faull (Vice-Chairman 2005/06)	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 2005/06)	Landowner	Landscape conservation, woodland regeneration, dogwalking
Christine Ingram	Access user	Horse-riding, multi-use, tourism
John Skinner	Access user	Walking, cycling, CROW access issues, Rights of Way
Sarah Slade	Landowner	Rural surveyor, farmer, 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
Kate Wass	Access user	Disabled access issues
Graham White (resigned Jan. 2006)	Landowner	Farmer, classic car trials, walking

Further details on members' interests and involvements can be seen on [www.devon.gov.uk/devon\\_local\\_access\\_forum](http://www.devon.gov.uk/devon_local_access_forum)

## Consultations

We have responded to a number of consultations including:-

- **Exe Estuary Cycle/Walkway (Devon County Council)**
- **Draft Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales (Defra)** We confined comments to Aim 5: Increase in off-road riding and carriage driving. The final strategy was published in December 2005 and it was pleasing to see many of our comments incorporated. These focussed on the need for safe crossings, long-distance strategic routes and a network of off-road routes.
- **Consultation relating to the amendment of the Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2002**

This resulted from the University of Gloucestershire's Review of Local Access Forums during 2005. Members contributed to postal questionnaires and some members participated in a discussion group. New regulations and support for developing the LAFs' role are anticipated in 2006, following comments on the consultation.

- **County Sports Partnership**  
In recognition of the Forum's widening role, we made comment on the Devon County Sports Partnership Plan.



## Widening Local Access Forum work

### Water access

A presentation by Tamsin Phipps, Access Officer for the British Canoe Union, at the February meeting, highlighted some of the problems experienced by recreational users of rivers and facilitated discussion of the campaign to improve access. Currently only 4% of rivers have legal access and this is frequently confined to a certain number of days or number of permits. We shall be considering the arguments and how to respond.

## Local Development Frameworks (LDFs)

This process will give more power to District Councils and encompasses a variety of spatial planning documents, replacing the Local Plan and other policies. We take the view that it is imperative to ensure that the protection and maintenance of rights of way, development of open space and incorporation of cycle and walkways into new and existing housing/industrial developments are



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adequately considered. We have responded to a number of consultations and shall continue to offer advice on these issues which affect both health and sustainability.

### Sport

Government Ministers have encouraged forums to look at sport issues. The Chairman attended a SW "Sport England" Conference in Dawlish which focussed on the importance of sport and recreation to health and tourism. This indicated extensive opportunities for broadening the scope of our work. During the Training Day we looked at major recreational improvements taking place at Haldon Forest, funded by Sport England.

## Liaison and networking

- During the year some members attended meetings of adjacent Local Access Forums and sub-regional meetings.
- In November the Chairman and Vice-Chairman attended a regional get-together of Local Access Forums to discuss the LAFs' future role. Geoff Audcent (Defra) and David

Gear (Countryside Agency) addressed the statutory focus of LAFs and the action plan for their development. Cath Hart (Hampshire County Council) and Alun Morgan (Chairman of the Joint Local Access Forum around Bristol) gave presentations on working with their LAFs.

- The Chairman, along with forum representatives from across the country, attended a stimulating meeting at Defra in Bristol to discuss future guidance for LAFs.
- The Chairman represented the Forum at a meeting to discuss a pilot project for coastal access along the north Devon/Somerset coast.



You can walk where you see this sign but please keep your dog on a short lead from 1st March to 31st July

LAF responses to consultations, agenda papers and minutes can be viewed on [www.devon.gov.uk/devon\\_local\\_access\\_forum](http://www.devon.gov.uk/devon_local_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 LAF 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 Local Access Forum

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