



DEVON LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

ANNUAL REPORT

2003—2004

Terms of Reference

The Devon Local Access Forum (Devon LAF) was set up by Devon County Council to fulfil its statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The purpose of the Devon LAF is to provide advice to Devon County Council on how to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable for open-air recreation, in ways which also address social, economic and environmental concerns. The Devon LAF is an independent voice but is financed through Devon County Council. It works within a set budget in order to meet its terms of reference. Further details can be found on the website.

The Devon LAF covers the whole of Devon with the exception of the National Parks and Unitary Authorities which have their own forums.

Membership

Following open advertising during early 2003 a cross-section of people from around the county, both access users and land managers, were selected to serve on the Devon LAF. The aim of the Devon LAF is to generate debate amongst access users, landowners and managers and those with other interests. Achieving a consensus view is an important objective. In addition to Cllrs Gretta Madigan and Mary Turner, Chair and Vice-Chair of Devon County Council's Public Rights of Way Committee, the following people were appointed to serve on the Devon LAF:

Access Users: Mareth Adams, Christine Ingram, Jenny Parsons, John Skinner, George Whitfield

Landowners/Managers: Terence Ayre, Michael Bickell, Charles Fane Trefusis, Bob Harvey, Sarah Slade

Those with other interests: Terry Faull, Tim Felton

At the first meeting Bob Harvey was elected as Chairman and Terry Faull as Vice-Chairman.

With the exception of the county councillors, Devon LAF members have been appointed for periods of one, two and three years to bring continuity to the work of the Devon LAF. There have been no resignations during the year and the four retiring members, appointed for one year, have all exercised the option to continue for a further three years. Members thereafter will have to re-apply as all vacancies will be advertised in the press and on the website.



Meetings

Members met at the beginning of April 2003 for a full-day training meeting at which they were briefed by Devon County Council officers on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and Local Access Forums; National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; rights of way and cycling routes in Devon. The first meeting in public was held on 22 April and a further four meetings have taken place since.

Consideration of the draft open access maps, published by the Countryside Agency, was the focus of the first three meetings following which a response was sent from the Devon LAF, dealing primarily with the effectiveness of the consultation process and inconsistencies

in mapping. Members were concerned that Parish Councils had not been adequately alerted to the consultation exercise and took the strategic decision to write to all Parish Councils, advising them of the consultation process and encouraging them to involve local people in the process. Six parishes contacted the Devon LAF following this letter to say that maps had not been received and they were put in touch with the Countryside Agency.

The fourth and fifth meetings of the Devon LAF were concerned with developing a greater understanding of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and its relationship with the Local Transport Plan. As part of this process the Devon LAF has sought to appreciate the needs of different user groups and landowners/managers.



With the exception of Working Group meetings, all meetings have been open to the public and the Devon LAF is grateful to those people who have come along and listened to the discussions and made a contribution.



Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Each Highway Authority is required to publish a visionary Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP). This will look at present and future access needs and how these can be improved for the benefit of the public, access users and visitors, and particularly those with mobility or sight problems. Devon County Council is required to consult the Devon LAF during the preparation of its RoWIP and during any review. The Devon LAF has been kept informed at regular stages on the progress of the Plan and has made comments.

The Devon LAF Rights of Way Improvement Plan Working Group has met twice to consider a RoWIP scoring system. The aim of this has been to devise a robust and objective matrix, which can be developed by Devon County Council to assess and prioritise potential improvements in the RoWIP. The fruits of this work will be combined with contributions from Dartmoor and Exmoor LAFs. Seeking funding and putting in bids will be a vital part of the RoWIP process.

Consultations

During the year the Devon LAF has been consulted on a number of important issues affecting the countryside and these have included:

For the Countryside Agency

- ◆ Draft Access Maps.
- ◆ Open Access Symbol. Proposed Guidelines for use.
Members expressed a number of concerns about the design and costs of the proposed symbol.
- ◆ A framework and guidance on local signage required to implement the new access rights. Consultation draft.
- ◆ 'Land between the Moors' consultation document.

For DEFRA

- ◆ Regulations relating to the Removal or Relaxation of General Restrictions under Part 1 of the CRoW Act 2000.
- ◆ Use of mechanically propelled vehicles on Rights of Way.
Members made particular suggestions on how enforcing agencies and the public can be made aware of legal and illegal use of vehicles on rights of way.

For the Department for Transport

- ◆ Initial comments on Local Transport Plan guidance.
Members wished to see greater provision for horse-riding in the Local Transport Plan.

General

- ◆ Public Access Consultancy for the Army Training Estate. Regional Report – ATE South West
Members commented on the need for public access to military areas, improved signing and the development of a more pro-active recreational policy.



Speakers at the Devon LAF

Speakers at Devon LAF meetings have brought their expertise and wealth of knowledge on a wide range of access issues and this has been appreciated. Speakers during the year have included:

From Devon County Council

Heidi Cruickshank, Improvement Plan Officer
(Progress reports on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan)
Peter Chamberlain, County Ecologist
(Ecological impacts of the proposed open access land)
Mike Jenkins, Rights of Way Manager
(Digital mapping of open access land)
Roland Pyle, Policy Development Officer
(Devon Local Transport Plan)

Other speakers

Tom Lewis, Countryside Agency
(Draft access maps)
Jeff Bolton
(Access and cyclists)
Yvonne Pope
(Access for those with limited mobility)



Layland Branfield, Deputy Chairman of Devon NFU and Devon farmer
Charles Huntington-Whiteley, Partner in Strutt & Parker and a member of Devon CLA Branch Committee
Mary Talbot-Rosevear, Secretary of the Small Farms Association
(Access problems and issues affecting farmers and landowners/managers)

Liaison with other LAFs

During the year the Secretary, Chairman, Vice-Chairman and some members have attended occasional meetings of the Cornwall, Dartmoor, Exmoor and Somerset LAFs. Greater networking is planned during next year through a Regional Workshop to identify access issues of common interest and concern.

Liaison with other organisations

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman held a useful meeting with Malcolm Bell, Chief Executive of SW Tourism. Members have liaised with different user and land management organisations and have addressed other meetings, including the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Trail Riders' Fellowship.

Devon LAF Workplan

During the first couple of meetings the LAF members discussed and agreed a workplan for activities during the first year. This focussed on ensuring effective implementation of new open access land and increasing awareness; advising on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan to ensure that it reflects the needs of local users and visitors and improves access for the disabled and other special needs groups; establishing the LAF as a statutory advisory body through contacts with key countryside and access organisations; and working in an open and accountable manner. The overwhelming majority of these objectives has been achieved or are ongoing thanks to the hard work and dedication of the members of the Devon LAF.

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.devon.gov.uk/prow/laf

The Secretary, Hilary Winter, can be contacted at the Devon Local Access Forum, Lucombe House, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter EX2 4QW.
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