

## Devon Local Access Forum Annual Report 2004/5

### Comment from the Chairman

*With a potentially volatile mix of five landowners, five access users, two with general interests and two county councillors, the prophets of doom forecast LAF meetings fraught with arguments and acrimony. In practice, the members have worked amicably with consideration and consensus to meet the objectives of the CROW Act 2000.*

*In two years we have distilled from a primaevial soup of individuals into an effective and complementary team which can inject large doses of specialist expertise into the decision-making process of the county and district councils, and can respond with local knowledge to national consultations.*

*Just as we watch over them, we need the public to watch over us. If you have any interest in our unique Devon countryside, please come to our meetings.*

*We value your views.*

**Bob Harvey**  
Chairman  
2004/5

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

The Devon Local Access Forum was established under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to advise the appointing authority, Devon County Council, on the improvement of public access to land for open-air recreation and enjoyment, having regard to the needs of land management and the desirability of conserving the natural beauty of the area.



The Devon LAF covers all Devon with the exception of the National Parks and Unitary Authorities which have their own LAFs. During 2004/5 the forum met three times in Exeter and, in addition, has undertaken training sessions, made site visits and established working groups.



The Devon LAF gives strategic advice on proposals, policies and plans where there are access implications. The forum does receive letters from members of the public but seeks to establish whether there are access matters of wider concern or principle rather than taking up individual issues.

### Who is on the Local Access Forum?

The Devon LAF consists of twelve members of the public plus the Chairman and Vice-chairman of Devon County Council's Public Rights of Way Committee. Members are appointed, following open advertising, and represent a balance between those who use the countryside for recreation and those who manage land. Other interests such as conservation, law and tourism are also represented.

Throughout their debates the forum members strive to achieve a consensus view, taking into account statutory guidance, the needs of both access users and land managers plus wider conservation, landscape, social, economic and educational factors.



Members were initially appointed for periods of one year (renewable for a further three years), two years and three years. From 2005 new members will be appointed for a three year term.

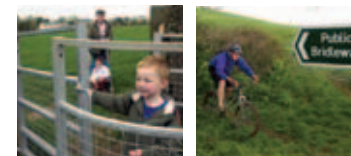
### What has the Devon LAF achieved during 2004/5?

#### Open access

The Devon Local Access Forum has considered the implications of new rights to walk on designated open country (mountain, moor, heath and down) and registered common land.

In 2003/4 the forum commented on inconsistencies in the mapping process and robustness of the consultation process. During this year the LAF-

- Observed the progress of Appeals following publication of the Provisional Maps.
- Supported an application from Devon County Council for Access Management Grant Scheme funding from the Countryside Agency to assess new open access land and information and signing requirements.
- Responded to various consultations on CROW Act implementation.



Following the Appeal process, determined by the Planning Inspectorate, 59,367.50 hectares of land has been designated as open access in Devon, predominantly within the National Parks.

The LAF welcomes open access which will be implemented in August 2005. The LAF is keen to ensure land can be opened up without adversely affecting maintenance budgets for the existing rights of way network. The LAF will have a continuing role in advising on priorities, information boards and appropriate signing, education about rights and responsibilities of users and landowners and the need for any restrictions on access.

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

Devon County Council has a statutory duty to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan setting out its vision for access improvements in the County. The forum has a statutory and strategic role to advise on:-

- The extent to which public rights of way meet present and likely future needs.
- Existing and new opportunities that can be provided by rights of way networks (e.g. footpaths, bridleways and byways) for exercise and open-air recreation and enjoyment.
- The accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.
- Priorities for the implementation of the plan.

The LAF has commented in detail on the draft plan following a working group meeting and will continue to be closely involved in establishing priorities as Annual Business Plans are produced. The Devon LAF has identified the following criteria as vital to the success of the ROWIP.



#### 1. Resources

Devon County Council, through its ROWIP and Annual Business Plans, should identify in detail specified resources for ROWIP projects, using a strong evidence base to provide the rationale for funding.

An allocation of funding for the ROWIP from the grant awarded to the Local Transport Plan (LTP) process should be clearly identified.

#### 2. Safety

It is evident that safety issues in the County are paramount for access users. Adequate funding must be directed to ensuring current safety problems are addressed. Safety must be given full consideration where new schemes are proposed.

#### 3. Consultation

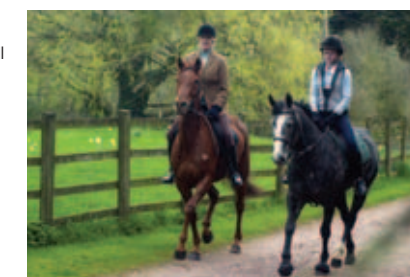
Many problems have arisen in the past due to inadequate consultation, particularly at local level. The ROWIP should seek to ensure that there is early and adequate consultation with local groups and the public and, importantly, between all relevant departments within Devon County Council.

#### 4. Multi-use

The ROWIP should seek to strengthen its profile on multi-use, developing good practice and seeking to ensure all user groups and the public have maximum opportunities for recreational enjoyment.

#### 5. Immediate benefits

Preparing the ROWIP is a statutory duty which comes without financial resources. The LAF considers some 'quick wins' should be sought to give public credibility to the process. Many schemes will take a long time to come to fruition, especially if funding applications and land acquisition are necessary.



### Who are the members?

Forum members	Status	Expertise and interests
Mareth Adams	Access user	Green lane and long distance trials motorcycling, horse-riding, walking
Terence Ayre	Landowner	Farmer, countryside management
Michael Bickell (resigned Nov. 2004)	Landowner	Farmer, horse-riding
Charles Fane Trefusis	Landowner	Estate management, forestry, cycling, walking,
Terry Faull (Vice-chairman 2004/05)	General interests	Landscape history, countryside interpretation, walking
Tim Felton	General interests	Barrister, lecturer in law and estate management, riding, walking, running
Bob Harvey (Chairman 2004/05)	Landowner	Landscape conservation, dogwalking
Christine Ingram	Access user	Horse-riding, multi-use, tourism
Gretta Madigan	County Councillor	Chairman Public Rights of Way Committee, horse-riding, walking
Jenny Parsons (resigned Nov. 2004)	Access user	Horse-riding, tourism
John Skinner	Access user	Walking, cycling, CROW access issues, Rights of Way
Sarah Slade	Landowner	Rural surveyor, farmer, horse-riding, walking
Mary Turner	County Councillor	Vice-chairman Public Rights of Way Committee
George Whitfield (resigned Nov. 2004)	Access user	Sustainable tourism, culture and heritage, cycling



### Second Devon Local Transport Plan (LTP)

Following a presentation to members by the Transportation Planning Officer at DCC, the Chairman, Vice-chairman and Secretary took the opportunity to present evidence to the LTP Panel Hearing in Barnstaple in November 2004.

An immediate outcome of this presentation has been to secure greater consultation with LAFs on highway schemes. In addition, greater efforts will be made to ensure that all planning applications and/or highway schemes are fully considered in terms of their potential impact on the rights of way network.

### Multi-use

During the year the LAF has continued to campaign for multi-use on cycle tracks, where appropriate, in order to provide safe off-road access for horse-riders in the County. This will also serve to increase the extent of the network open to horse-riders. The LAF was pleased to see a change in Devon County Council's policy to reflect this so that multi-use is now the preferred option on new off-road cycleways and will be considered on existing routes.

### Liaison with other LAFs

The Devon LAF continues to liaise with other LAFs with members attending occasional meetings. The forum organised a successful workshop in June attended by neighbouring LAFs and hosted by Devon County Council. This provided an opportunity to discuss access issues across the West Country. Malcolm Bell, Chief Executive of South West Tourism Ltd.; Geoff Audcent and Sean Davies, Defra Policy Advisers

and Becky Shrimpton, Access Communications Manager for the Countryside Agency, gave useful insights into the importance of tourism in the South West, the role of LAFs and promoting open access land. This resulted in a co-ordinated approach to the Rt. Hon. Alun Michael MP, Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality on resources for implementing the new right of access and support for the work of LAFs.

### Training

Members enjoyed a useful training day in June, based at the Ruby Country initiative in SW Forest. Members explored the difficulties arising from an unusable bridleway crossing a Site of Special Scientific Interest and the varying perspectives adopted by different agencies. They also looked at signing issues at one site and took the opportunity to walk along the newly opened cycle-track at Highampton, now multi-use.

A training session was held on the Definitive Map review process.

### Consultations

The LAF has responded to a number of consultation documents including:-

- Consultation relating to regulations about public places under section 42 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- Consultation paper on proposals for regulations on appeals against notices under section 38 of the CROW Act 2000.
- The Exe Estuary Cycle/Walkway

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



## Annual Report 2004/5

Inside landscape photos by Steve Church. Front cover photo by Mark Rattenbury



### Devon Local Access Forum

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The Devon LAF is funded by Devon County Council. The LAF operates within a yearly budget of £3000, plus a part time secretary

