



## Devon Countryside Access Forum

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Mr D Driver  
Senior Projects Officer  
Policy and Programme Group  
Forestry Commission  
620 Bristol Business Park  
Coldharbour Lane  
Bristol  
BS16 1EJ

5 June 2009

Dear Mr Driver

### **Restoring and expanding open habitats from woods and forests in England**

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is a local access forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, with a specific responsibility to advise "as to the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area." It has a statutory function to advise the Forestry Commission as a section 94(4) body under the Act.

Given its role, it is disappointing that local access forums were not consulted on this particular policy consultation. Whilst we accept access forms a small part of the proposals we nevertheless feel recreation (and the associated health benefits) are very important and need to be given full consideration as the policy develops. The members of the Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF) have not had an opportunity to discuss this consultation document as it came to the attention of the Forum too late to do so. However, the Chairman and Co-Chairman wish to raise some issues and will bring these to the attention of the Forum at its next public meeting.

The challenge, identified in the document, is to "establish a clear policy to enable effective decision making about when it is right to remove or retain woods and forestry on potential open habitat. This will make sure we end up with a landscape that delivers more public benefits overall now and in the future and a process of change that is supported by most people."

The Devon Countryside Access Forum, is required, in accordance with Sections 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 (Local Access Forums), to advise on the improvement of public access to the countryside.

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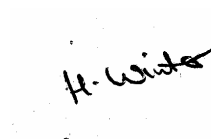
Both open habitat and woodland areas provide different access and recreational opportunities and experiences and the DCAF would not wish to see a situation where access opportunities might be diminished through a policy of woodland felling and open habitat restoration. Woodlands frequently provide good access for walkers, dog walkers, horse-riders, cyclists and those with mobility problems.

We are pleased to note on p.17 a quality of life theme which refers to the importance given to "high quality engagement in decisions about the initial proposals" and would strongly support a high level of engagement at the earliest opportunity about any proposals (**Option 1**, page 24) so that the impacts can be positive and can "meet local aspirations." The DCAF would wish to be involved in these discussions where proposals are put forward for areas in Devon (excluding the unitary authority and National Park areas which have their own local access forums).

We are pleased to note recognition of the complexities that might result if woodland removal leads to future designation of created habitat as open country under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (p.44). The DCAF would particularly welcome involvement in such instances as there are implications for land management and access use which would need careful assessment and consideration.

I should be grateful if you could acknowledge this letter and the DCAF looks forward to receiving further information on the development of the proposals in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Winter', is written over a faint, circular official stamp.

Hilary Winter  
Forum Officer