

Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

East Devon Pebblebed Heaths visitor access consultation: Appendix G

Organisation responses

These responses were from organisations that did not complete the online consultation form. They can't be added to the views of the 2 organisations expressed in the results document of the consultation form.

Devon Countryside Access Forum

Dear East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Site Manager

Pebblebed Heaths Visitor Access Consultation

The Devon Countryside Access Forum (DCAF) is a local access forum under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). Its statutory remit is to give independent advice "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..." Section 94(4) of the Act specifies bodies to whom the Forum has a statutory function to give advice. The South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership is formed from the three district councils in the area and the Forum has a duty to advise district councils.

The DCAF currently has fifteen members, appointed by Devon County Council, who represent the interests of landowners/managers, access users and other relevant areas of expertise such as conservation and tourism.

A group of members visited the site and these comments have been agreed by the Forum and take into account advice previously developed. The response will be on the agenda at the next meeting in January for formal approval.

The DCAF recognises the importance of safeguarding the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths and protecting species which give it Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area status. The increasing population growth in the immediate and wider area, such as Cranbrook, will inevitably increase recreational access on the heaths. The heaths offer significant recreational access opportunities for safe off-road use by a wide range of users including walkers, dog walkers, families, cyclists, horse-riders and disabled users. Open access plus the network of public rights of way (footpaths and bridleways) and permissive paths provide many options for informal recreation.

Car parking charges

The DCAF strongly supports the proposal not to charge for parking in the formal car parks on the Pebblebed Heaths. A charge may not be economic to collect, and any charges may displace people onto the roadside verges and passing places. The area is widely used by local residents on a regular basis and such use is important to health and well-being.

Car parking proposals

1. The Forum would welcome more information on the topics and messages that will be included on the interpretation/information boards. In principle these are supported.
2. The provision of additional dog bins, if regularly emptied, will encourage responsible dog walking.
3. Managing vegetation to improve the visibility of car parks should encourage use and deter anti-social behaviour.
4. Closure of the little-used Frying Pans car park would appear appropriate. Similarly use of Uphams for the Royal Marines and educational visits would be sensible, subject to Model Airfields car being enlarged to accommodate cars that would previously have used Uphams.
5. Additional way-marked trails from Four Firs car park to Woodbury Castle would ensure people had confidence to use this route. New gates permitting greater access to Bicton Common by people with disabilities and tramper buggies would be appreciated by this user group.
6. Reducing car parking at Squabmoor and Stowford Woods to minimise tree root damage is appropriate, if informal car parking close by is available.

Matters for further consideration

The Devon Countryside Access Forum is concerned about some of the proposals and the impact on access, as outlined below:

Horse-riders

The proposed closure of car parks and use of height restriction barriers will effectively limit horse box parking. Information from staff at the consultation suggested that Wheathill car park to the south will be available for horses. However, on the website summary, reference is made to a height restriction barrier so it is not at all clear where horse boxes could be parked.

The Pebblebed Heaths are criss-crossed by bridleways and individual horse riders are permitted on open access land by Clinton Devon Estates. Historically, the heaths have been an important horse-riding area and are used extensively today. Significantly reducing the options to park horse boxes will disadvantage this recreational user group for whom road riding is increasingly unsafe. There are very few places, outside the National Parks, where there are good off-road riding opportunities. The Forum advises the South East Devon Habitat Regulations Partnership and Clinton Devon Estates to reassess this aspect of the proposals, consult closely with the British Horse Society and local horse-riding groups and ensure horse riders can continue to park in some car parks and access the wider area.

This impact on horse riders was not brought out sufficiently in the consultation summary, entitled 'Visitor Access Improvements' and the accompanying report. Consequently, equestrian users may not have responded to the consultation.

Disability access and height barriers

Use of height barriers could also disadvantage some disabled users who transport mobility scooters in high vans or in vehicle top containers. It is likely that the increasing sophistication and automation of transportation options could mean more vehicles fall in this category. Consideration should be given to ensuring that access is available in several car parks.

Estuary Entrance/Estuary View and Woodbury Castle car parks

Estuary Entrance/Estuary View and Woodbury Castle. The Estuary View car park has outstanding views. The Forum has reservations about closing this car park as it is used by people enjoying the views or having a picnic, some of whom would be unable to walk far or to use the proposed all-ability trail. The DCAF appreciates the challenges of having to deal with anti-social behaviour but this could be displaced elsewhere if this car park is closed. The all-ability trail is nonetheless an additional route for people who wish to walk to the viewpoint which would be appreciated.

Access to the Estuary Entrance car park is not inviting and improvements to the car park and increased number of spaces would enhance this area. However, the DCAF has concerns if capacity is improved at this site at the expense of the Woodbury Castle car park – proposed for closure/partial closure. Woodbury Castle is a honeypot location on the heaths and also explored by families and young people who would not necessarily walk on the wider common. Access opportunities to walk, cycle and ride are much more limited on the Estuary Entrance car park side of the road. The B3180 is a relatively busy road with restricted views coming out of the Estuary Entrance car park. Focussing parking at Estuary Entrance will mean additional numbers of vulnerable road users – children, dog walkers, disabled and elderly people in particular – would want to cross this road to Woodbury Castle and the heathland beyond. Unless there were significant traffic calming measures this crossing is potentially very unsafe. Restricting car parking to blue badge holders at Woodbury Castle would not necessarily reduce damage to the Scheduled Monument or ease congestion.

Car parks: general improvements and disability access

The DCAF supports changes to the formal car parks which would make them more welcoming to visitors. However, surface improvements should be with local stone, with tarmac kept to the absolute minimum, to minimise urbanisation of the landscape. Compacted local gravel is suitable for disabled users but loose gravel could impede movement.

A couple of members of the DCAF, together with members of the Wheelchair Access Group, visited the Pebblebed Heaths in June 2019. This visit highlighted the requirements of disabled users. These included removing earth bunds to permit access out of car parks onto trails, providing accessible gates and reducing problems associated with deep gullies and steep cross slopes. Where disabled car parking is allocated, consideration needs to be given to space at the side and rear of vehicles to allow scooters/buggies to be taken out.

Landscape considerations should be borne in mind when putting in additional signage and height restriction barriers to ensure minimal visual intrusion.

Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour could be reduced by increasing the visibility of car parks, but it could also displace such behaviour to other areas. Improved site maintenance, regular monitoring visits by staff, quick responses to reports of fly-tipping, removal of litter and a welcoming environment should assist. Local community engagement is a major factor in tackling this issue. The information boards should include a telephone number to report problems.

Closing some car parks at night or putting up CCTV signs/equipment could deter inappropriate behaviour but the DCAF recognises that there would be staff and resource implications.

Overall car parking provision

It will be difficult to control and enforce efforts to reduce the number of informal car parking spaces, especially if population increases mean additional numbers of visitors are coming to the Heaths. This is particularly the case as the number of formal car parking spaces is not being increased. The Forum recommends continual monitoring and review to ensure formal car park capacity is sufficient.

Sustainable transport

The focus of the consultation is on car parking provision. The Devon Countryside Access Forum recommends that the partners involved in conservation of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths seek to encourage access users to visit the area using sustainable transport and the public rights of way network, and to consider whether any improvements would facilitate this.

The Forum would welcome feedback on its comments.

Yours sincerely

Forum Officer

Letter sent on behalf of the Devon Countryside Access Forum

Chair: Sarah Slade

Vice-Chair: Chris Cole

British Horse Society (BHS)

Dear sirs,

Further to my recent discussions at the consultation event last month, I am writing to confirm the points and concerns that have been raised to me by riders who use the Pebblebeds.

As is appreciated by your organisation the Pebblebeds are a much used resource by many user groups, not least by a large horse riding community. These riders are not only local to the area, as evidenced in the survey passed on to you, but by visiting riders who travel by horsebox. There are also riding stables which utilise the commons and also it is appreciated by yourselves that organised riding events take place from time to time, which are properly notified to you.

I take positive reassurance from our conversations that the riding community is seen in positive terms by yourselves and that your organisation will not seek to restrict the free riding of the commons. There is no issue from your part with regard to the surface, which is seen as robust and not subject to any wear or erosion from horse riding. In addition there is not any desire on your part to restrict in any way riders from accessing the commons from any point convenient to the individual rider. These rights are protected by the 1923 Act to make open access (by Lord Clinton) and this has been reinforced by the 2000 Countryside Act.

Where there have been areas where there are access restrictions raised by riders I appreciate that you are prepared to enter in to dialogue to try and mitigate any concerns. The main point of contention has been over the issue of parking. Some car parks are seen by yourselves as purely car parks, unsuitable for the parking of horse boxes or trailers due to the confines of size. There are remaining issues over several larger car parks which are larger but where there have been issues with travellers and usage by commercial vehicles. It has been necessary on your part to make them unusable for larger vehicles by adding height barriers. We discussed the use of combination locks or additional keys for riders who may wish to park horse boxes. This is something that you were prepared to consider on a case by case basis, especially in regards to requests for licensed riding events. I was given a contact at the Estate Office on 01395 443881.

As this visitor consultation is predicated to positively promote access I hope that requests for keys or a number to the locks are given appropriate consideration, especially as it would avoid additional parking on the road, which I know is an issue that the consultation wishes to avoid and discourage.

British Horse Society County Access and Bridleways Officer

East Devon Radio Control Club

Good morning,

Thank you for alerting us that the club hadn't sent in a response to the consultation.

Looking at the overall plan, it's good for the management of the commons, nature and the protection of ancient sites. However, the EDRCC committee has concerns that the proposed changes will adversely impact upon our members' use of the flying site. In particular our disabled members will no longer be able to transport their models and equipment to the airfield. Also as time passes there may be more of us requiring this facility.

For the remainder of the membership the layout to increase the number of parking spaces is of concern to modellers when assembling models with other vehicles manoeuvring close by within a much restricted space.

The inability to gain vehicle access from the car park to the flying site will also make site maintenance an even more onerous task than it already is.

If vehicle access from the Model Airfield Car Park is removed we suggest that CDE permits access for our disabled members from Uphams Car Park and to relieve them from a very much longer walk over uneven ground when returning and retrieving vehicles that they park on the fire break just the other side of the Model Airfield Car Park as we do during organised events like the Commando Challenge and Cycle Races.

A further suggestion is that by permitting all of our members the privilege of parking there that it will remove the concerns we have as mentioned above and reduce the pressure of space in the busier Model Airfield Car Park as well.

Best Regards, Chairman; East Devon Radio Control Club

Individuals responses

These responses were from people that did not complete the online consultation form. They can't be added to the views of the 94 people expressed in the results document of the consultation form.

As in the survey results the main issues raised was keeping the Pebblebed Heaths accessible for horse riders and horse transporters. The height restriction barriers will restrict / prevent access. Also mentioned is that horse riders can't ride underneath height barriers.

Group of respondents 1

A few notes from yesterday:

- Request for disabled parking on Aylesbeare as the tarmac track provides easy access for people who rely on traditional wheelchairs. There are few places on the heaths that can be accessed. Would be a nice compliment to the planned all ability trail at estuary view. Likely to be achievable earlier than the new trail.
- Emphasis from local couple regarding importance of deterrent to travellers
- Suggestion for 'passing place' signage down Hawkerland road in gaps that are left to deter parking.
- Expecting the model air club to get in touch regarding stopping vehicle access to the airfield from that car park. Currently there are a small number of less abled members that we allow to drive to the field.
- BHS I am expecting a thorough formal response
- With the notes from the Joneys event please can you add on that there was a request from one person for more parking in general across the site to take the growing population, we had a long conversation with her.

Thanks,
Pebblebed Heaths Site Manager

Group of respondents 2

A few things to note that cropped up in the session in Exmouth:

- Bike racks – fair point, I had actually been thinking about those. Particularly castle car park as people cannot cycle on the monument, they could cycle to it then lock their bike up, could be in the space that is closed off to vehicles.
- An additional bench part way along the all ability trail at estuary view so that people can pause for a rest, again a good suggestion. I got the impression that the lady that suggested it probably wouldn't do the survey.
- General desire for traffic calming/speed limit on the main road, mentioned a couple of times, mainly in relation to castle/estuary view

Thanks

Pebblebed Heaths Site Manager

Individual respondent 1

Hi

I recently completed the online survey but forgot one of the most important suggestions. Like many other people we meet at Stowford/Yettington we desperately need the wooden bridge over the stream to be rebuilt. I know that the floods washed the bridge away but so many people used to use the bridge to make a circular walk or take their dogs to the small pond and turn around rather than going up the steep bank as the steps were becoming difficult for some people. Hopefully this will be included in the work you will be doing.

Many thanks

Individual respondent 2

I have read the plans for the upcoming improvements to what is an outstandingly beautiful area.

Could you please explain why the height restrictions are being added. We like to bring our horses to the area to use the bridle paths. Obviously we need horse boxes to be able to do this. Height restrictions may mean that we are unable to continue to ride here.

Individual respondent 3

Hello

I would like you to consider installing a 1 mile circular 'board walk' somewhere on Woodbury Common.

A slightly raised wooden route with handrails and benches would provide an accessible route for people with mobility problems, people with push chairs, to school groups and to anyone who finds the Common a bit daunting to walk and would benefit with a circular walk which would be impossible to get lost from. An accessible car park would also be important so people could go straight from parking the car to the board walk.

Along the route could be tasteful signs explaining the wildlife and plants which could be seen, the birds, the history etc.

I have been on a few similar boardwalks on holiday and thoroughly enjoyed them. They provide a safe walk and also protect the wildlife from feet as people stick to the boardwalk and don't venture off.

I am an XXX who lives in the area and walk my dog regularly on the Common, so I am particularly interested in making the beautiful Common accessible to all.

I look forward to receiving your comments.

Kind regards

Individual respondent 4

Dear Team,

I just wanted to email you my dismay at the news there are plans to stop people parking horse boxes/trailers in the car parks on Woodbury common. There are designated bridle paths on the common, and therefore one draws the conclusion that it is ok to ride a horse there.

Most people who own horses are animal lovers and follow the 'country code' myself included. I do not live a hackable distance from the common so have to use a trailer in order to be able to enjoy the common as many other folk do.

It seems this is discrimination against horse riders, but it is ok for mountain bikers to use the common. I urge you to reconsider these plans or at least put in designated area where people can park a horsebox/trailer.

Many thanks,

Individual respondent 5

I was dismayed to learn that some of the VMP proposals will mean horse box access will effectively be prevented or restricted in many of the car parks. As we live some distance from the common, boxing to these car parks is our only option to enjoy the great riding on the common.

Please can you review this and ensure that the access we currently have is not compromised.

Many thanks.

Individual respondent 6

Dear Sir /Madam

I live in Southerton and often walk over Aylesbeare Common.

Last year May 2018, i was bitten by an infected tick which had, unbeknown to me crawled up my trouser leg to calf.

I developed full blown symptoms of Lymes, but because i sought treatment early, made a full recovery after 4 weeks of antibiotics.

The treating nurse said that Aylesbeare common was notorious for ticks.

I recommend that when / if new signage goes up, a warning to walkers, of presence of ticks and need to cover up bare flesh, is included.

Exmoor and other moors popular with holidaymakers has them, so i was very surprised/shocked that there were no warnings, as far as i could see, on Aylesbeare.

It is surely a duty of care by providers of public facilities to include this Health and safety as matter of course.

Ironically, i was bitten again same leg, whilst sitting in the garden of a neighbour whose house is on fringe of Common. The nurse removed, the still alive tick! Thankfully this wasn't diseased.

Lymes disease as result of tick bites is on the increase nationally.

I would appreciate your response.

Individual respondent 7

Sir/madam

I'm writing to express my concern about the changes to the car parks on the common especially to horse riders. The new design to the car parks will seriously restrict horse boxes and trailers using the common. Woodbury Common is open to everybody. There are many riders that use the common but people have a very aggressive opinion of horses on the roads and there have been many incidents of aggression and near misses in Exmouth and the surrounding area. The common is our safe place to ride. We still have to cope with dirt bikes and 4x4s on the green lanes, marines popping out the bushes and all our nice sandy gallop tracks have disappeared.

Please, let us enjoy our hobby along with everyone else. Make the car parks accessible to all horse boxes and trailers.

Kind regards

Individual respondent 8

Good afternoon

I attended a consultation event and was asked to feedback some points I raised, having completed the survey I find the only way to feed these points back is to email you.

There is little mention regarding horse riders. I do not box my horse to the common, my horse is stabled on the edge of the common so I ride from there and back. I use the common normally 5 or 6 times a week. I use Dalditch Plantation, Dalditch Common, Lypmstone Common, East Budleigh Common, Bicton Common, Woodbury Common and Colaton Raleigh Common.

Many of the car parks have tracks leading to and from them, as horse riders we regularly ride through the car parks as we leave one track and join the next. Where height restriction barriers are planned, there will need to be another way for riders to exit/enter the car park, it is not practical (or safe) to expect horse riders to ride under the barriers.

If I was asked what you could do to improve my experience of using the area, I would say it falls into 2 areas

1. Access. My head is approx. 8 feet in the air when I ride. Unfortunately when vegetation is cut back it is done only at ground level, this means the gaps beside the low barriers are often impassable and vegetation around gates makes using them difficult. The proposals suggest that the number of low barriers will increase, not only must there be space beside them for access but these spaces must be kept free of vegetation (at all levels)

2. Use of off road areas by Clinton Devon Estates/Military Services. The 3 Codes request that users stay on established paths to avoid damaging the land, keep their speed down so as not to kick up stones and are considerate to other users. Please can CDE and the military consider

- if they are off road, is their journey really necessary (or is it a short cut)?
- are they travelling slowly to avoid kicking up stones/water?
- does the track they are using require some maintenance due to the damage the vehicles have caused?

I hope the consultation goes well and look forward to seeing the results. I am sure that most people are really thankful that we have such a wonderful space and appreciate the need to look after such a valuable environment

regards

Individual respondent 9

Dear Sirs,

I have read the consultation document of which I mostly approve, as a resident of Lymptone and a lifelong visitor to the Commons.

I was disappointed to find that in your online Consultation Survey, the Bystock site is not listed. There is, however, a section in the Consultation Information about it: I attach a copy of the relevant section. It refers to the parking area off the Pine Ridge to Yettington road.

The section on strengths and weaknesses seems confused. Weakness: "No public access" - there has indeed been public access for a long time. "Access to Bystock ponds" - this is a strength, would you not agree? The road visibility is a valid point.

Then the Opportunity section refers to it as a "car park with potential for improvement work", subsequently ignoring this and mentioning a Wrights Lane car park which currently does not exist. The Threat section would seem to indicate that this is not likely to be a good option.

Nevertheless the car park has been closed, which means that access to the meadow and the ponds from that end is not now possible. The Draft Concept Proposal would appear to have been pre-empted without the possibility of consultation, since it does not appear on the online public survey.

Would it not be wise to give more details of the "Alternative location" so that consultation can take place? Should the car park not have been kept open until the consultation is complete?

Thank you for your time in reading this opinion.

Individual respondent 10

Pleased to hear that you are not planning to introduce car parking charges and are going to improve car parking surfaces. We walk there every day and love the common just as it is, but if we could have one wish it would be for some strategically placed logs to sit on so that us oldies can rest our weary old bones - especially up the hills! Also more notices asking people to pick up after their dogs, people let their dogs out of cars, let them run ahead and by the time they catch up they have missed their dog leaving excrement on paths (or just choose to ignore it)

Kind regards