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*24th September 2004*

From the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality  
The Rt Hon Alun Michael MP

*Dear Mr Harvey,*

Thank you for your letter of 1 September concerning the recent workshop for local access forums in the south west and the issues of concern which the forums have identified in developing their role as independent expert bodies.

I should first say how pleased I am to hear of the initiative taken by the forums in the south west to develop effective liaison arrangements amongst themselves. I am sure this will assist greatly in developing their level of expertise and the quality of the advice which they provide.

To a great extent forums will be what their individual members make them, and the most important ingredient in their success will be the commitment, motivation, abilities and insights which members bring. However, it is important that forum members have the right level of support and guidance, so that they have the confidence and information to be able to perform their role effectively.

I note your comments in relation to confusion, communication and continuity, and particularly the need for further guidance. You should by now have received my letter to all members and secretaries of forums in England. This sets out my own thoughts on what needs to be done to ensure that forums continue to develop and thrive in a way which benefits everyone. As a first step I have asked my officials to work with the Countryside Agency, who will be talking to representatives of local access forums and gathering views on what support, information or guidance they would welcome. This will enable the types of issues which you raise to be considered in detail and then addressed through the most appropriate means.

*(XNB. Previously circulated to Exmoor LAF member).*

I will ensure that the Agency are made aware of the concerns which you have raised.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Alun Michael*

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*9th October 2004*

From the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality  
The Rt Hon Alun Michael MP

*Dear Mr Harvey,*

Thank you for your letter of 6 September concerning funding to manage the new right of access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

I am pleased to hear of your support for the extension of the Access Management Grant Scheme until 2006/7 and its modification to better address potentially dangerous mines and quarries.

The new right of access will bring significant potential benefits to local communities, but access will need to be managed effectively on the ground if these benefits are to be realised fully. The grant scheme is therefore intended to support and encourage access authorities in playing their full part. Local access forums also have a key role to play, by advising their appointing authorities in the preparation of management plans and funding bids.

Early indications are that the scheme is proving popular and that funds will be available this year to meet the funding sought for all the medium and high demand designated nature conservation sites, as well as all, or most, of high demand non-designated sites.

Announcing the scheme's extension to 2006/7 will enable access authorities to plan ahead with greater certainty and make the best use of the funds being made available. The Countryside Agency is consulting the Local Government Association and a number of individual access authorities on possible scheme priorities for next year. The Agency will also be interested to hear from any local access forums who have views on the scheme (contact: AMGS Administration, Countryside Agency, Bridgewater House, Whitworth Street, Manchester M1 6LT, E-mail: [AMGSadmin@countryside.gov.uk](mailto:AMGSadmin@countryside.gov.uk)).

The scheme does not cover access land within the national parks, which are funded separately through the national park grant. Since 2003/03 the grant has included an element for the implementation of the new right of open access. From next year we intend to make this a permanent part of the national parks' funding model

*Yours sincerely Alun Michael*