



An independent statutory advisory body administered by Exmoor National Park Authority, the appointing authority, from its offices at Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset TA22 9HL
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22nd November 2024

EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

To: The Members of the Exmoor Local Access Forum

A meeting of the Exmoor Local Access Forum will be held **in the Committee Room at Exmoor House, Dulverton TA22 9HL on 4th December 2024 at 10am.**

The meeting will be open to the press and public in accordance with the provisions of reg. 7 of The Local Access Forums (England) Regulations 2007 (under s 94 and 95 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). There is public question time at this meeting when the Chairman will allow members of the public two minutes each in which to ask questions.

(The agenda and papers for this meeting can be downloaded from the Exmoor National Park Authority's website at www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

Sue Applegate
Secretary
Exmoor Local Access Forum

MEETING AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Welcome to New Members, Reappointment of Exmoor LAF Members & Resignations**
3. **Election of Chairman & Vice-Chairman of the Exmoor Local Access Forum**
4. **Declarations of Interest:** Members are asked to declare any direct or indirect personal interests (including financial) in relation to items on the agenda for this meeting and shall disclose the nature of those interests to the meeting.

(NB. The regulations do not prohibit any member having such an interest from remaining in the meeting and participating in the discussion).
5. **Minutes**

(1) To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 18th April 2024 [Item A].

(2) To consider any Matters Arising from those Minutes which are not elsewhere on the agenda.
6. **Meet the Community / Public Question Time:** This part of the meeting enables members of the public to engage with the Local Access Forum on issues concerning open access, rights of way and outdoor recreational pursuits in the National Park.
7. **Inclusion Work on Exmoor** (20 mins)

To receive a presentation from Ben Totterdell, Learning & Engagement Manager
8. **Feedback on Visits/Meetings held since the Last LAF Meeting** (10 mins)

To feedback to members on:
 - a. Driver Farm Visit - 3rd May 2024 [GL, GC & LC]
 - b. Meeting with Sarah Bryan, ENPA CEO discussing sale of Driver Farm, impact on RoW standards following cuts, role of the LAF - 4th June 2024 [GC, GL]
9. **Permitted Path Closures and Ash Die Back** (15 mins)

To consider an issue that has been brought to the attention of the LAF by members of the public [GL] [Item B].
10. **Pharmaceuticals and Exmoor Rivers in relation to Access** (10 mins)

To consider the reported impact of high levels of pharmaceutical products in Exmoor's rivers on public access [GC]
11. **Active Travel on Exmoor** (10 mins)

To receive a presentation from Dan Barnett, Access & Recreation Manager
12. **Externally Funded Access Projects on Exmoor** (5 mins)

To receive updates and provide advice where appropriate on the following projects through which (wholly or partly) access improvements are being achieved [SA] [Item C]

- a) DEFRA Access for All Funding Year 3
- b) Pioneers Royal Forest HLF
- c) Landscape Recovery

13. ENPA Partnership Plan (5 mins)

To receive a written update from Clare Reid, Head of Climate Change, Nature and Communities and to consider setting up a working group from the LAF to respond to the forth-coming consultation on the draft plan [Item D]

14. Public Path Orders / Legal Matters (5 mins)

To note updates on orders made since the last meeting:

- i. Great Bradley Bridge (DU10/38) - order confirmed

15. Access & Recreation Highlights April 2024 – November 2024 (10 mins)

To receive a presentation on the work of the Access & Recreation Team since the last meeting (April 2024 – November 2024)

16. Date of next meeting and agenda items: To agree the date, method (and venue if needed) of the next Forum meeting.

17. Any Other Business of Urgency

For further information about the Exmoor Local Access Forum and its work, please contact the Secretary, Sue Applegate, at the postal address, telephone number, or email address given at the top of this agenda.

EXMOOR LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Minutes of a meeting of the Exmoor Local Access Forum held on **Thursday 18th April 2024** at 10:00 at The Memorial Hall, Exford.

PRESENT

George Curry (Chair)
Graham Lavender (Vice)
Alison Kent
Simon Gibson
Peter May

Robert Billson
Nick Thwaites
Laura Carew
Chris Binnie
Rupert Martin

No members of the public were present.

Exmoor National Park Staff in Attendance:

Dan Barnett

Sue Applegate

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Domonic Elson
Kate O'Sullivan

2. VISIT TO THE DEPOT

Feedback from visit to the depot: Excellent set up, so much seems to be being achieved by a very small team. Query re. the depot doing things that are L/O responsibilities and ongoing maintenance for the England Coast Path. Question re. responsibility for bridges – usually lies with the highway authority.

3. Reappointment of Exmoor LAF Members & Resignations

Following the end of their 3 year term, RM & LC were reappointed to the LAF. Annie Prebensen and Ed Greenhall had chosen not to stand again.

Action: SA to write to thank EG & AP

4. Declarations of Interest : None

5. MINUTES: (1) APPROVAL

The minutes of the meeting held on the 29th November 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MINUTES: (2) MATTERS ARISING

(5) DB has refreshed the dog information on the website and some social media messages have gone out

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(8) *RB made a representation on the Wootton Ridge consultation on behalf of the OSS and corrected an error regarding the rights relating to the public in general not just local people (s193)*

Action: RB to send his OSS response to SA for LAF records & to circulate

(11) *Update on car parking; charging has started at Haddon. At Exford there is a trial arrangement with the Parish Council. There was a query as to whether local people were happy with charging at Haddon. DB explained that there is no charging before 10am, there is a park wide annual permit for £60, no charges for blue badges and reduced rates for those on low incomes. Over 60 annual passes have been sold since charges were introduced.*

6. Meet the Community / Public Question Time

There were no members of the public present.

7. Exmoor LAF

GC explained it seems like a good opportunity to look at the LAF to see where it is going and how it can better advise the National Park.

- a) Members were invited to explain what areas of expertise they have to help identify gaps.

GC – training for disadvantaged, mental health, natural environment, climate change

CB – farmer/landowner, horse-rider

AK – rights of way, long-distance walking, small-holding

NT – career in communications and has worked abroad a lot, interested in the balance between those who live, work and visit Exmoor

LC – lives at Tarr Steps, farms and teaches art, pilgrimage

PM – brought up on a farm, worked in agricultural services & finance, member of motorcycle clubs, enjoys cycling

GL – botanist, seed collection, path watcher

RM – owns Lillycombe shooting estate, tree planting, carbon recovery

RB – chartered surveyor, horserider, planning law, commons

SG – farm/estate manager for Lee Abbey, member of a previous LAF

Areas identified as not covered by current membership – cyclists, people with mobility issues, younger people, tourism

- b) Aims and purpose of the ELAF: GC referred members to the Terms of Reference (Item B) and NE Guidance (Item C) and suggested that the ELAF should be concentrating on strategic issues, should be advising early on in the process. Questions whether the LAF can be more effective in its role. DB was asked what more the LAF could do; keep improving access at the forefront of everyone's mind, finds the ELAF a good sounding board. Feels the LAF has influenced things when it has advised the Authority eg. handing RoW back to SCC & DCC did not go ahead. More pro-active works and

ITEM A

working groups would be good. Discussion as to whether the LAF is representative of those who live, work and visit Exmoor.

One of the issues is that the LAF only meets twice a year. GC would like to see the LAF being more proactive in providing advice and arrange subgroups/working groups between meetings. DB – LAF can meet more often but it would need to be without officer support.

All agreed that more working groups in the future, enacted at an early stage, would be a better approach.

Action: SA to ask the Member Support Officer to include LAF Chair on the circulation list for the ENPA Authority meetings – agenda items

8. Recruitment

Following 2 resignations, the ELAF currently has 12 members. The terms of reference state that “The lower and upper limits to the size of the forum (10 and 22) are set out in the Regulations. Exmoor National Park Authority regards a membership of 12 to 18 as an effective working size whilst allowing a wide representation of interests.”

SA explained the recruitment process and encouraged members to circulate the advertisement. Following a discussion it was agreed that areas to target should include cyclists, people with mobility issues, younger people, tourism representatives, young farmers, hill farm network,

Action: SA to organise recruitment campaign and ALL to consider how they can use their contacts and organisations to widen the membership in the areas identified above.

9. Access Policy & Changes to Rights of Way and Access Management on Exmoor

DB updated the Forum on the new arrangements which were outlined at the last meeting. Overall – ticket numbers through the depot have been reduced.

Approaches to landowners to do things – early days but some positive responses.

Paring – was quite cut back last year – now looking at volunteers to help with this – good expressions of interest for new ‘Path Parers’. Path Fixers – going well, active group and Path Watchers – expanded now to cover most parishes. Drainage – struggling to deal with drain maintenance, no ‘key’ drains were cleared this winter.

BVPI score is down this year to 93% (from 97% previously) but still very high – some complaints but still good currently.

Budgets – £500K top up to the National Park budget this year, hopefully this could ease the stress on our public access work but we have other financial pressures.

RoW Support Officer post (part-time, 3 year) has just been advertised – providing support across the team. Discussion re. BVPI score going down but some felt it was not yet statistically significant. Concern re. drainage – effects of increased rainfall, erosion and run-off, climate change.

Action: ELAF to write to ENPA to express concerns about potential falling standards due to reduce budgets and specifically lack of drainage – GC/SA

10. Externally Funded Access Projects on Exmoor

a) DEFRA Access for All Funding Year 3 [Item D]

Current list of proposals has been circulated – any feedback is welcomed. The suggested Access for All group was not formed in year 2 due to lack of capacity, so LAF feedback is especially important.

b) Active Travel Funding via National Parks England [Item E]

A bid was submitted with only 2 weeks notice for this fund and £100K has been awarded. The funding is to develop an understanding of how active travel can work in Rural Areas such as Exmoor and develop 'shovel' ready projects suitable for infrastructure investment. 3 areas of work will be covered:

- 1) Develop an Active Travel Plan – will be consulting on this
- 2) RoWIP type work – studies focussing on 5 specific areas
- 3) Investigation into Family Friendly Cycle Trail issues

DB expects to contact LAF for involvement on this within the next couple of months.

Action: DB to consult

c) Pioneers Royal Forest HLF [Item F]

Wide scoping project with focus on landscape and heritage but also some access work. Phase 1 funding was granted and the Access Feasibility Study was carried out under this. Phase 2 bid will be submitted end of May.

Action : SA to share list of projects being included in Phase 2

11. Consultations

SA explained the 2 consultations that had been circulated by email between meetings – no responses had been received from members.

12. ENPA Updates

a) Driver Farm

ENPA has decided to keep the farm and is carrying out basic repairs and investigating future operation models. The land has been put into Countryside Stewardship. Discussion re. sale of land by ENPA and access rights. Question as to why the LAF was not consulted about this.

Action: ELAF to write to ENPA to express concerns about the sale of ENPA land, potential loss of access and questioning why the LAF have not been consulted. Also pointing out that re. Driver Farm – access was not referred to in

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the committee report. Stress that the LAF are happy to meet to provide feedback.

Visit details – ENPA volunteer visit to Driver Farm Friday 3rd May 10-3.30. LAF members are welcome.

Action: LC & GL to attend the Driver Farm visit on 3rd May

b) Partnership Plan

SA read out an update from Clare Reid outlining the Partnership Plan process and seeking LAF input. She suggested a working group to deal with the consultation which is expected to be in the summer/autumn 2024.

Action: SA to circulate CR email and seek volunteers for the working group

12. National Updates

A paper was circulated giving national updates on access legislative changes & proposals, ELMS and the Review of Access Land [Item G]

13. Public Path Orders and Legal Matters

The following orders have been processed in the past year – public path orders have been severely limited by staff capacity but hopefully this will improve if/when a RoW Support Officer is appointed.

- i. Great Bradley Bridge (DU10/38)- informal consultation complete, order made – no objections – awaiting bridge construction before confirmation
- ii. East Lynch (WL21/12) – informal consultation complete, order made, confirmed, 3 new kissing gates installed replacing stiles. Complete.

14. Access and Recreation Highlights November 2023 – April 2024

The forum received a presentation of the work being carried out by the team in the last 6 months. This included improvements to surfaces damaged by water erosion, improvements funded by the SWCPA and a report on the new England Coast Path routes which have been implemented in the past few months.

15. Date of Next Meeting and Agenda Items

Decided to have the next meeting in Dulverton – Exmoor House. SA will send a 'doodle poll' to find a date in November. Members to be consulted on agenda items.

ACTION: – SA to circulate

16. Any Other Business of Urgency

None. The Chair closed the meeting at 17.01

Permitted Path Closures and Ash Die Back

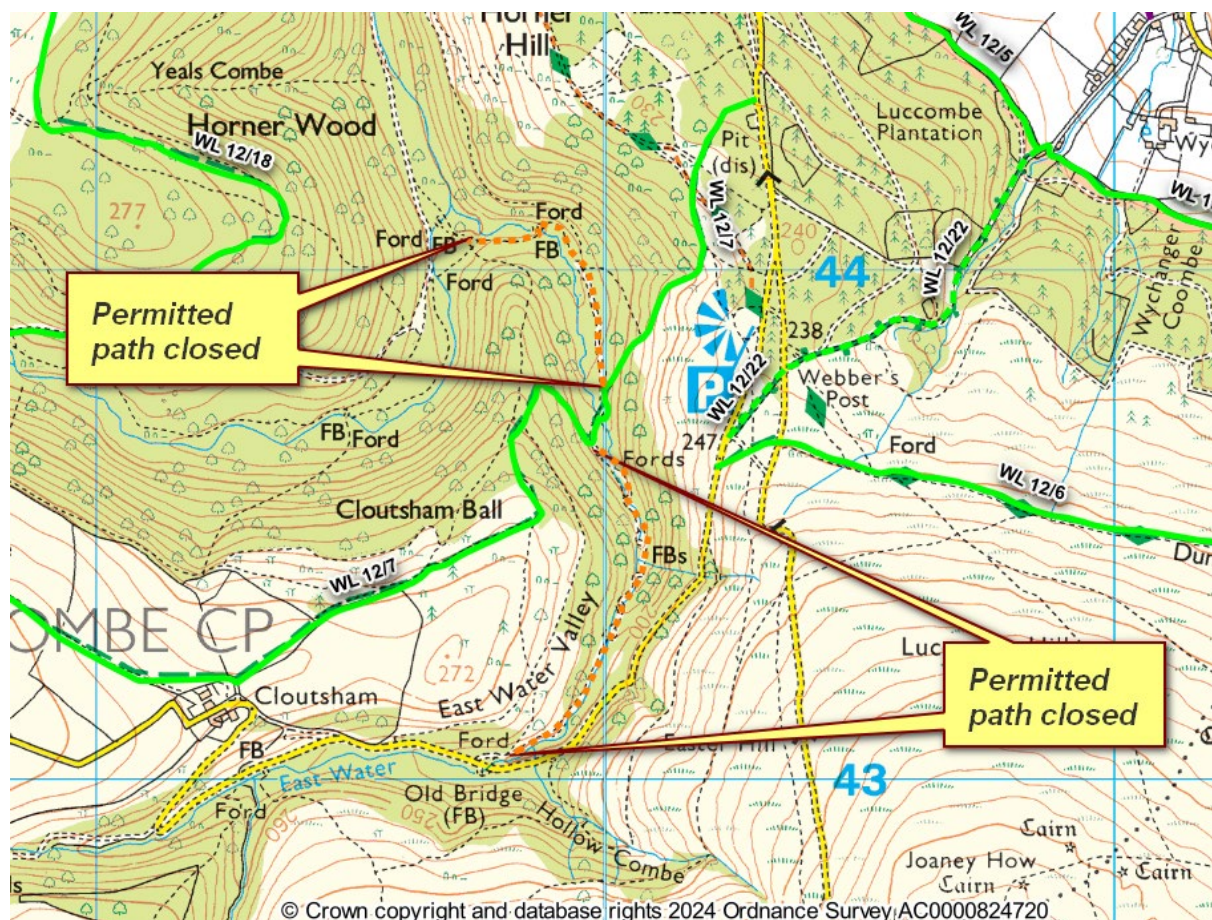
This paper is intended to provide some background information to aid the discussion around this agenda item.

Over the past 2-3 years, several permitted paths that have been previously well used, have been closed to the public by the National Trust on Exmoor. It is not certain whether these paths will be reopened again, and this has led to complaints from the local community. ENPA (as agents for the Highway Authority) are not able to insist that the paths remain open as the routes are only permitted and can be withdrawn at any time.

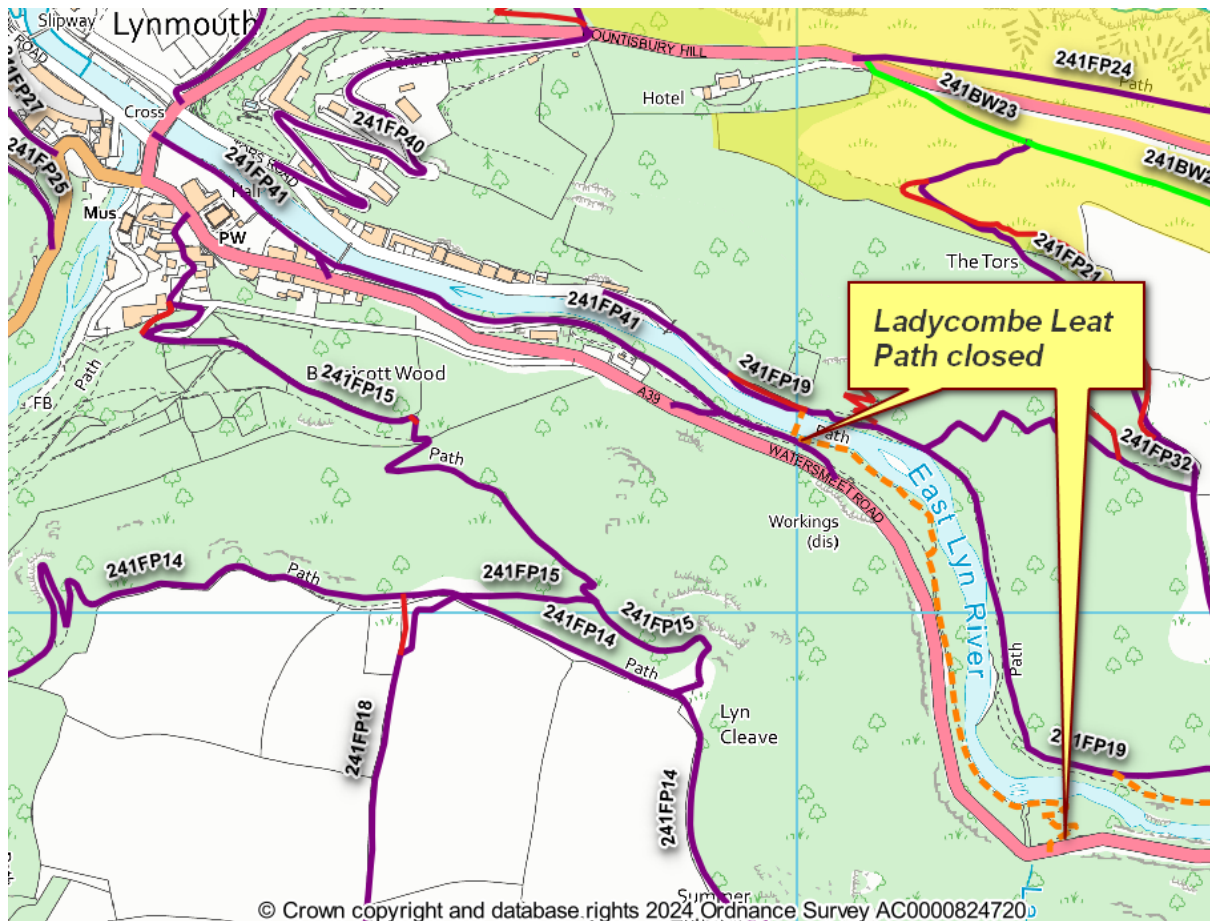
The issue has been brought to the attention of the LAF by several members of the public who would like to see the routes reopened for use by the public. Some of these people have written to the National Trust to request this but have not received positive responses. In most cases the reason for the closures has been given as relating to ash die back and public safety. This is of course an important issue however it is noted that there are many locations within the National Park where this issue has been dealt with without a need for path closures.

Two examples of the closed paths are given below:

East Water Valley – footpath closed 2021



Ladycombe Leat Path – footpath closed early 2024



In both the above cases the reason for closure has been given as the need to deal with Ash Die Back.

Sue Applegate

Senior Public Rights of Way & Access Officer

Externally Funded Access Projects on Exmoor

In addition to the Active Travel England Funding that has been received by Exmoor (agenda item 11 – presentation), there are 3 other externally funded projects which either fully support access projects or where there is an access element within the project.

a) DEFRA Access for All Funding Year 3

This consisted of £93,000 for Access for All funding over 3 years (with no funding at all in year 2). The year 3 funding must be spent by the end of March 2025 and has been allocated as shown below but may be subject to late-stage changes.

Project Name	Details	Cost
Auction field (DU 4/6)	Path surface improvement suitable for trampers and less able	£4,800.00
Accessible Picnic Benches	At Haddon	£1,600.00
Stone pitching near Wheal Eliza	Improve stone surface of damaged paved path with high quality pitched/cobbled finish	£10,000.00
Bridleway at Bridgetown	Surface improvement for route - popular route esp. with campsite nearby	£4,000.00
Bridleway from Pound - Simonsbath to Wheal Eliza	Surface improvement for route - popular route with adjacent parking	£5,000.00
Bench near to Snowdrop Valley	Resting place on this popular route	£600.00
Audit of NPCs / New Dulverton Centre	To complete accessibility audits and statements for use of our 3 National Park Centre's. Audits to include recommendations to making the centres more accessible.	£1,800.00
NPC minor improvement	Funding to implement priority improvements from above audits.	£3,000.00
Grading of 10 Explorer walks (MWStiles)	Consultancy support to review and grade the 10 Exmoor Explorer routes using the Miles without Stiles grades and to recommend future access improvements.	£4,500.00
Great Bradley route - Withypool to Hinds Pitt	Surface and drainage improvements to the bridleway following the opening of the Great Bradley bridge in October 2024	£5,000.00
Withypool Riverside Footpath (Waterhouse Fm)	Surface & drainage improvements to a section of popular footpath west of Withypool to make access easier - removal of boardwalk and replacement of stiles with gates	£10,000.00
Bossington Coast Path	Adding aggregate surface to make route easier for all (approx 600m) plus some furniture improvements (50% contribution)	£8,500.00
Popery Lane	Resurface Popery Lane with cement slurry paint to improve surface for all	£6,000.00

b) Pioneers Royal Forest HLF

The Pioneers Royal Forest Project has a wide remit around nature recovery, heritage, landscape and local skills but also has an access element to it.

The next stage of Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funding for this project has now been approved amounting to a grant of approximately £1.25 million to be spent over 4 years. This means that the access projects identified in the Feasibility Study and chosen to put forward in this bid (amounting to around £30,000 worth of work) can go ahead (subject to consultation/permissions etc). A list of the projects is below for your information – location plans for these were circulated by email in November.

Ref	Route	Current Status	Value to the Public?	Skills benefit	Cost?
R05	Pinkery Drive to Driver Farm Link 1	Access Land	High		£1,500.00
R06	Pinkery Drive to Driver Farm Link 2	Access Land	High		£500.00
R07	Layby Link to Pinkery Drive	None	High		£3,500.00
R08	Driver Farm Pinkery Link Footpath	None	High		£1,000.00
R09A	Driver Farm Bridleway Link (A-C)	None	High		£1,000.00
R10	The Chains Permitted Bridleway	Permitted BW	High		£4,500.00
R11	Exe Head to Hoar Oak Restricted Byway	Restricted Byway	High		£2,500.00
R14	Cornham Brake	Access Land	High	Y	£5,000.00
R17	Prayway Head	Permitted FP/Access Land	High	Y	£2,000.00
R23	Simonsbath Meadow A	None	High	Y	£2,000.00
R28	Birch Cleeve	Access Land	High		£10,000.00

c) Landscape Recovery Funding

This is a DEFRA funded project which covers a large geographical area of central Exmoor and has been awarded the first stage of grant funding. The project, as the title suggests, is largely about nature & landscape recovery with a small allocation for improving access which in this initial stage will build on the Pioneers study with an access audit.

Sue Applegate

Senior Public Rights of Way & Access Officer

Exmoor National Park Partnership Plan 2025-30

Background

Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) is required to prepare, and keep under review, a five year management plan for the National Park. This is called the Partnership Plan in recognition of the need to work in partnership to develop and deliver the Plan. The Partnership Plan is the primary document through which the purposes of the National Park can be achieved. National Park purposes set out in the Environment Act 1995 are to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Parks
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public

While carrying out these purposes, National Park Authorities also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Parks.

A great deal of preparation has already gone into the plan following an extensive process of evidence gathering, consultation and engagement. This included:

- preparation of the State of Park report¹ which provides a key element of the evidence base for the Plan
- discussions with Partnership Plan groups, Steering Group, ENPA members and staff (including the Exmoor LAF)
- online and in-person stakeholder workshops, a next-generation workshop and a webinar on climate change
- a public opinion survey² which ran from April to September 2023, with nearly 1,000 responses

Current Position

The draft Partnership Plan is going to the Authority meeting in December to approve this for consultation. Assuming approval is granted, the consultation will take place in the New Year. This will be undertaken via an online survey, with alternative formats available for those who are not able to respond in this way. The consultation will be widely publicised through social media, press releases, ENPA's newsletter Parklife, on ENPA's website, and with partners.

The plan addresses the main challenges facing the National Park and is structured around six aims and a place-based delivery section:

- A cared for landscape and heritage
- A nature-rich landscape

¹ [Exmoor State of Park Report 2023](#)

² [National-Park-Partnership-Plan-Public-Opinion-Survey-2023-final-results.pdf](#)

ITEM D

- A net zero National Park, mitigating and adapting to climate change
- A welcoming place for all, that people feel connected to, improving their health and well-being
- Healthy Natural Resources
- A great place for people to live, work and do business
- Bringing it all together - place based delivery
 - Moorland & Farmland
 - Woodland and Trees
 - Rivers, Streams and Wetlands
 - Coast

The plan includes a set of targets from the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework issued by the then Government in January 2024, highlighting targets from the Environment Improvement Plan (EIP) 2023 that Protected Landscapes should prioritise. This includes one target around access and engagement: *Improve and promote accessibility to the National Park and engagement with Exmoor's special qualities for all*

A number of other, locally derived, targets are being proposed for access and recreation.

How can the Exmoor Local Access Forum Contribute to the Next Stage?

For previous Plans we have set up a sub-group/working group from the LAF to look at the draft Plan in detail – we would be happy to set this up again and ask for 3-4 volunteers please.

LAF members can also respond as individuals using the online survey when this comes out in the New Year.

Clare Reid
Head of Climate, Nature and Communities

Sue Applegate
**Senior Public Rights of Way
& Access Officer**

December 2024