



PLYMOUTH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

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19 January 2012

Mr Barry Keel
Chief Executive
Plymouth City Council
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PL1 2AA

This letter constitutes formal advice from the Plymouth Local Access Forum. Plymouth City Council is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this forum in carrying out its functions.

When calling or telephoning please ask for: **Mr Ross Johnston**

Dear Mr Keel,

The Plymouth Local Access Forum (PLAF) is a statutory advisory body set up by DEFRA to advise local authorities on the promotion, protection and enhancement of recreational public access to green spaces. The member base of the Forum is made up of 3 of your elected Members along with a mix of local people who have interests relevant to Plymouth - the idea is to make the views of the PLAF representative of the local populace. The statutory framework the PLAF operate within mean that the advice we give has legal weight and so must be sincerely considered. We have been a key stakeholder for a number of successful projects which have made significant improvements to green spaces in the city including the Stepping Stones Access2Nature Big Lottery funding bid and the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid both of which attracted significant investment in public access to green spaces, sustainable transport initiatives and promoting health and well-being through walking and cycling schemes.

We regularly work very closely with a number of your officers, either on specific projects or over longer periods in terms of "business as usual" activities with which we are involved. For a long time now we have been concerned about the level of resourcing allocated to public rights of way which is an area of work which is subject to some rather unique legislative pressures. The short version of these pressures is that in 2020 any footpath, bridleway or byway not properly recorded will be extinguished and lost to the city forever - this could potentially result in the loss of around 800 potential public rights of way and the main issue as we see it is that the legal processes your officers are obliged to follow are both extremely long and very expensive making progress slow. They quite rightly prioritise their work where they can make the most improvements and they do so very effectively.

I won't ask you to consider allocating more resources to that particular work area, I have no doubt this is a common scenario for every area of the council. However, it does strike the Forum that the sort of work that needs doing is well suited for a young person trying to gain experience to support longer term career goals. We feel that a series of quite clear task and finish projects could be put together by

your officers which would perfectly compliment graduates from a range of subjects. Your Officers in Transport and Highways agree however they are currently subject to a departmental reorganisation with a council wide reorganisation beginning next year and so do not feel they are able to make decisions about student or work placements until a number of key decisions have been made.

So our request to you is that we ask you to consider if there is a way that the layers of bureaucracy can be stripped away and a 12 month work placement be arranged, working with us, to support the valuable work of your public rights of way officer. We feel the costs to the Council are minimal but the benefit to the people of Plymouth is potentially extraordinary and of course a young person has the opportunity to gain real life work experience which in the current climate can make a huge difference to their employability.

We are well aware of the views of your officers and their managers however we would be grateful to hear your personal opinions on this matter.

Yours Sincerely

Mr Ray Fairchild
Chair of the Plymouth Local Access Forum