



Plymouth Local Access Forum  
c/o Ross Johnston  
Democracy and Governance  
Plymouth City Council  
Civic Centre  
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**Street Scene**  
Environmental Services

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Please ask for: Gareth Harrison-Poole

Date 12 March 2013

My Ref

Your Ref

Dear Members of the Local Access Forum

We are always pleased to receive considered and proactive suggestions on how we can improve the services we provide.

As you will already be aware over the past 3 years we have been working with our Transport colleagues on a range of different projects that have resulted in the dedication of permanent public rights over council owned parks and green spaces. This has led to new public rights of way being created in Radford Woods, Woodland Woods, Southway Woods, Ham Woods, Efford Valley and Forder Valley Nature Reserve.

You will have noted that we have been working on a site by site basis meeting the dedication of public rights with varying degrees of capital investment in each site which includes path resurfacing, signage, interpretation, drainage works and any other work that we feel is necessary. These projects are planned out on the back of community engagement so that we deliver improvements requested by local users of that particular green space. We feel this is important because much of the access within our nature reserves is informal and is generally below the standard considered for adoption as a highway. We feel that the improvements we have been making offer a more sustainable long term solution and allow us to work together to provide a more friendly and accessible network of paths.

We have had regard to your advice and whilst we agree with the preamble to your request we cannot agree that it will deliver the benefits you set out. In fact we believe it will result in a negative impact on both our green spaces and the quality of the PRow network. We have therefore decided not to follow your advice and we offer the following reasons as justification for this decision: -

1. If we were to follow your recommendation we would require a significant capital investment to cover the cost of the statutory signage (signs at junctions with the existing public highway). If for example we were to create 100 paths using this process we would be looking at approximately £30,000 as up front capital to achieve the dedicated signage. This amount is equal to that of two years capital budget allocated to PRow meaning we would be able to do nothing else during this term. When we look at the work we have carried out in the project sites around the city this would seem to us a difficult sacrifice to make.

2. Whilst we are happy to create PRoW in council owned parks and green space we must also maintain our position as land managers and there are sites we would resist PRoW being created in. The Hoe for example hosts many events and if we were to allow a highway to cross it the council or others holding events there would incur additional costs in securing temporary closure. The excessive timescales required to put a temporary closure in place combined with the public ability to object to such closures could put events at risk of not happening. We might also wish to be cautious about allowing public access to sites that are environmentally delicate or fragile. We need to retain the ability to carefully consider each route created in terms of our wider responsibilities towards the management of each site. To do this for all sites we manage in one go is currently not feasible due to resource levels.

3. We believe that in light of the points highlighted above it would be difficult for us to justify the cost and time required against the public benefits and we believe would result in an inaccessible and badly maintained network of paths.

We trust you will reconsider your views on this topic in light of our comments. We believe you will be able to agree that we have a proven track record of delivering new high quality public footpaths on Council owned land and we believe that this work should continue in the same vein. We are happy to take advice from you on which sites you believe we should focus on and on the specifics for each site but we believe the forums attention would be best placed dealing with paths where the landowners are not actively seeking opportunities to promote public access.

Regards

Gareth Harrison-Poole  
Greenspace Manager  
Environmental Services