

THE SOMERSET LOCAL ACCESS FORUM
TERMS OF REFERENCE

Title

1. The Forum shall be known as the Somerset Local Access Forum.
2. The Forum will be the Local Access Forum for Somerset, with the exclusion of that area of Somerset within the Exmoor National Park (which has its own Local Access Forum).

Role and Responsibilities

3. The primary purpose of the Somerset Local Access Forum is to provide relevant advice to the Somerset County Council (the appointing authority) and to Natural England on how to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable for open-air recreation, in ways which address social, economic and environmental interests. The Forum will assist access provision, giving advice on issues of particular relevance to Somerset.
4. The Somerset Local Access Forum will give advice on three main topics.
 - a) implementation, management and review of the statutory right of access to open countryside;
 - b) Rights of Way Improvement Plans;
 - c) the development of recreation and access strategies which cater for a wide range of people.
5. The Somerset Local Access forum will work to:
 - a) develop a constructive and inclusive approach to the improvement of recreational access to the countryside;
 - b) respect local circumstances and different interests while operating within national guidance;
 - c) provide advice on issues of principle and good practice which is consistent with national guidance;
 - d) engage in constructive debate and seek consensus wherever possible;
 - e) where consensus is not possible, make clear the nature of differing views and suggest how they might be resolved.
6. In carrying out the functions in paragraph 5 above, the Forum shall have regard to:
 - a) the needs of land management

- b) the desirability of conserving the natural beauty of the area for which it is established, including the flora, fauna, and geological and physiographical features of the area;
- c) guidance given from time to time by the Secretary of State;
- d) proper liaison with neighbouring authorities;
- e) consultation with adjoining Forums.

Annual Report

- 7. The Forum shall produce an Annual Report at the end of each year of its meeting outlining and reviewing its work. The Annual Report shall be compiled and published by the Somerset County Council.

Membership

- 8. The membership will:
 - a) be balanced to avoid dominance by any single interest group or coalition of like interests; and
 - b) include a cross section of local interests in the countryside.
 - c) The membership will consist of up to a maximum of 17 members including;
 - 2 elected councillors - one nominated by Somerset County Council and one by each of the District Councils within Somerset in turn, and
 - up to 15 other members.
- 9. Membership of the Forum will be for a term of up to three years save that:
 - a) a member replacing another member who has retired, been replaced or otherwise vacated membership will be a member for the duration of the term left for the person replaced;
 - b) at the end of the relevant period any member can be re-appointed;
 - c) the two elected Council representatives shall be appointed to the Forum by the appointing authority (SCC) on a 2 year appointment;
- 10. Any member who has been absent from all meetings of the Forum for a period of one year or fails to comply with the requirements of paragraph 11 below may be removed from the Forum by the appointing authority.

11. Any member who is directly or indirectly interested in any matter brought up for consideration at a meeting of the Forum shall disclose the nature of his interest to the meeting.
12. The Chair and Vice Chair will hold office initially for one year and will be appointed by the Forum at its first meeting held in that year. No member will hold the position of Chair or Vice Chair for more than three years.
13. The Vice Chair will chair any meeting, or part of any meeting as appropriate, when the Chair is unable to attend or has to leave the meeting for any reason.
14. The Chair may suspend any meeting if the meeting falls below a quorum of one third of members currently appointed and/or nominated.
15. The Forum shall take steps to ensure that the Chair and Vice Chair do not represent similar interest groups.
16. A member of the Forum may resign by notice in writing to the Somerset County Council (the appointing authority).

Administration

17. Meetings will be held at least twice a year and more frequently when necessary. The venues will be agreed by the members.
18. There will be a Secretary who will be a dedicated officer employed by Somerset County Council, who will have responsibility for:
 - a) distribution of papers;
 - b) arranging and publicising meetings;
 - c) liaison between the Forum, the Somerset County Council and Natural England;
 - d) contact with all adjoining Forums;
 - e) completing the Annual Report.
19. Meeting agendas will be agreed between the Chair and the Secretary. They will be distributed one week before any proposed meeting (except in case of emergency) and all papers for inclusion on an agenda will be submitted for the Secretary three weeks before any proposed meeting (except in case of emergency).
20. Meetings will be advertised in advance and held in public. Except with the permission of the Chair they shall not be recorded or broadcast.
21. Agendas, papers and minutes of the meeting will be available to the public.

22. The Chairman may invite observers to the meeting when appropriate. The Somerset County Council and Natural England will have a right to send observers to any meetings.
23. Observers will be able to contribute at the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.
24. The public will be able to ask questions on the business of the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.
25. The Somerset County Council will have the right to review the chairing and membership of the Forum if necessary, including to ensure that the requirements of paragraph 8 are being met.
26. The Forum may decide to set up such committees, sub-committees and working parties as it considers necessary and they will be subject to the same rules (altered as necessary for the circumstances) as the Forum.
27. These Terms of Reference can be amended by the Forum from time to time to suit changing circumstances subject to Somerset County Council having approved any changes before they come into force.
28. The Forum shall comply at all times with the requirements for Regulations 6,7, 8 and 9 of The Local Access (Forums) Regulations 2007.