



National Trails Annual Report 2015/16

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NATIONAL TRAIL 



Executive Summary

This annual report is our third since the publication of our New Deal for National Trails in 2013. It covers the period from April 2015 to March 2016 and is structured to illustrate progress against the published Quality Standards for National Trails.

The report provides a national summary of the activity and work undertaken during the final year of a three year commitment to level funding for National Trails which was agreed following a formal review which took place between 2011 and 2013. It also covers the period that includes the 2015 corporate spending review which set out challenging savings targets for Defra and the Defra family. In response Trail managers working with their relevant trail partnerships, applied themselves vigorously to the challenge of raising additional income to off-set potential reductions in central government funding and continued to work together very positively. This demonstrates the value of not just the National Trail brand but the value of the concept of the National Trails as a family. A concept that has not only been embraced through the growing support for the national website, but also through the work of the Funding Formula Review Group where each of the trails and new sections of **England Coast Path** were represented and put their individual circumstances to one side in order to agree a set of recommendations that best suited the group as a whole.



National Trail mugs showing popular locations along all the trails

Specifically during this year other notable achievements and developments have been:

- A new 93 km (58 mile) stretch of **England Coast Path** (Brean Down to Minehead) added to the family.
- The National Trail website increasing in popularity as more trail-specific functionality is added by individual trails.
- Improvements to condition monitoring demonstrate that trails continue to maintain condition against the agreed Quality Standards.
- Consolidation of trail partnership governance structures and greater collaboration between the groups.
- A growing evidence base with an increasing focus on local economic benefits.
- Trail Partnerships have secured and in many instances exceeded matched funding requirements, maximising the leverage from central government grant funding.

Natural England remains fully committed to supporting National Trails and working with National Trail partnerships and England Coast Path authorities to explore options for a more sustainable funding model. This will help to ensure that these important national assets are maintained in future years while making them less reliant on the public purse.



Looking eastward from the Hadrian's Wall Path near Steel Rigg

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The Family of National Trails

There are 13¹ National Trails in England, totalling over 2,200 miles (3,541 km) and Natural England is currently leading work to establish a new National Trail around the entire coast of England. The map on page six shows the location of all the current National Trails and open stretches of the new England Coast Path at March 2016.

The National Trails provide some of the nation's highest quality walking and riding experiences and all of the routes are signposted and promoted with the acorn symbol. The National Trails are managed locally but within a framework of guidance and support provided by Natural England.

Our vision for National Trails is that they are a family of the highest quality recreational routes connecting our finest landscapes for extensive off road journeys.



Knucklas Circular Walk, Offa's Dyke Path National Trail

¹ 15 in England and Wales. Note that the website and some of the research quoted in this report refer to the family of 15 trails.

England Coast Path & National Trails

England – March 2016



The New Deal for National Trails

In March 2013, Natural England launched new management and funding arrangements for National Trails (the New Deal²). We promised that we would sustain our national contribution towards maintaining the routes for a three year period from April 2013 to March 2016 in exchange for local partners taking greater collective responsibility for delivery.

This document is the third in a series of annual reports which demonstrates how trails are delivering against the Quality Standards and gives an insight into the wide range of benefits from this unique recreational resource. It covers the period from April 2015 to March 2016 and provides information on how each of the trails in England have continued to develop their working arrangements with local partners and are establishing more robust monitoring systems to demonstrate how they deliver the Quality Standards for National Trails. These monitoring systems along with the current pattern of annual reporting now allow us to identify trends in the ongoing management of trails which we have endeavoured to illustrate within this report.

As in previous reports we have also provided some conclusions and a forward look to take into account some of the work currently being undertaken in 2016/2017. A full appraisal of work undertaken in 2017/18 and beyond will be provided in future reports although the format of these may be subject to change.

National Quality Standards

One of the commitments we made as part of the New Deal was that we would report annually on progress nationally towards meeting the Quality Standards. The Standards are set out in the New Deal and this report is arranged in four main sections which reflect our underpinning management principles for National Trails:

Experience – enable as many people as possible to enjoy a wide variety of walking and riding experiences along National Trails and through the English landscape.

Enhancement – make constant improvements to the trail and its associated routes. Contribute to the enhancement of the landscape, nature and historic features within the trail corridor.

Engagement – build and sustain a community of interest in caring for the trail and the landscape through which it passes.

Economy – creates opportunities for local businesses to benefit from the use of National Trails.

² New Deal document.

The Quality Standards present a broad and ambitious menu for National Trails but included within them are some specific indicators by which we review progress. The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that we monitor are:

1. Improving trail condition

2. Effective partnerships

3. Informative website

In addition, there are a number of Key Indicators (KIs) where we have suggested things that may be measured in order to illustrate how National Trails bring benefits. Unlike the KPIs we do not insist that these are reported against but we have encouraged trail partnerships to think about how they can demonstrate their wider contribution to them. As a condition of grant, we require additional resource leverage by trail partnerships at a minimum ratio of 3:1 (Natural England grant to local contributions). Within their individual annual reports, trail partnerships need to provide us with evidence of this minimum contribution and details of any additional investment. This demonstrates how they are using our core investment to lever in further funds and how they are able to use these additional funds to improve and develop the trails rather than just sustain them.

As with previous reports, the following sections set out a summary of progress under each of the headings for the management principles set out above. They detail progress specifically against the KPIs and also provide a selection of material evidencing the wider benefits of National Trails.

The information includes data collected by Natural England as well as the trail partnerships and Walk Unlimited³. This includes unsolicited feedback from users which we have been provided with by the trails⁴. We continue to work with our partners to create better monitoring regimes and produce robust evidence to develop consistent messages about the full range of benefits that National Trails provide. We believe this is important for National Trails and the emerging **England Coast Path**, and will help to articulate the benefits of access and engagement with the natural environment in all its forms.

³ Provider of the official National Trails Website in partnership with Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.

⁴ See symbol 

Experience

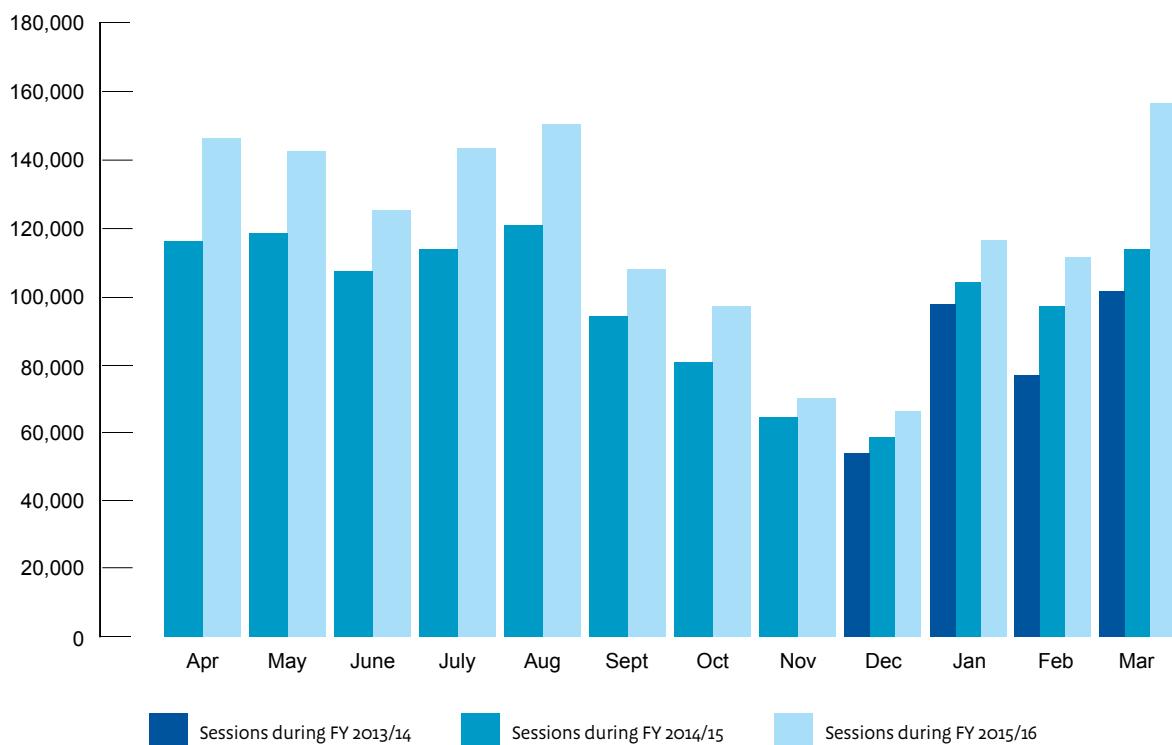
To enable as many people as possible to enjoy a wider variety of walking and riding experiences along National Trails and through the English landscape.

For 2015/2016 we have continued to encourage our National Trail partners and new partners (through the creation of the **England Coast Path**) to take advantage of the national website. We have also added to our suite of people counters on developing stretches of the **England Coast Path** which we hope will help build our evidence base and support work to attract additional resources for both maintenance and development.

Key Performance Indicator: Informative website

Use of the National Trails website continued to grow strongly throughout the financial year 2015/2016, with the number of sessions increasing by 20% as compared with the financial year 2014/2015, and an increase of 16% in the number of users seeking information during the same period. The **Pennine Way** experienced the strongest year-on-year growth in unique visitors to their pages (over 100%) which is thought to be directly associated with the increased media attention around the 50th year celebrations. The **South Downs Way** sections saw the greatest number of unique users at 138,123 during this year.

Website Sessions December 2013 to March 2016



Throughout the year the website continued to receive positive feedback with people often citing the quality and usefulness of the information on specific trail pages (see below).

Cotwold Way - *Really good maps / walking instructions. A lovely walk thanks for the trail information made available.*

North Downs Way - *Just had a quick look at this Street View link for the North Downs Trail. <http://goo.gl/ZKpd1r>. Absolutely brilliant.*

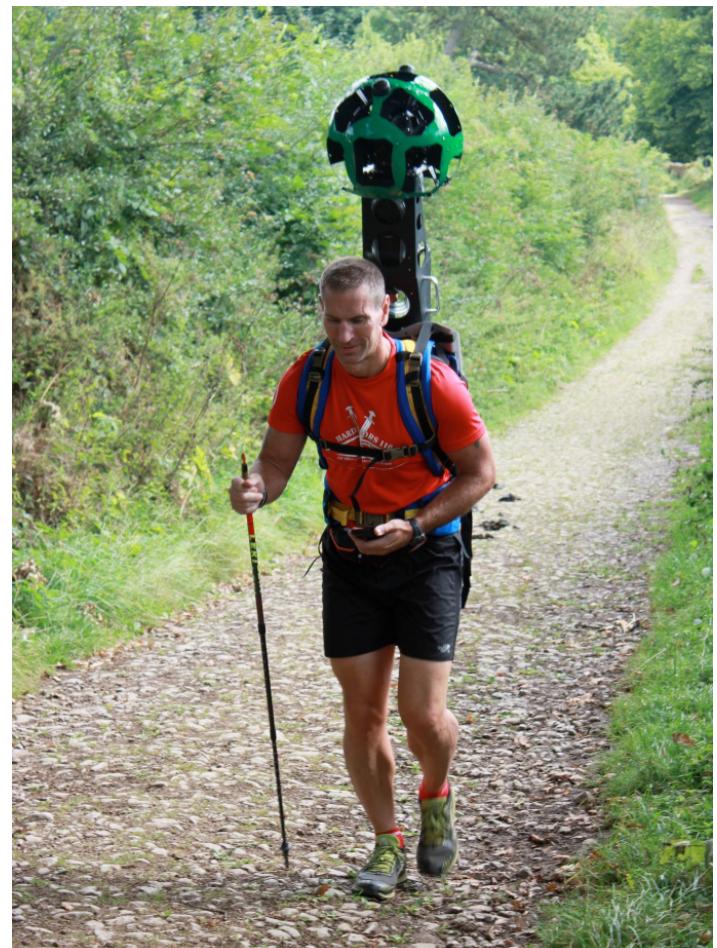
Offa's Dyke Path - *I simply want to thank you for this well designed and informative website. So often I am stymied by poorly constructed sites, yours is one of the best that I have encountered. Carry on.*

Working with specific trails, various improvements were also made to some trail pages including creation of a transport map, hall of fame, a volunteer area and events calendars.

Changes were also implemented to contribute towards the self-sustainability of the website and to support fund-raising opportunities for the individual trails. These included the addition of a donate button, instigation of a business membership scheme and easy fundraising membership.

Pages for the Brean Down to Minehead stretch of the **England Coast Path** were added in March 2016, bringing the total number of stretches promoted to five. It was recognised at this stage however that the website's structural ability to promote the **England Coast Path** needs to be further developed.

In addition to promoting the National Trails through the website and following a trial by the **South Downs Way**, Walk Unlimited worked with Google to secure loan of Google Trekker equipment to enable photographic recording of trails similar to the 'street view' feature for roads. A number of the trails took advantage of this although the actual filming required careful planning by the trail officers and proved extremely weather dependent. It is envisaged that the ability to 'see' the trail in advance will be of great assistance in planning walks, particularly for those users with restricted mobility or small children.



Capturing images on the Cleveland Way with the Google Trekker

Engagement with different audiences has increased through the growing use of Facebook and Twitter. At November 2015 the National Trail Facebook account had 3,400 followers and Twitter 3,382. The reach ⁵ of National Trails through social media exceeded 2 million for 2015 and the exposure ⁶ exceeded 4 million.

In addition to social media activity at the national level, eight trails have trail-specific Twitter accounts, four have trail-specific Facebook accounts and six have trail officer blogs on their web pages.

All of the trails report growing use of the website and trail partnerships and National Trail staff are increasingly using it as a means of communication. For example, on the **Hadrian's Wall Path** a blog and various news items are updated at least once a fortnight, and on the **Cleveland Way** a volunteer trail reporter produced regular 'Tales from the Trail' articles.

On the **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path** the accommodation database has been checked and relevant businesses contacted to ensure all details are up-to-date.

The **South Downs Way** team noted that their events calendar is well-used and being populated by event organisers. The team has also started to add maintenance works to the calendar to allow event organisers to see when there may be disruption on the trail. The addition of the donation button has been a great step forward, with £557 donated in the few winter months it was live during the year.

On the **Thames Path**, trail blogs and trail news items were continuously added to the website as the year progressed. On completion of a market research questionnaire, a downloadable certificate was available for walkers of the entire trail and during the year there were over 450 respondents, 38 of whom requested printed certificates sent in the post. The questionnaire results revealed that 76% of respondents used the **Thames Path** pages of the official National Trails website for planning out their walk.

The **Yorkshire Wolds Way** Facebook page now has 810 'likes' (up from 650 in previous year year) and 26 posts were made. The Twitter account has 1,563 followers.

In addition to the national website, Durham, Sunderland and Hartlepool authorities use www.durhamheritagecoast.org, Durham Heritage Coast Facebook page and Twitter accounts to promote the **England Coast Path**.

On the **North Downs Way** in the period from June 2015 to April 2016 the Twitter following increased by over 300 followers and on the **Ridgeway** a Twitter account was set up in July 2015 which appears as a newsfeed on the National Trails website. This attracted nearly 200 followers by March 2016, including local businesses such as pubs and cafes and also interest groups that the trail had not previously engaged with.

The 50th anniversary of the **Pennine Way** was very well publicised over the course of the year with extensive press and media coverage. This included a BBC documentary, numerous newspaper and website articles, and features on local and national radio. Many events took place including 'Walk the Way in a Day' when the entire length of the **Pennine Way** was walked on a single day using a set of 50 circular walks. Overall the number of users on the **Pennine Way** was significantly higher than any other year since monitoring began.

⁵ Reach – the number of people who see relevant content across various social media networks.

⁶ Exposure – the number of people that potentially could have seen relevant social media content.

Key Indicator: Visitor satisfaction

The large volume of positive comments that have been received by trails during the year provides clear evidence that not only are the trails still extremely popular, they also provide high levels of visitor satisfaction. Feedback has been received in a large variety of formats including anecdotally via trail officers as well as via email, on Facebook and through other social media platforms. People continue to take the time to write, showing their appreciation and recognising the efforts of managers in maintaining the trails as the examples from individual trail reports below demonstrate:

'so impressed with what great shape the entire trail was in – superb condition and the waymarking was excellent'

'I really enjoyed the trails being so raw, so much part of the landscape'

'would like to express our appreciation for the exemplary signing and maintenance... which made this walk, the first long distance one we have done, a real pleasure'

'the walk was amazing, what an adventure, I would spend the rest of my life walking up and down these trails if I could get it to pay'

'it's obvious to see the hard work - thanks - a credit to you'



A Word Cloud based on key words of top 100 TripAdvisor reviews from the **South West Coast Path** (below) illustrates how people perceive the trail.



The wide range of comments that trails receive point to the many aspects of people's lives that are positively affected by a visit. This includes opportunities to improve levels of social interaction and physical health as well as fulfilling people's personal achievement goals.

Key Indicator: Level and type of use of the trail and awareness of brand and degree of engagement

The ability for trails to download information from the network of people counters across the country has proved extremely valuable in getting more accurate information on their use and this is now feeding into the regular reports being submitted to trail partnerships. The accuracy of information gained from the counters can be improved by combining with data from detailed site surveys although they are proving to be extremely helpful in monitoring usage trends which can then inform funding and development bids and help with longer term maintenance planning. For example, on the **Cleveland Way** the overall totals show an increase in use of 5% on the previous year which continues a trend in increasing numbers since 2013.

The Pennine Way reported an increasing trend in user numbers between 2013 and the beginning of 2016. The numbers of visitors in 2016 is expected to show an annual increase, some of which is likely to be attributable to the promotion from 50th anniversary celebrations including Julia Bradbury's Best Walks with a View television programme which was broadcast in spring 2016 and featured sites associated with the **Pennine Way**.

Managers of the **Offa's Dyke Path** have recorded an increase in users of the trail since 2012 which corresponds with an increase in web site visits and social media activity. An increase in runners using the trail has also been reported and people counter data indicates some 3,000 people are walking from end-to-end each year with a very high proportion of day and multi-day walkers.

The **Yorkshire Wolds Way** team worked with Warter School in October 2015 to support their full school walk of the **Yorkshire Wolds Way**, this year covering sections between Hessle and Brantingham. The school's intention is for every pupil to have walked six stages of the route during their time at the school. The trail also ran successful Geocaching events, with over 120 people taking part at the Market Weighton event in July.

On the **Hadrian's Wall Path** some 2,850 passports were sold in 2015, a scheme that continues to grow in popularity and presents a unique opportunity to engage with walkers, influence their behaviour and act as a positive management tool. This, together with the goodwill generated by the Passport Scheme, demonstrates the popularity of the trail as a visitor experience and the National Trail brand in general.

On the **North Downs Way** the trail manager has worked closely with rail companies to gain approval for a Rail 2 Trail scheme connecting some 34 train stations with the trail via way-marked walking routes. This ability to access the trail via public transport has proven particularly popular with a number of bloggers in the London area who focus on the theme of 'escaping to the countryside'.

On the **Ridgeway 'Challenge'** events attract large numbers of participants and include the UK's largest ultra-marathon called Race to the Stones which involved some 2,000 participants in July 2015. A new mountain bike event in August 2015 also attracted over 700 riders. Horse riding events also took place attracting people with a range of abilities, from nationally renowned athletes to complete beginners.

The **South Downs Way** is increasing its engagement with event organisers. This year saw the third annual event organiser's forum which was attended by 28 people representing 14 events.



Riders on the first SCOTT MTB marathon event held along the Ridgeway in August 2015

Conclusions and Forward Look

Use of the website is on the increase. Trail partnerships and new England Coast Path authorities are finding it a helpful way of sharing information and raising the profile of their trails.

The installation of 16 counters on new stretches of the England Coast Path during 2015/2016 will be a great help in assessing volume of use and 55 people counters have now been installed across all National Trails. These collate data to help us understand trends and assess impact of increased promotion.

Levels of satisfaction among users of the trails remains high and it is encouraging to note the wide range of use of the routes by individuals, couples and groups with many people experiencing National Trails for the first time.

*'first long distance trail at
the age of 65 having only
started walking in 2014
.....where to walk next??'*

*'a challenge for two 50+ ladies
but recommend to all '*

*'live in the States...trying
to walk each of the NTs'*

*'second completion of
trail almost exactly 30
years after my first'*

*'5 of us started in earnest
and ended in style
with champagne and
chocolate chip cookies'*

Enhancement

To make constant improvements to the trail and its associated routes. Contribute to the enhancement of the landscape, nature and historic features within the trail corridor.

During 2015/2016, all trails continued to prioritise maintenance and work that ensures good systems are in place for ongoing monitoring. In some cases this has meant establishing new baselines which substantiates the wealth of anecdotal evidence about condition.

Key Performance Indicator: Trail condition

The overall length of National Trail available has increased by 93 km due to greater accuracy of recording and from route variations. Overall the proportion reported as being of condition (which is very low compared to total length of National Trail) has shown a continued rate of improvement.

Trail	% route reported out of condition 2013/2014	% route reported out of condition 2015/2016
Cotswold Way	3.1	2.6
Cleveland Way	2.9	1.6
Hadrian's Wall	7.7	0.4
Offa's Dyke (English section)	negligible	0.5
Pennine Bridleway	1.3	0.6
Pennine Way	1.9	2.0
Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path	7.7	5.3 ⁷
North Downs Way	0	0.2
Ridgeway	4.6	4
South Downs Way	2	2.4
South West Coast Path	1.5	1.7
Thames Path	1.7	0.9
Yorkshire Wolds Way	1.5	1.2
England Coast Path Durham Hartlepool	5.7 (2014/2015 figs only)	5.7

⁷ Figure relates predominately to vehicular damage on **Peddars Way** where plans have been drawn up for repair/resurfacing.

Damage and rutting to path surfaces continues to be a problem reported by trails particularly in the winter months. In the case of the **Ridgeway** this is often attributed to illegal vehicle use. Repair works are however undertaken as soon as possible and on the **Offa's Dyke Path** over 100 tons of material was airlifted to repair a damaged section on the Hatterall Ridge in Hertfordshire.

Volunteers continue to make a vital contribution to path maintenance and enhancement by undertaking surveying and monitoring work. On the **Cleveland Way** a major bridge was replaced with the help of volunteers and the co-operation of the National Trust. New technology is also helping, a good example being on the **South West Coast Path** where the entire length is surveyed using an app running on Android tablets.

Vegetation cutting and scrub clearing is influenced by seasonal weather conditions but overall totals for 2015/2016 are impressive with an annual total of 2,053 km of 'soft' vegetation cutting and just over 103 km of scrub clearance.

In spite of the caveat that many trails are still establishing a robust baseline, there has been a noticeable reduction in the number of stiles which can be linked to growth in the number of gates as trails seek to make their routes more accessible. The proportion of stiles reported as being out of condition has, however, risen from an average of 9% in 2013/2014 to 12% in 2015/2016, while the proportion of gates out of condition has remained fairly stable from an average of 5.7% to 5.8% over the same period. The proportion of bridges and gates deemed to be out of condition over the same period has remained at 5%.



New bridge and ramps on the Thames Path at Hurley

Finally the number of fingerposts reported as out of condition has only changed very slightly over the three years from an average of 18.5% to 19.6%.

Whilst concerns have been expressed by trails about their ability to maintain signage standards in some areas, a number of significant signing programmes have been undertaken including on the **South Downs Way** and on the **Peddars Way** and **Norfolk Coast Path**, where signage was installed on the Coast Path at Sheringham and at Cromer to assist with navigation through the town. On the **Cotswold Way** the quality of signing was the most frequent subject of positive user feedback with way-marking having significantly improved on the Gloucestershire section over the past year.

On the **South West Coast Path** we have for the first time received full infrastructure detail for the whole 630 miles of the route, establishing a clear baseline for future monitoring.

On the **Hadrian's Wall Path** the infrastructure baseline has been updated and supplemented by detailed work undertaken by Cumbria County Council following the floods in December 2015. Flooding resulted in the need for emergency signing, and investment over the year, following condition surveying, included the installation of 40 new finger and way-marker posts.

A full condition survey was undertaken on both of the Pennine Trails which, combined with feedback from partners and users, has been used to complete the condition monitoring form and inform allocation and prioritising of resources. Consequently there has been a significant investment in improving trail condition at a number of locations including along the High Peak Trail in Derbyshire where the trail was widened to reduce conflict between users. Surfacing work was also undertaken on the **Pennine Way** over Fountains Fell in the Yorkshire Dales National Park which has improved the walking surface whilst protecting fragile moorland.

A short section (1.16 km) of the **Pennine Bridleway** south of Glossop was also completed during the course of the year which is another step towards opening the **Pennine Bridleway** in this area.

On the **Cleveland Way** coastal erosion has continued to present a serious challenge. Several slips happened this year but support and cooperation from landowners ensured that the trail remained open at all times for the public to enjoy.

Whilst numerous smaller scale maintenance works have been undertaken the **Yorkshire Wolds Way** team reported that the trail is in very good condition overall with no need for major improvements.

Key Indicator: Quality of the trail corridor

The quality of the trail corridor reflects the fact that many National Trails pass through areas of great environmental, architectural and heritage interest, many of which are afforded statutory protection⁸. People don't just come to use the trail itself but to enjoy the corridor it travels through. Whilst there are many positive initiatives going on, the potential for inappropriate development and other activities to impact negatively on the trail corridor remains.

⁸ 84% of the length of the National Trails and 61% of the England Coast Path will lie within national or international designations for landscape and nature conservation. 25% of the length of National Trails pass through SSSIs.

Litter and vandalism are ongoing issues in some locations as well as unauthorised vehicle use. Trails are always seeking to address these issues and make improvements. On the **Pennine Trails** the partnership has been working alongside other groups to link the trails with wider landscape initiatives such as the Redesdale Landscape Partnership Scheme. Peatland restoration and trail management activities have been working hand-in-hand for many years and this continues actively in the South Pennines and Peak District. The use of a cut and collect mowing machine on sections of the **Pennine Bridleway** trail corridor also helps to maintain the verges for wildflowers that thrive in unimproved grassland.

New stretches of the **England Coast Path** running through Durham, Hartlepool, and Sunderland are now being recognised in new heritage coast management plans and development proposals are being linked to corridor improvement initiatives.

On the **South Downs Way** trail managers are working with the National Park rangers and landowners to improve wildlife habitats adjacent to the trail, including erecting nest boxes as part of barn owl conservation projects. Opportunities also exist to benefit the corridor where several Countryside Stewardship applications are being assessed in clusters. The South Downs National Park Authority has been successful in gaining International Dark Sky Reserve status for an area of over 400 square kilometres, including substantial sections of the **South Downs Way** corridor. There are only 10 other Reserves with this status internationally. The route is particularly well used at night and this use continues to grow.

On the **Thames Path** trail volunteers worked in partnership with wildlife groups on habitat restoration projects and small circular walks where the trail passes through nature reserves in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

Key Indicator: Improvements to accessibility

The **Yorkshire Wolds** team has supported the social enterprise Mapping for Change which uses apps and volunteers to record the line of the trail and barriers to access along it. On the **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path**, access audits were completed by a disabled access group on the Wells to Holkham stretch.

On the **South Downs Way** the trail officer worked with a company called Pony Access to help get disabled people out along the trail in a specially designed and built pony drawn cart. After considering the legal issues it has been agreed that the project could provide improved access in this way and further work is being planned.



Pony Access helping people with disabilities enjoy the South Downs Way

Conclusions and Forward Look

Overall it has been extremely encouraging to see that all trails have developed their monitoring systems to establish accurate baselines and ensure the robustness of future data. We believe that the trails are continuing to be managed to a high standard and we feel confident that future monitoring will allow the trail partnerships to have an even greater understanding of how effectively Quality Standards are being maintained.

A challenge for the future will be to work with the new coastal authorities and encourage learning and best practice across the family to ensure that new **England Coast Path** stretches have similarly robust systems of monitoring and reporting in place.

Engagement

To build and sustain a community of interest in caring for the trail and the landscape through which it passes.

During 2015/2016 we continued to support trail partnerships to establish and consolidate and in some cases develop their Delivery Frameworks. As the **England Coast Path** opens we are increasingly being asked for advice on local governance arrangements to support managing authorities who have not previously been involved in the management of a National Trail.

Key Performance Indicator: Effective partnerships

We now have trail partnerships covering all 13 trails in England. At March 2016 new **England Coast Path** stretches have either been absorbed into existing partnership arrangements, as is the case in Norfolk, or they are evolving within existing local structures such as Heritage Coast management arrangements. The work of Natural England's national team now includes supporting new coastal authorities as they start to think about cost effective management of their stretches of the **England Coast Path** in the longer term.

Nationally over a 100 separate organisations from the public, private and third sector⁹ are now involved formally as stakeholders in the trail partnerships. This includes;

- 69 access/highway authorities (with some of the London boroughs represented by Transport for London (TFL)).
- six National Parks - Northumberland NP, North York Moors NP, Yorkshire Dales NP, South Downs National Park, Peak District NP and Exmoor NP.
- 10 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnerships/ conservation boards
- five local authority tourism units.
- Other public sector partners such as Historic England, Environment Agency, Port of London Authority and Natural Resources Wales.
- National landowning conservation charities such as the National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wildlife Trusts.
- National organisations such as the British Horse Society, Country Land and Business Association and the National Farmers Union
- Numerous representatives from local communities including tourism based business enterprises, local access forums and local ramblers groups

In addition, whilst in the New Deal we stated that we would no longer insist that each National Trail should appoint a National Trail Officer (although we made clear that this was deemed to be best practice), all of the existing trail partnerships have appointed or continued a lead

⁹ The Third Sector comprises of community groups, voluntary organisations, charities, social enterprises and co-operatives.

officer role for the trails. Their formal job titles and work responsibilities are locally determined but they continue to work together through quarterly meetings and have a supportive and sometimes more executive role on each of the trail partnerships.

Self-assessment

Following last year's self-assessment exercise initiated by Natural England, National Trail partnerships have continued to develop, building on the success that has been achieved over the last three years.

Some highlights over the last year include the **Ridgeway** which now has a membership of around 20 organisations and whose regular attendance at meetings reflects the strong level of local commitment to this trail. Consultation and input into work priorities and on objectives has been a strong feature of partnership arrangements and the Ridgeway Partnership has held two events for wider stakeholders to address the year's priority items. Numerous new contacts were made at these events, giving rise to new working relationships.

The **Thames Path** has also sought to demonstrate how much further the trail's partnership has come this year and a full consultation was undertaken by all partners to review the Delivery Framework. This has now been amended to reflect the work and aspirations of the partnership, which includes all the working groups' objectives.

Following a partnership self-assessment exercise, the areas the **Pennine Trails** partnership identified that they are now doing well included good communication and decision making. Areas where the partnership can improve were identified as understanding the cost/benefit (of the partnership) and increasing representation from individual highway authorities.

Wider partnership working arrangements

Representatives of trail partnerships also attend a wide variety of strategic/local partnerships. This includes a representative from the **Hadrian's Wall Path** on the World Heritage Site Partnership Board and **Pennine Trails** representatives attending Pennine Prospects meetings.

Through its members, the **Yorkshire Wold's Way** partnership is supporting a Rural Partnership Group, seeking new European Agricultural Rural Development funding from the Local Enterprise Partnership for a tourism based project capitalising on Hull City of Culture 2017.

Interest in developing and/or joining trail partnerships is being expressed by a range of local authorities working with Natural England on the delivery of the **England Coast Path** and wherever possible Natural England staff has been attending a number of exploratory meetings around the country to support these initiatives. Commitment by authorities taking on new stretches of the **England Coast Path** has been effective in establishing measures to enable coordinated management. This included the appointment of a project officer in September 2015 for two years to cover the new section of **England Coast Path** from Seaham to Wearmouth Bridge. This was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Fourteen¹⁰. Other good examples include working with the Heritage Coast Partnership to coordinate the management of the England Coast Path in Durham, Hartlepool and Sunderland.

¹⁰ Fourteen is a £3.5m programme funded by Spirit of 2012, a charity set up by the Big Lottery Fund to connect events to communities across the country; tackling disadvantage by supporting opportunities in sport, physical activity, culture and the arts, volunteering and social action. The Sunderland communities of Ryhope and Hendon were two of the 14 communities who accessed the fund.

Key Indicator: Level and type of engagement/voluntary participation

One of the highlights of the year continues to be the huge contribution that volunteers make to the management of National Trails. Work is undertaken on a variety of levels from providing input to planning and development meetings to undertaking monitoring and practical improvement works.

There is a new partnership with Ramblers volunteers in East Riding whose work will encompass activities on the **Yorkshire Wolds Way**. On the **Hadrian's Wall Path** volunteers continue to actively report on their adopted path sections. Over the year volunteers refurbished a total of 150 metal acorns, at a cost saving of around £750 to the project.



Volunteers helping to repair a drystone wall alongside the Hadrian's Wall Path

Across the year on the **Cleveland Way** 292 volunteer days were spent on the trail on a wide variety of activities from the installation of new bridges to looking after precious habitats along the route and keeping vegetation at bay. The **Cleveland Way** team also hosted the National Trails Volunteers conference and representatives of all National Trails gathered at Larpool Hall to share experience and best practice in working with volunteers. This proved to be a highly productive and forward looking event which was attended by a mix of volunteer leaders and volunteers. The event was a great opportunity to share best practice among all National Trail volunteers and it is hoped that it will be repeated in 2017.

On the **Pennine Trails** volunteer participation is generally practical in nature and some 325 volunteer days were completed with 134 days being provided by new recruits. This is in addition to self-directed volunteer groups who undertake maintenance on the **Pennine Way and Bridleway**, including the Calderdale Rights of Way (CROW) volunteers and the Peak and Northern Footpath Society.

The **Cotswold Way** Warden coordinators model continues to be successful in involving local volunteers in day to day management and condition surveying. An integrated approach is maintained via regular coordinators' meetings with the trail officer and the annual **Cotswold Way** Warden's Conference.

On the **Ridgeway** a new volunteer photographer is developing a portfolio of images to promote different aspects of the **Ridgeway** such as its use for sporting activities. The images also help promote local businesses and the towns/villages that can be visited along the route of the trail to help support the local economy. Three new volunteer positions were also created to cover office-based work including the management of website and social media interests.

The **Thames Path** has increased its engagement with volunteers and in December two volunteers won the Oxfordshire award for Recognition and Valuing Volunteering in Oxfordshire

Working in partnership with The River Thames Society River Wardens, volunteers monitor all sections of the **Thames Path** on a quarterly basis and this now includes London. Both groups are currently working in collaboration on a full disability access audit for the whole trail which a volunteer helps coordinate from the office at least one day per week.



Volunteers installing map boards at a key access point on the Ridgeway

Under **Thames Path** trail supervision a team from Fujitsu's legal department volunteered to undertake work as part of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility Programme. The team spent the day clearing several hundred metres of undergrowth from the sides of the **Thames Path**, near Old Windsor.

On the **Offa's Dyke Path** the key area of volunteer involvement was helping to carry out repairs to the surface of the Hatterall Ridge section in Herefordshire. All in all 409 volunteer days were recorded on this single project.

Key Indicator: Land manager satisfaction with the management of the route

Land manager satisfaction continues to be a key objective for trails and strenuous efforts are made to work positively with the many hundreds of private individuals and wide variety of organisations who own and/or have control of the land over which the trails pass.

On the **Cleveland Way** the National Trust work in close partnership with the trail officer and maintenance ranger. Each year the route that passes through National Trust land is walked and assessed, resulting in the path being maintained to a high standard by both partners. Coastal erosion continues to present challenges, however support and cooperation from landowners enables managers to keep the trail open for the public to enjoy at all times.

On the **Pennine Trails** a significant benefit of having the Pennine Trails Rangers is that they develop and maintain good working relationships with landowners who appreciate having a clear local point of contact with a good knowledge of the area.

On the **South Downs Way** a close working relationship with a large golf club has enabled improvements to the trail and trail corridor whilst reducing conflict with players. This has been achieved by improving the trail surface to reduce the tendency of trail users to stray onto the course. The club has responded by removing fencing intended to keep people on the trail which provides better views of the local landscape. The club also helps directly with the management of the trail verges. The club is now looking to provide seating along the trail for walkers to use. In East Sussex the owners of a private estate though which the trail passes have also contributed financially to trail management works including improvements to the surface of a local car park.

The following examples of feedback from landowners along the Thames Path illustrate some of the good relations that exist between trail managers and landowners/occupiers:

'I am very happy with the work that the Thames Path Team do. They have good communication with myself regarding any repairs that need doing. They are always friendly and helpful in their approach to jobs and repairs'.

'You recently renewed five gates and signs at Radcot. This work was done superbly, so that my dogs and sheep cannot get through and the gates also are self-closing so that the public cannot leave them open.'

Conclusions and Forward Look

The trail partnerships are continuing to demonstrate the value of wider engagement locally and using their experience to support evolving governance arrangements on the **England Coast Path** will become increasingly important.

The trail partnership chairs have also started to network together and at the time of writing have formed an alliance group to promote the value of National Trails.

The value of volunteer effort to support maintenance of the trails and the infrastructure and governance that supports volunteers remains critical. We hope in the future to be in a position to support the trails to agree a consistent and robust method of recording and valuing this effort.

Economy

To create opportunities for local businesses to benefit from the use of National Trails.

As in previous years, our focus for 2015/2016 has been to work with the trail partnerships; the emerging stretches of England Coast Path and also independently to provide better evidence of the benefits of National Trails to local economies.

We know that average spend is generally highest during visits to the coast, mountains, hills or moorland - the landscape types that the England Coast Path and National Trails pass through. Although such visits make up only 10% of all visits to the natural environment they account for 80% of visitor spend¹¹ and generate significant income for local economies¹².

Investment in National Trails 2015/2016

The diagram on the page overleaf shows investment by Natural England matched at the level required by the local trail partnerships at a ratio of 3:1 (national: local). It also shows investment by Natural England into further creation works on the **Pennine Bridleway** as well as additional investment by the local authorities and income from a wide range of other sources which demonstrates the success of trail partnerships in levering in additional funding.

¹¹ Natural England (2015) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment Analysis of Expenditure during visits (NECR17).

¹² Longer visit of ten miles or more to places like the coast, mountains, hills or moorland, generate an average of £63 per visit. This compares favourably with an average spend of just £9 for visits of less than ten miles, which tend to be to local parks.

Example - Experience

On the South Downs a 'Poet in Residence' walked the whole trail in several trips over a year and produced a series of poems which were published on the trail blog featured on the National Trails website.

Example - Enhancement

During the year The Yorkshire Wolds Way celebrated becoming the first of the footpath based National Trails to remove all of its stiles which has been a target for many years.

Example - Engagement

During the year The Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path Partnership agreed a revised development framework and members are now receiving regular reports on England Coast Path development.

Example - Economy

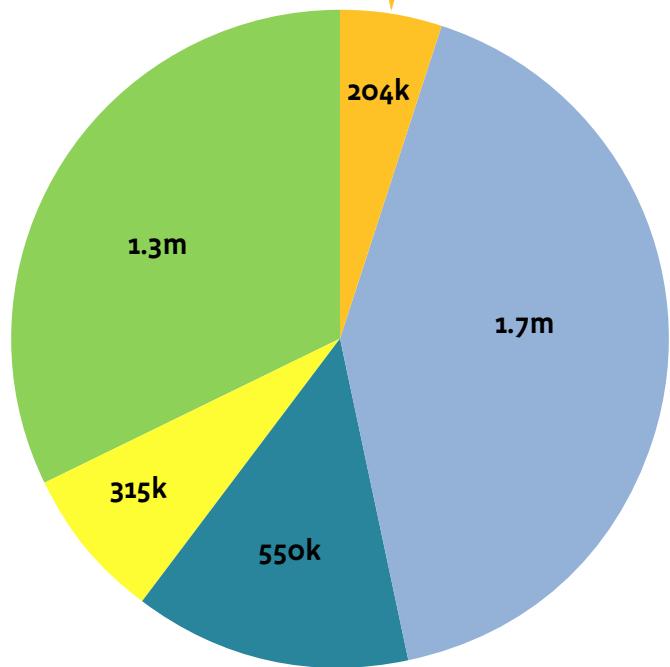
An income of around £8,000 (around 5% of the annual budget) is now being received by the Hadrian Wall Path from the Trail Passport and individual donations.

Includes funding to progress outstanding creation works on the Pennine Bridleway

Contributions

- Natural England Formula Grant
- Match Funding Required
- Highway Authority Additional
- Other
- Natural England Additional

Total 4.06m



During the year trails continued to explore new ways to raise income and create the right conditions for additional investment to be made. Trails have exploited numerous opportunities to tap into external grant funding as well as devise ways of reducing reliance on public funding, although the core support from Natural England continues to be crucial as leverage for trails to attract investment for more developmental works.

It is also important to show how the trails have helped to bring wider investment into the local economy via visitor spend and one area that contributes significantly to this is the organisation of events, where there has been a renewed focus on working with professional event organisers. For example, a local authority working with the trail team on the **Ridgeway** attracted a new events organiser resulting in the MTB marathon event which brought over 700 riders to the area. The event village was in Wantage where people stayed overnight at the campsite or with local accommodation providers. On the **North Downs Way** a developing relationship with professional event organisers raised nearly £1,000 in additional donations.

Other innovative ways of deriving income have been employed such as selling old branded way-markers and fingerposts. On the **Pennine Way** a range of fingerpost blades (some up to 25 years old) were listed for sale on the National Trail website and sold out in less than two weeks, raising over £1,000 for the partnership. The sale of old signs and fingerpost blades has also been very popular with Hadrian's Wall Path walkers (an idea taken up by other National Trails) with most selling for between £60 and £70.



Signpost fingers being sold at the World Heritage Site conference in February 2016

On the **Cleveland Way** the National Trails officer has found new ways to generate support and income for the trail through sponsorship and donations, building on previous success with the Helmsley Brewery. This scheme continues to work well and £742 was received in donations from April to December 2015 which helped fund a new edition of the Cleveland Way Top Ten Experiences handbook, which is still in strong demand. Similar schemes are operated by the **Yorkshire Wolds Way** with the successful completion of discussions with the Wold Top Brewery, leading to the brewery agreeing to partner with the trail in making the Wold's Way Ale, the official beer of the National Trail. A contribution from the sale of every pint goes to help keeping the trail open.

In October 2014 the South West Coast Path Association on behalf of the trail partnership secured £1.1 million from the Coastal Communities Fund to repair the coast path following the extreme weather of previous years. Funding was also used to grow the capacity and capability of the Association, and work with businesses and others to promote the trail. The total spend including Natural England grant funding and contributions from other partners was almost £1.9 million.

Key Indicator: Benefit to the local economy

The main way that National Trails benefit the local economy is through income generated by tourism. Feedback from those users that apply for trail completion certificates shows not only that they are investing in local businesses, but that use of these facilities contributes as much to their overall experience as the route and the landscape.



Promoting the Wolds Way Ale Partnership

'...not to mention all the lovely welcoming B&Bs we stayed in along the way'

'From staying in luxury at Llanthony Priory to practically begging to stop on a campsite, there was never a dull moment'

'Just finished 8 stage walk on the Pennine Way fantastic menus and ales!'

'...stayed in a range of B&Bs, a few pubs and met lots of delightful hosts who fed us 14 cooked breakfasts and some supplied us with packed lunches to keep us going'

'B&Bs along the way very good, and geared up for walkers'

Using local suppliers for maintenance and development work continues to be a key feature of National Trails and reports contain numerous examples of where trails have sourced all their furniture from local suppliers and used local contractors for maintenance and cutting works.

Strenuous efforts are being made to support tourism initiatives to maximise the benefits that are derived locally from increased levels of visit spend. Examples include the **Yorkshire Wolds Way** and **Cleveland Way** who have joined with Scarborough Borough Council, Ryedale District Council, Visit Hull and East Yorkshire, Visit York, Yorkshire Dales National Parks Authority and Sustrans to promote walking and cycling opportunities to the Dutch and Belgians at two annual walking and cycling exhibitions (Fiets and Wandelbeurs).

The **Thames Path** brought together a wide range of organisations through a business tourist development forum which enabled the trail managers to highlight the many ways that the **Thames Path** benefits businesses. The trail officer has also attended events organised by Tourism South East which resulted in a number of businesses expressing an interest in incorporating walks on the **Thames Path** as part of their excursion deals.

Given the anticipated impact in terms of visitor spend, a significant amount of staff time and funding (£20,000) was invested by the South Downs National Park Authority in the production of the Guide to the South Downs Way, South Downs Way Mountain Bike Guide, South Downs Public Transport Guide and Car Free South Downs booklet.



Business Partnership working with Visit Thames

Anecdotal evidence from the more remote businesses along the Pennine Way suggest that 50% or more of their business is related to the trail. On the **Offa's Dyke Path** some businesses have reported that this figure can be as high as 60%. Bed and Breakfast, campsites and pubs at start and end points inevitably benefit considerably from walkers who tend to spend at least one night at these locations. Stable yards and trekking centres also benefit from their location near the **Pennine Bridleway**, with many using the Bridleway to offer day and multi-day rides.

On the **Peddars Way and Norfolk Coast Path** the Explore More Coast project was completed and, with a total budget of £200,000, this resulted in a walking festival and 20 new circular walks. A local business toolkit was also developed and businesses were contacted and encouraged to put their details on the website.

The **South Downs Way** was a key factor in a successful West Sussex County Council bid to the Local Enterprise Partnership for funding to re-sign six strategic link routes between the **South Downs Way** and communities with trail facilities such as accommodation, food and drink or public transport.

Key Indicator: Service providers' satisfaction with the management of the route

Trails continue to report that service providers not only benefit significantly from the presence of the route but also recognise and appreciate the management that ensures the trail's continued use and popularity. Service providers are also a good source of feedback for trail managers, reporting issues that have been picked up by walkers and enabling them to be resolved more quickly. On the **Hadrian's Wall Path** following the extensive flooding in Cumbria, businesses were quick to express their appreciation that the message the 'trail is open' was being regularly communicated by trail staff.

Businesses often use Twitter to show their appreciation for the National Trail as these examples from the **Cleveland Way** and **Yorkshire Wolds Way** show:

Townsend Farm B&B - 'Have you been to the Cleveland Way – it's beautiful'

Humble Bee Farm - 'Morning from the Yorkshire Coast – wonderful walking!'

The **Pennine Trails** are in the process of creating a survey form for service providers and positive feedback has been received from Rushop Hall on the **Pennine Bridleway** in Derbyshire where measures have been put in place to reduce levels of vehicular traffic following resurfacing work.

In December 2015 the **South West Coast Path** undertook a local business survey. The online survey link was distributed via email during mid-November 2015 and a total of 246 completed online questionnaires were submitted by 4 December 2015 – a response rate of approximately 14%.

The key findings of the survey were:

- 1.** Just over three quarters of businesses responding to the survey (77%) were accommodation businesses. 11% were food and drinks related businesses.
- 2.** 71% of businesses were situated next to the coast path and a further 26% within 5 miles of it.
- 3.** 94% of all businesses responding to the survey indicated that they attracted visitors using the coast path.
- 4.** 91% of these businesses reported that the numbers of their customers using the coast path up to the end of October 2015 compared with 2014 had increased (33%) or remained at the same level (58%).
- 5.** 54% of businesses indicated that if the quality of the coast path were to decrease, e.g. it became overgrown in early summer, that it would have a slight impact on their overall business performance and a further 30% that it would have a significant impact.
- 6.** 91% of businesses would like to attract more walkers.
- 7.** 76% of businesses indicated that September was the month when their customers using the coast path were the most important to their business turnover. Businesses indicated that the months of April, May and October were similarly important with the next most important month being June.

On the **Offa's Dyke Path** the trail officer reported that the thirteen Walkers are Welcome towns along the route are vital to the role of engaging with local businesses and users.

Conclusions and Forward Look

As finance within the public sector continues to be under pressure from competing demands, it becomes increasingly important that National Trails are able to evidence the benefits (particularly the economic benefits) which flow from the existence of these world class routes. The trail partnerships have been working on this, as has Natural England who have commissioned consultants to produce a framework for evaluation of the economic, health and social impacts of improvements delivered by the **England Coast Path**.

This is the first time such a study (which includes baseline data collection and visitor surveys) has been undertaken at the creation of a National Trail and we look forward to developing robust data and analysis in relation to the benefits the trail will deliver.

Natural England's performance in 2015/2016

In line with its national oversight role, Natural England has continued to champion National Trails and monitor how they maintain Quality Standards.

During 2015/2016 we:

- Facilitated meetings of the Funding Formula Review Group which led to a number of recommendations being made to Natural England for the future.
- Fully committed and accounted for a budget of £1.7 m for annual maintenance.
- Secured £55k to support new stretches of the England Coast Path.
- Contributed an additional £190k to support outstanding capital creation works on the Pennine Bridleway.
- Supported the work of all 13 trail partnerships and gave advice to new England Coast Path authorities about grant funding and governance arrangements.
- Continued working with Natural Resource Wales and Walk Unlimited to support the national website.

Next steps

1. Natural England will continue to support the concept of a National Trails family and development of initiatives to enable trail partnerships to share best practice and information that supports more coordinated and cost effective management. This includes:
 - Building and sharing the user evidence base that clearly shows the wider benefits to the local economy.
 - Supporting the development of the website to better reflect the promotional needs of the England Coast Path.
2. We will focus on supporting and advising new coastal authorities as they take on local management of new stretches of the England Coast Path. This includes:
 - Producing updated guidance to reflect the management needs of the England Coast Path
 - Organising workshops and seminars to share best practice and promote joint working between individual trails.
 - Providing advice and support in the development of new trail partnerships



Walking the England Coast Path in Norfolk

3. We will continue to make the case to government for financial support for maintenance whilst helping the family move towards a funding model less dependent on the public purse. This includes;
- Accepting and implementing the recommendations from the Funding Formula Review Group wherever possible within funding constraints.
 - Undertaking/commissioning work to investigate alternative funding sources and providing evidence/information to support funding applications.

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