



Analysis of responses to Natural England's consultation on 'the future management of National Trails from April 2013'

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1 Introduction

Background

Between the 10th May and 5th July 2012 Natural England sought views on its approach to the management and funding of National Trails. The purpose of this consultation was to provide a targeted and structured opportunity for our delivery partners, key interest bodies and representatives of user groups to have a formal opportunity to comment on the main principles involved.

Our proposals were set out in a discussion paper entitled “A family of unique trails – Natural England’s discussion paper on the future management of National Trails from April 2013”. In this document we stated our ambition that in the future National Trails should be as good as, if not better than, they are today. Our core proposition was that central Government should continue to invest in trail maintenance across England while Trail Partnerships take responsibility for local delivery.

Structure of this document

The purpose of this document is to present a summary of the key findings from the consultation. Chapter 2 provides information on who responded to our proposals and submitted comments to the questions we posed (the list of the twelve questions posed is provided at Annex A) Chapter 3 presents the detailed analysis of the responses structured by topic and broken down by question where relevant. In Chapter 3 we have also described the key themes and any issues presented by the respondents.

At all times we took a rigorous approach to the recording and analysis of the consultation responses to ensure we obtained a thorough understanding and an accurate record of the thoughts of the consultees. A detailed description of the consultation analysis methodology is provided in Annex B.

2 Participation in the consultation

In total 250 delivery partners, including key interest and user groups, individuals and businesses were invited to respond to the discussion paper. A total of 141 responses were received in response to this consultation (see Annex C for the full list of respondents). Natural England is very grateful to all who took the time to respond and we were extremely pleased with the level of response. Responses were submitted in a range of formats (28 on a word template, 83 completed the smart survey online and 29 submitted their response in their own format). Nine responses were received after the deadline, all of these were analysed. A copy of all of the 141 responses will be available to view on Natural England’s website following publication of this report. Whilst this is not Natural England’s standard practice we have received a number of Freedom of Information requests and in the interest of fairness and in anticipation that other parties are interested in this information we have decided to make it publicly available.

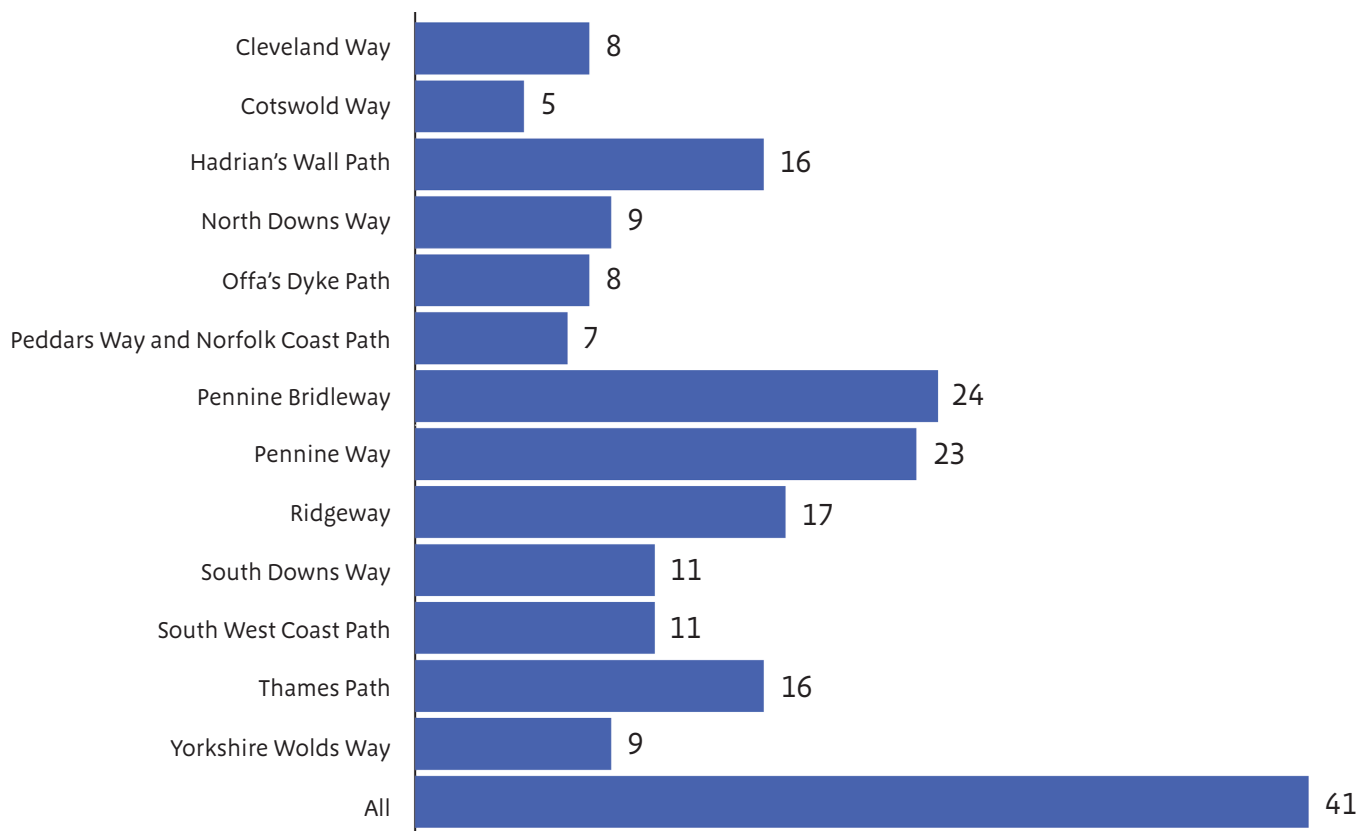
In addition to asking the twelve discussion paper questions, we also asked some contextual questions, about who respondents were and if they had an affiliation to a particular trail. Table 1 below shows a break-down of the 141 respondents by stakeholder group.

Table 1: Break-down of responses by stakeholder group.

Agency	5
AONB	7
Business	5
Committee	1
Local Access Forum	17
Landowner	1
Local Authority	30
Local group	7
Local partnership	4
Local user group	3
Management Group	1
National Park Authority	6
NGO	20
National Trails Friends/ Association	4
National Trail Officer/ Staff	10
Profession	2
User	18
Total	141

Respondents were invited to indicate if they had a connection with any particular trail. More than one trail could be selected and there was an option to select all trails. An outline of the number of responses received by Trail is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Responses by trail (more than one trail could be selected)

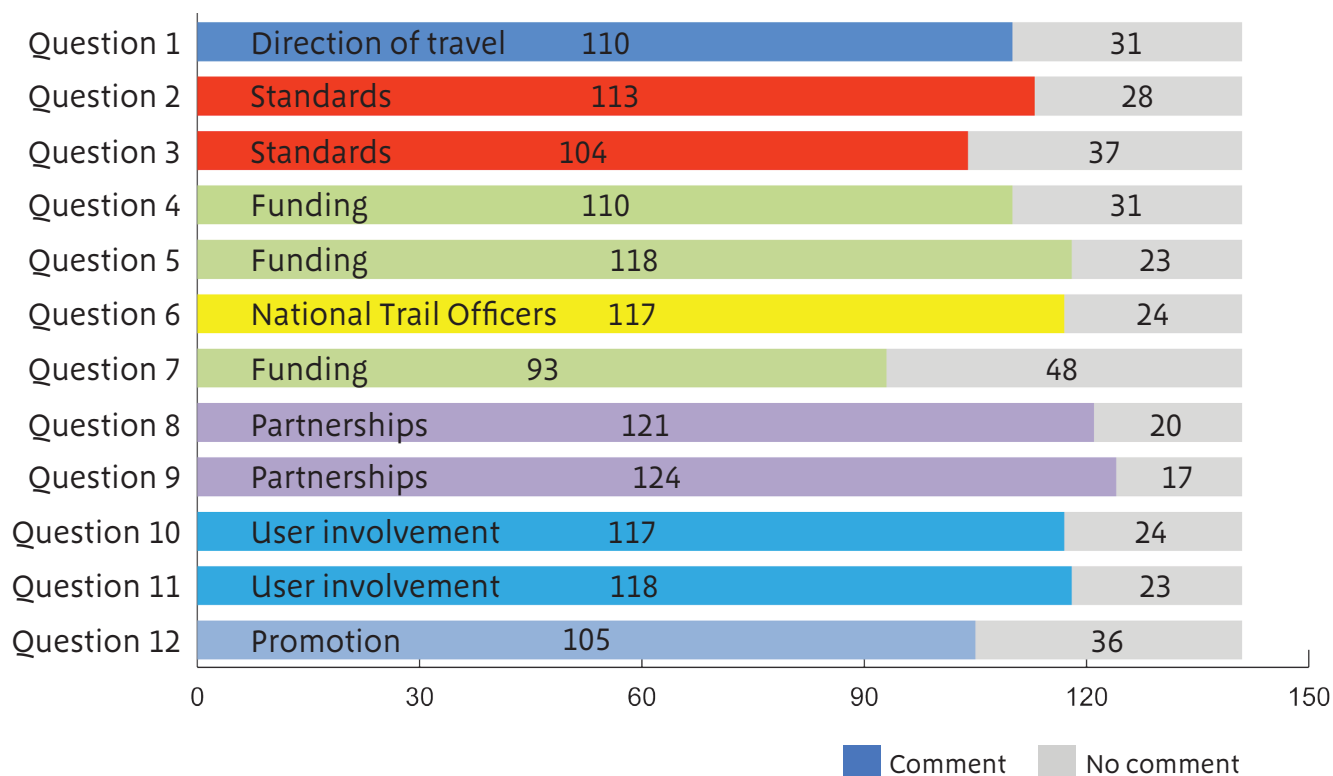


A number of respondents related their comments to all of the trails and this reflected the high proportion of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and 'umbrella' organisations responding. Some Highway Authorities, Local Access Forums (LAFs), individuals and businesses also responded in relation to all trails.

Not all respondents chose to provide comments for all questions and Figure 2 shows the response level for each of the twelve questions. In addition, for some questions respondents were invited to indicate a preference (agree, disagree etc...) and the results for this are reported in Chapter 3. The colouring in Figure 2 shows the overarching topic to which the individual question relates, for example, questions 2 and 3 relate to the Quality Standards topic.

In Chapter 3 we have used this question grouping by topic when presenting the detailed analysis of the themes and issues, as highlighted by the respondents in their comments for those particular questions.

Figure 2: Response level by question



In Chapter 3 below we have presented a detailed analysis of the responses structured by topic (as per Figure 2) and broken down by question where relevant. We will go on to describe the key themes and any issues presented by the respondents.

3 Analysis by topic, theme and issue

3.1 General observations and key cross cutting concerns

Overall we received a positive response to our proposals as illustrated in Fig 3 on page 9. A number of cross cutting themes were apparent which influenced responses to all the questions and these are summarised below:

Understanding

There was an apparent lack of understanding by some respondents about the starting point for this Review. On reading the responses it was clear that respondents had differing interpretations of the baseline for this consultation. Some feared what we are suggesting will make a significant difference, whilst others made the point that they have to some extent been doing what we are suggesting for 20 years. Responses, such as 'if it's not broken, don't fix it' were balanced by those that recognised the inequity of the current situation. The analysis team looked into these misunderstandings and the degree to which respondents were concerned.

Detail

There was concern expressed about the level of detail contained in the consultation document, especially in relation to the funding and Quality Standards sections. In some cases, the comments suggest an understandable curiosity about the parallel process of operating Working Groups developing a funding formula and the Quality Standards framework. Their challenge to us was that we ought to share the material the Working Groups were using more widely, as and when it became available. There was a proportion who asked explicitly for further consultation on the detail, once developed.

Trust

There was some evidence of a lack of trust. These concerns can broadly be captured in three categories:

- That in spite of the tone of the discussion document, they do not believe that there will be sufficient funding to keep National Trails 'as good if not better than they are today'; some state they believe the review and its proposals are a 'smoke screen' for planned cuts;
- The accountability of the Trail Partnerships to the national lead/champion, including how they will commit to deliver the Quality Standards;
- The accountability within the Trail Partnerships themselves, and how arrangements would ensure fairness for all partners.

The following sections of chapter 3 will describe the principle findings for each of the seven topic areas. There is one section per topic.

3.2 Overall quantitative response

For 6 of the 12 questions consultees were invited to indicate a preference: strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree. The results from this are shown in Figure 3 below. Note that not all responses indicated a preference and so the percentages are based on the total number of responses to that question. These results are further discussed in the topic by topic sections that follow.

3.3 Direction of travel

This section focuses on the Direction of Travel and draws on responses to question 1.

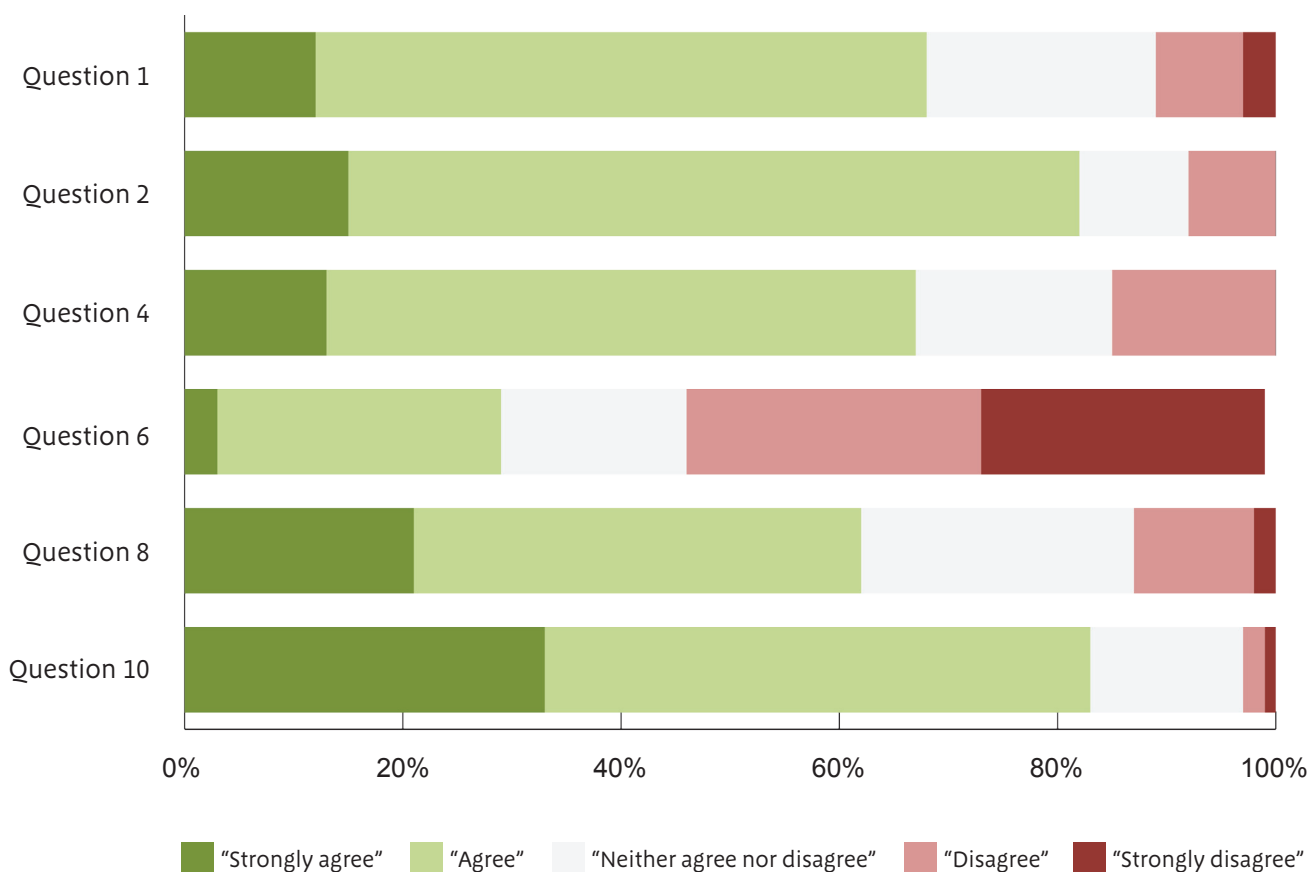
Q1 Do you agree that these propositions describe the right direction of travel?

Of those who expressed a preference, **68% agreed** that the propositions as set out in the consultation document described the right direction of travel and **11% disagreed**.

Where respondents had made comments, the majority had referred to specific aspects of our proposals which are discussed in detail in the following sections of this report. The most frequently cited topics were Trail Partnerships and funding. In addition, a number of respondents discussed national leadership and this topic is discussed in more detail in 3.10.

In addition to the topics listed above, a number of respondents commented on other matters relating to National Trails and these comments have been captured in 3.11 Other Significant Comments.

Figure 3: Summary of the overall quantitative response



3.4 Quality Standards

Questions 2 and 3 covered the proposal to refresh the Quality Standards for National Trails.

Q2 Do you agree with the proposed approach to Quality Standards?

Q3 Do you have any comments on the proposed framework or the draft Family and Trail Standards listed in the Annex to the discussion paper?

Of those that expressed a preference 82% agreed with the proposed approach to Quality Standards and 8% disagreed. However, a more detailed assessment of the responses revealed that the respondents had an apparent dilemma:

- Aspirational and ambitious Quality Standards, which are wide ranging and unrestrained by (Natural England's) budget. By their nature they are difficult to measure and monitor and so potentially difficult to enforce; and by comparison
- Focused Quality Standards, which are trail specific and developed to reflect the available budget, are easily measurable and enforceable.

In response to the questions, 4 key themes emerged:

- National Trail Quality Standards are a fundamental part of trail management
- Clarity of the proposed model is sought
- Scope of the National Trail Quality Standards
- Monitoring of the National Trail Quality Standards

National Trail Quality Standards are a fundamental part of trail management

Key elements in response: financial constraints, Trail Partnerships

Whilst recognising the dilemma as described above, there is overwhelming support for the concept of Quality Standards for National Trails, set at the national level, albeit with some concerns regarding maintaining those standards in difficult financial times. These concerns were further heightened for some by the proposed establishment of individual trail partnerships.

'Quality standards are essential. Currently national standards for all National Trails are well understood and need retaining. It is agreed that universal high standards, but not uniformity between Trails, is the correct approach.' (A Trail Association).

'They are long overdue for an overhaul. The idea of 'family' and 'trail' is sensible. They do need to be ambitious though, and aspire to the highest quality despite restrictions on funding' (a Social Enterprise).

Clarity of the proposed model

Key elements in response: lack of detail, lack of understanding, dilution of standards, beyond the scope of influence, more information.

There are significant issues around clarity of the proposed nested hierarchy of standards. Whilst some respondents clearly understood and supported the proposed nested hierarchy of the family, trail and local standards, many did not.

'There is a danger that the complexity of the nested approach for the standards will result in confusion. The terminology is not helpful' (a National Association).

Some interpreted the structure as a downgrading of the Quality Standards, others were asking for further information, to enable a more considered response. In particular, the family standard was often confused with the National Trail brand and criticised for including areas which go beyond the scope of influence for the managing authorities (for example, the quality of landscape).

There was also a level of misunderstanding in relation to the Trail and Local standards; 'Trail' was interpreted by some as applying to individual trails (as opposed to all trails), and 'Local' as sections of that trail (as opposed to applying to an individual trail).

Scope of the National Trail Quality Standards

Key elements in response: aspirational, expectation, equality, enforcement

When considering the scope of the Quality Standards, there were varying demands; these ranged from aspirational and ambitious standards not restrained by funding, to standards set to reflect budgets and those that can be readily enforced.

'Setting and enforcing rigorous quality standards is vital to the on-going success of National Trails' (User Group).

There were also calls for the Quality Standards to include both user experience and trail corridor, including linking routes, circular walks, public transport and multi use provision. There were specific concerns that allowing local standards might result in inappropriate compromises, for example, between an overall standard to remove all barriers from National Trails, as opposed to only where deemed appropriate by trail managers.

From a customer point of view, the use of the standards to inform user expectations was welcomed. The practical difficulties of setting Quality Standards and then measuring their performance drew comment, especially when different users have very different expectations. Several respondents commented that measuring user experience should complement and not replace monitoring the quality of infrastructure.

'There are practical difficulties because of the huge variety of user expectations for some sections of Trail' 'One person's 'well maintained' is another's 'dangerous'! Balancing these often conflicting expectations is a challenge.' (A Highway Authority).

Monitoring of the National Trail Quality Standards

Key elements in response: easy, consistent.

There was consensus that the Quality Standards should be easily measurable and be consistently, regularly and (if possible) independently monitored. Concerns were expressed as to how these wider ranging standards could be measured.

'The monitoring framework associated with the standards will need to be simple if it is to be capable of implementation and comparison across the different trails' (A National Park Authority).

3.5 Funding

This section focuses on funding. The narrative draws mainly on responses to questions 4, 5 and 7 but also includes those which were placed in answers to question 1.

- Q4** Do you agree with our proposals for how we provide the central Government contribution for local delivery?
- Q5** What special factors do you think should be taken into account in determining the level of award to individual Trails?
- Q6** (* see note below)
- Q7** Are there any other issues you'd like to raise about our funding proposals? Please explain.

* Please note, that whilst Question 6, which asks whether or not Natural England should explicitly provide funding for the National Trail Officers (as opposed to the payment being included in a single lump sum payment to the trail, which also contains an allowance within it for trail maintenance), is also part of this group of questions, it is reported separately below. The decision to report it separately was based on the level of interest it received in the responses.

Of those that expressed a preference, **66% agreed** with our proposals for how we provide the central Government contribution for local delivery and **15% disagreed**.

8 key themes emerged:

- A broader, more ambitious package of support is needed
- Stronger financial commitment is welcomed
- Pressures on local resources
- Flexibility for local decision making
- Need for a framework of monitoring and controls
- Efficiency of administration
- Responding to unexpected events
- Transition to the new funding formula

In addition, there were 118 responses to question 5 commenting on factors that should be taken into account when determining the level of funding to individual trails.

A broader, more ambitious package of support is needed

Key elements in response: ambition, expansion, declining investment, and the England Coast Path

'More funds are needed not less' (An Individual).

There was a general concern that our proposals on funding represent a 'stand still' position - and people would have liked to see a more ambitious set of proposals, to build on previous investment and to support delivery across the range of benefits outlined in the discussion paper. A number of respondents said that focussing exclusively on maintenance is the wrong approach and that a broader package of support is needed from central Government that includes promotion and development.

A few respondents commented on funding in 12/13, stating that £1.67 million was a small investment given the results that it achieves. One respondent thought the funding package should allow for the possibility of access enjoying a higher profile in the future and potential for the expansion of the National Trails network.

There was a widespread concern by all stakeholder groups about declining central Government funding. Indeed several respondents felt the proposals were a precursor for further cuts or making others pay for trails. Many of our local delivery partners said that the current Natural England investment is at the minimum level needed for basic upkeep of the routes, and that funding is just about sufficient so long as there are no unexpected problems. A few said that funding is already below the minimum needed and that there is a risk of gradual deterioration in quality of trails if it cannot be increased.

A number of respondents were concerned about funding for maintenance of the England Coast Path pointing out that Natural England support for National Trails will need to increase as new sections of trail are established.

'This level of funding is infinitesimally small in terms of the national Government budget, almost literally invisible. If the whole budget were to be lost there would not be the slightest positive impact on national or departmental finances. Conversely, if the budget were to be doubled, such is its low level there would not be the slightest negative impact on such finances.' (A Friends Group).

'Long term Natural England should be thinking about equality and trying to extend [National Trails] to all users' (A National User Group).

'It is odd that the funding arrangement deals only with maintenance when many of the important factors that make National Trails special are far wider than this..' (A National Park Authority).

Stronger financial commitment is welcomed

Key elements in response: central Government commitment, confidence, review cycle, unspent funds

'It will be really helpful for those responsible for maintaining a trail to have awareness of a three year financing plan, allowing them to plan investment in the medium term with more confidence.'
(A National User Group).

There was widespread support for continued central Government investment in National Trails with a number of respondents commenting that this is vital. Local delivery partners were particularly pleased by the proposal to confirm budgets for a three year period, citing the problems caused by annual uncertainty and importance of increased confidence, for example, in tackling major works that can take several years to progress.

A few respondents said that the length of financial commitment needed to be at least five years or longer. Some local delivery partners suggested there should be a rolling three year budget whilst; others that it would be important to have a review commencing well before the end of the three year cycle. Another suggestion was that grant recipients should be able to carry funds forward if not completely spent into a new financial year, for example, if a project is held up by poor weather conditions.

'We are encouraged that Government is committed to supporting maintenance of trail infrastructure to a high degree. It appears logical that trails that are of national importance and will attract visitors from outside a given area are supported at a national level and above the statutory requirements imposed on county councils.' (A National Agency).

'The current system of a yearly grant bidding system is both time consuming and very much a stop-start system especially if there is any delay in bid approval.' (A Local Trust).

Pressures on local resources

Key elements in response: fund raising, volunteers, Local Authorities, match funding

A number of respondents were concerned about the current financial climate and how this might impact on match funding from Local Authorities and other potential fund raising opportunities. User groups in particular commented that long term maintenance should be paid for from the public purse and that fund-raising and increased volunteer involvement should not be seen as replacing Government funds. Several respondents made the point that success in fund raising or making efficiencies should not lead to a capping effect on future grants or a reduction in the allocation from central Government. Another thought that there are likely to be differences between trails in their ability to attract additional donations and that this should not lead to a decline in infrastructure quality.

It was proposed that greater volunteer involvement does not necessarily reduce the cost of managing trails because whilst volunteers give of their time freely, resources are needed for their coordination, supervision, training, insurance, tools and equipment. A number of alternative sources of funding were suggested, including the landfill communities fund and environmental stewardship schemes, which could provide payments to landowners for facilities such as water taps, hitching posts and benches.

'The opportunity to raise additional funds should be there to provide additionality and services to users or the Trail environment or community, not to underwrite the asset management and information provision.' (An Individual).

A number of respondents commented that statutory responsibility for the routes belongs to local highway authorities and it is right that funding from Natural England is a contribution to the cost of maintaining trails to a higher standard. A few of the Local Authorities that responded made the point that in the current financial climate it is getting increasingly difficult for them to match the contribution from Natural England. A number of user groups were concerned about Local Authority funding too, commenting that relying on Local Authorities could mean shortfalls in funding that might impair the quality of provision. Some said the contribution required from Local Authorities should be less, or removed, whereas others said if there is a shortfall, Local Authorities needed to make up the difference. There were suggestions that Natural England should offer more flexibility about the way match contributions are provided, for example, by converting time spent by volunteers into a cash value. Others were strongly opposed to this approach, saying that volunteer time should be regarded as additional. Another suggestion was that trail partnerships should be able to substitute match funding from Local Authorities for funding from other sources.

'As most of the routes run over existing rights of way for which the local highway authorities have a legal obligation (and funding) to maintain, the monies for the National Trails is additional to the this funding. As there is perceived to be a local financial benefit to the National Trails, the Local Authorities and business community have a vested interest to ensure continued local funding to support the visitor spending.' (A Friends Group).

Flexibility for local decision making

Key elements in response: flexibility, accountability, and controls

'The funding for each Trail must be seen to be fair across the whole family of Trails and then within each there must be sufficient control so that cross authority boundary spend is seen to benefit the whole Trail' (An Individual).

There was widespread agreement with the principle that central Government investment should be distributed in a way that is equitable and transparent; there were a range of views on whether priorities should be decided locally, how much flexibility there should be, and the need for controls.

Some felt that central Government support for locally agreed priorities was the right approach. Local partners, in particular, cited advantages of budget flexibility, for example, in responding to local needs such as repairs following storm damage. Others, particularly users and national groups, had concerns about how this would work in practice. The most frequently cited comment was that if there is more local autonomy, then the funds that would previously have been used for essential maintenance might get diverted into management fees or grand schemes. Another related concern was that the budget might be monopolised by dominant partners. Some respondents were concerned that more local freedom and flexibility would mean that grant recipients would no longer need to account for their expenditure. One suggested that competitive bidding would be a better approach, more along the lines of the current system where annual bids are evaluated nationally. A few respondents felt that Natural England should direct how the budget is used, or at least stipulate how much needs to be spent on maintenance.

'Natural England should publish advice on the general aims, objectives and administration of Trail partnerships, similar to its advice on the management of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.' (An Individual).

'There is a danger that sums may be dedicated to grandiose projects rather than the core business.' (A Local Group).

A suggestion that funding should be allocated to an independent body to distribute was made, although it was noted that this would probably cost more. A counter view was expressed that establishing trails as independent trusts could reduce the need for taxpayer support, because they would carry out tasks and be able to raise their own funds.

'One way round this could be to allocate the grant to an independent body who could ensure it was distributed fairly, but of course this would cost money.' (A Social Enterprise).

'Local Trail Trusts would also lessen the burden on Local Authorities and provide a greater degree of security and certainty over the distribution of public money.' (A National User Group).

Several respondents connected our proposals on funding with those for trail partnerships, for example, that a strong and functioning partnership is a pre-requisite to effective prioritisation and budget management. Trail partnerships are discussed later in this chapter. A number of respondents made a connection between the National Trail Officer role and needing someone to co-ordinate how funds are used and to check that money is spent correctly.

Need for a framework of monitoring and controls

Key elements in response: funding requirements, monitoring, financial sanctions

A recurring theme in responses related to the balance between local delivery without undue interference, but within an appropriate framework of monitoring and controls. Comments were made about specifying expectations in return for funding, monitoring and what actions should be taken if things go wrong. Several respondents said that Natural England should set the quality standards and monitor their performance. Delivery partners were particularly keen to have clear funding outcomes agreed. There were questions raised about the financial implications if one of the local highway authorities withdrew from a partnership. Users and others were more concerned about measures available to deal with poor performance.

'The deliverable outcomes need to be agreed as part of the offer and part of the discussions between Natural England and Trail Partnerships.' (A Local Highway Authority).

Efficiency of administration

Key elements in response: reducing administration, transferring a burden, cost effective use of resources

A number of respondents commented on ways that our proposals might affect efficiency within the delivery arrangements. Some said a standardised funding formula, fixed for a three year period would reduce administration and that fewer grants and increased local flexibility would also help to cut down on administration. However, a number of Local Authorities were concerned that administration would be transferred to local partners, rather than be reduced. One suggestion was that partnerships determine how funds will be used, whilst Natural England continue to make separate grants to individual partners.

Several local partners and other respondents commented on the importance of efficient resource-use when considering local trail partnership arrangements. They said that the potential to improve efficiency depends on the local arrangements in place, and that these should avoid being over complicated or demanding to avoid funds being wasted on local administration. Some were concerned that trail partnerships could become 'talking shops', or that complex new legal structures would be needed. Another respondent thought that national arrangements should be considered for shared activities, for example, for system support, monitoring and promotion.

'Care needs to be given to the cost of distributing this funding compared to the actual level of funding.' (A Local Access Forum).

'Overall there is also a risk that some resources currently dedicated to management action on the ground could be diverted into the cost of the administration of the partnership process. At the very least an additional burden will be placed on partner authorities to provide officer support to the partnership.' (A Local Authority).

Responding to unexpected events

Key elements in response: contingency

Another theme to emerge was how trails cope with unexpected events, such as a section of path being lost following a cliff fall. Some respondents felt this issue will arise more frequently as climate changes triggers more severe weather events. Several Local Authorities sought clarification on the circumstances that would be treated as exceptional, and the process of applying to Natural England for support. The question of how major capital works might be funded was raised, such as the need to replace a large span bridge. One suggestion was that an emergency fund should be established for National Trails to help in such circumstances.

'The development of funding formulas will not accurately take account of unforeseen circumstances.' (A National User Group).

Transition to the new funding formula

Key elements in response: transition arrangements

Some respondents were concerned with how changes to funding would be introduced and in particular the need for transitional arrangements should there be significant changes in the level of funding to individual trails.

'Dependent on your decisions there may be a significant step change in funding for some trails next year.' (A Local Access Forum).

Factors

Key elements in response: a wide range of suggested factors

We asked about what special factors should be taken into account in determining the level of award to individual trails, a wide range of suggestions were made. The following list is a summary of the factors suggested:

- Age of trail
- Length of trail
- Physical (e.g. terrain, soils, rainfall, gradient)
- Unexpected natural events (e.g. flooding, erosion, coastal retreat)
- Environmental sensitivity (e.g. heritage, biodiversity)
- Infrastructure (e.g. accessibility for works, path infrastructure, amount of vegetation cutting needed)
- Land management practice
- Volunteer involvement
- Popularity of the route (e.g. amount of wear and tear, closeness to centres of population, local use)
- Accessibility to a range of users
- Legal (e.g. public safety, illegal activities, shared use with vehicles, underlying status of public rights of way)
- Administrative (number of local highway authorities involved, level of collaboration at a local level, landowner negotiations, need for external consents)
- Value for money
- Delivery of outcomes (e.g. civic engagement or economic benefit)
- Innovation (e.g. a challenge fund that trails can bid into in response to special needs, opportunities and threats)
- Capacity of trails to fund works (e.g. more remote, less iconic trails may be less able to attract funds)

The most frequently cited factors were those associated with physical issues, popularity and length. Many respondents also referred to environmental sensitivity, unexpected natural events and underlying status. There was noticeable disagreement about some factors, such as whether level of use/popularity of routes should be taken into account.

Many delivery partners advocated a simple funding formula.

'A trail could be highly used, but require minimal maintenance, or conversely it could be more lightly used but need higher maintenance' (A National Association).

'One factor that should NOT be considered is the number of people using any particular trail. Using such a factor risks encouraging inappropriate behaviour (such as using funding to promote/advertise trails to raise numbers to get a bigger grant next time), and puts the less used Trails at a funding disadvantage, where their appeal may in part lie in the fact that they are less crowded.'

(A National User Group).

'There are unique elements to all National Trails which will to a very great extent "cancel each other out". Whilst one may traverse soft peat another will impact on extensive archaeology and another will have eroding coastline, etc, etc. For this reason we would recommend a simple formula with minimal differences in standard, length based rates. Once you begin to introduce special factors, all trail partners (rightly) will seek the inclusion of the particular factors which affect their particular trail. We believe that the most transparent and defensible funding formula is a simple one'

(A National Park Authority).

3.6 National Trail Officers

This section focuses on National Trail Officers (NTO). The narrative draws on responses to question 6.

Q6 Do you agree that we should no longer specify that a proportion of any grant must be used to fund a National Trail Officer?

Of those who expressed a preference, **29% agreed** that we should no longer specify that a proportion of any grant must be used to fund a NTO and **54% disagreed**. The most common respondents disagreeing were Trail users, Local Authorities, Local Access Forums and Protected Landscapes and Non-Government Organisations.

There is evidence to suggest that some respondents may have misunderstood the question, taking it to mean that Natural England did not value the National Trail Officer role; this is not the case. The question specifically asks whether Natural England should insist that a portion of the Natural England grant is used to fund a National Trail Officer. This question was asked because if Trail Partnerships are to have more autonomy, it may not be appropriate for Natural England to dictate how their funding is spent and that perhaps Trail Partnerships should be allowed to try different ways to deliver the required outcomes.

Three key themes emerged:

- The value of NTOs;
- Having an NTO post should be a requirement;
- Staffing needs should be locally decided.

Two other significant themes emerged, though cited less frequently by respondents:

- It is important to have a named officer;
- The role varies from trail to trail.

The value of NTOs

Key elements in responses: leadership; professionalism, knowledge.

Over half of respondents commented that the NTO role is highly valued and should not be lost. The NTOs were described as being respected and knowledgeable professionals with the ability to unite all aspects of trail management and to work with a diverse range of partners. There was strong agreement that without a dedicated project officer, it would be difficult for 'National Trails to be as good as, if not better than they are today'.

'The one single factor in the development of trails in recent years which stands out in my mind is the passion and commitment of the officers to their respective trails regardless of the bureaucratic encumbrance of the parent organisation.' (A Tourism and Leisure Professional).

'It is because of the investment by Natural England and its predecessors in National Trail Officers that National Trails have become 'the gold standard for public access to the countryside'. (A National Trail 'Friends' Group).

'It is vital that there is someone with an overview of the whole Trail to ensure consistency of approach, to coordinate and advise on prioritise for available funding, to provide a point of contact/knowledge for anyone seeking information on the Trail and to champion the Trail on behalf of users' (A National Trail Officer).

Having an NTO should be a requirement

Key elements in responses: posts may be more vulnerable; ring fence.

There is a fear that without an NTO role in the grant conditions, some Trail Partnerships may see removing the role as a way to save money; they would divert funds to additional maintenance, impairing other aspects of National Trail management. Some respondents state that there is a suspicion that Local Authorities and/or Trail Partnerships will not appoint a single named officer without Natural England grant condition in place. This is seen as a backward step by many and a false economy. Many respondents saw the National Trail Officer role as being so essential that its funding should be ring-fenced. Some said there are so many other pressures on Local Authority funding, that some may be forced to share out the NTO's duties amongst existing members of staff, and in so-doing dilute the role and lose its coordination impact.

'If Natural England remove the requirement to fund Trail Officers it may result in the deletion of the post.' (A Local Authority).

'Many Local Authorities are not the slightest interested in rights of way, and would be likely to cut the officers' post. They would be an easy target for Local Authorities to save money, especially in these straightened times.' (A User).

Staffing needs should be locally decided

Key elements in responses: flexibility, local decision making, best value.

Other respondents, including a number of delivery partners supported the proposal that local partnerships are the ones best place to decide on the most appropriate staffing for the trail.

'...trails are at very different stages of their lives, have very different needs and very different partnerships that support them. Some partnerships are far larger and more complex than others, individual partners also bring varying levels of resource, skills and experience to the trail. By allowing greater flexibility with the grant, local partnerships will be able to assess the priorities of the trail, the resources available to them and therefore ensure best value for money for the Trail, for Natural England and for the taxpayer. [continues...] The overarching principles of this consultation is to devolve delivery to the local partnerships, the decision to no longer specify a proportion of the grant for a Trail Officer seems to achieve just that.' (A Local Highway Authority).

It is important to have a named officer

Key elements in responses: consistency; ambassador; single point of contact.

Over half of the respondents stressed the need for every Trail Partnership to have one named person who oversees the general management of the Trail and who acts as a first point of contact. Some also stated that NTOs are highly regarded as ambassadors or champions for their respective Trails. They are the 'face of the Trail,' an important single contact and that they are what sets National Trails apart from other long distance routes. Without this role there was a fear that National Trails will gradually cease to be the quality product that users have come to expect. Not everyone agreed that it necessarily needs to be a NTO per se, but that there needs to be someone overseeing Trail delivery, to ensure consistency, to act as an ambassador, and as a first point of contact.

'We see no reason why Natural England should not specify a requirement for a named National Trail Officer as we are certain that without one on all Trails there will be damage to the overall brand for which Natural England are responsible'. (A National Park Authority).

The role varies from trail to trail

Key elements in responses: sharing responsibility; working efficiently; longer trails.

There were a number of comments about the differences in the Trails themselves (for example, the physical characteristics such as differing lengths and also the complexity of trail management, that some Trails cover many more Local Authorities than others). This led to suggestions that it may not be necessary to have a full time person on each Trail, or that one person could look after more than one Trail.

'The Trail Partnership model only works if someone has responsibility for the whole Trail and in most cases the only person who has this is the National Trail Officer. However it isn't necessary to have a full time National Trail Officer per Trail – more than one Trail could be covered by a single National Trail Officer and a single Partnership (for example the Cleveland Way and Yorkshire Wolds Way).' (A Social Enterprise)

Trail management has varying degrees of complexity. Some Trails are almost entirely within one managing authority area whilst others pass through multiple counties, National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty boundaries - one Trail even passes through two different countries. Many thought that the more complex Trail management is, the more important it is to have one person acting as a co-ordinator and moderator. One County Council stated that they thought of the National Trail Officer as being an independent voice, unifying the Trail Partnership members.

'National Trail Officers are critical to the successful management of National Trails. They are the only people who have an overall detailed knowledge of the whole Trail. The longer the Trail and the greater the number of Local Highway Authorities involved, the more important their role.'
(A Volunteer).

3.7 Local Delivery Partnerships

This section focuses on Trail Partnerships and draws mainly on responses to questions 8 and 9, but also on comments relating to Trail Partnerships embedded within respondent's answers to question 1.

Q8 Do you agree that Trail Partnerships should be responsible for local delivery?

Q9 How can Trail Partnerships demonstrate value for money?

Of those that expressed a preference, **62% agreed** that Trail Partnerships should be responsible for local delivery and **12% disagreed**. The remainder did not answer the question posed or were unclear as to their position. 77% had an opinion on how local trail partnerships could best demonstrate value for money and 23% had no comment or felt that it would not be possible.

Eight key themes emerged as follows:

- Local delivery responsibility
- National oversight of delivery
- Partnership diversity and relationships
- Constitution and roles
- Demonstrating value for money
- Need for Performance Indicators
- Importance of taking a Trail Corridor approach

Local delivery responsibility

Key elements in response: agree; rejection of the model; Ok but not appropriate for some trails.

Over 80% of respondents agreed with the general direction of travel toward local partnerships being responsible for local delivery.

'We agree that it is preferable for local people are responsible for the trail management'
(Non Governmental Organisation).

Others, although a minority, strongly expressed that they did not agree with the basic principle of locally led delivery.

'National Trails, are not solely for local communities: they are for everyone. Why then should the onus of upkeep fall upon local communities alone?' (A Local Access Forum).

A number of respondents felt that whilst this diverse partnership approach, led by a single partner, was a good model for some National Trails, it was doubtful whether this would work for the larger or more complex National Trails.

National oversight of delivery

Key elements in response: Natural England / Govt stepping back; ongoing national role.

A number of respondents discussed the need for a coherent delivery model with local partnerships working alongside national organisations. Some felt that Natural England was stepping back from having a role and/or that Government was delegating any responsibility for National Trails to local partnerships. A few felt that the need for national oversight of delivery was not sufficiently addressed in the consultation paper.

A significant number of respondents made the point that, whilst agreeing to a more locally determined delivery model, there was still a need for a national perspective. The issues raised included: accountability; oversight and scrutiny; nationally set standards; trail promotion; and continued national funding.

'...[we are] not convinced that Natural England's proposals provide the safeguards or overriding national governance structures to enable Trail Partnerships, as proposed, to maintain National Trails at today's standards putting at risk the ambition for National Trails in the future is for them to be as good as, if not better than, they are today.' (A National User Group)

'That being said we reemphasise the need for central national championship and leadership as well as exchange of practice for the trails' (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

National leadership is discussed in more detail as a separate topic below.

Partnership diversity & relationships

Key elements in response: diversity of partnerships; Highway Authority role; additional bureaucracy & diversion of funds away from practical maintenance; confidence & sanctions.

A significant number of respondents felt that a more diverse partnership was a key element to successful local delivery, with some citing that Highway Authority dominated partnerships would be unsatisfactory.

'It is vitally important however, to ensure that each Trail has a Trail Partnership that accurately reflects its users and beneficiaries, and is not dominated by a single organisation or a single type of organisation for example highway authorities' (A National Trail Officer).

Others felt that whilst diverse partnerships were a good thing, the statutory and funding role of Highway Authorities needed to be recognised.

'Although we agree that Trail Partnerships are the way forwards and the right devolved level, the composition of these groups must permit the Local Highway and Access Authority to ultimately decide on maintenance spend and maintenance priorities for trails within its area. Highway and Access authorities are solely responsible and legally liable for the maintenance, management, protection and definition of public access'. (A Local Authority).

In addition, some felt a lack of confidence in the ability of partners, both locally and nationally, to work to the overall good of the Trails - a concern stemming from the current financial climate and its resource constraints, as well as concerns around what sanctions might be available to bring into line any delivery non-conformers.

'It is not clear what the sanctions might be if one or more partners are unable to maintain their commitment or what if any legal status the Trail Partnerships might have' (A Local Authority).

Constitution and roles

Key elements in response: constitution & accountability; roles & relationships; integration with protected landscape partnerships.

A significant number of respondents raised questions regarding the constitution and roles, many mentioning that they felt there was insufficient information to respond fully as described in the 'clarity of proposed model' section above.

Issues concerning constitution and accountability were matched by a similar number asking questions on roles and relationships and a feeling that these elements were critical to the model.

A small number of respondents felt that better integration/coordination with protected landscape partnerships would provide benefits in terms of constitutional structure and delivery.

'The (partnership name), particularly in regard to the (AONB name), considers that there should be integration with the Protected Landscapes local governance and reporting structures, as all key interests are likely to be represented.' (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

Demonstrating value for money

Key elements in response: wider objectives and securing wider resources; user experience & satisfaction; efficiency and accountability; standards.

A small majority felt that value for money should include wider factors, including local economic benefits and the success of the partnerships in 'levering in' additional resources, whether monetary contributions or voluntary effort. Some made specific references to the accrual of existing economic and social benefits to illustrate this point of view.

'It is important that TPs focus on wider issues, beyond maintenance; for example social exclusion, transport, economic value and biodiversity' (An Individual).

A large minority strongly expressed the view that the experience and satisfaction of users should be the key test of whether value for money was being achieved.

'Outcome indicators including user numbers and satisfaction are good measures, but as indicated above, with some balance for less popular/favoured trails'. (A Local Access Forum).

A significant number expressed the view that local partnerships should be assessed in terms of their delivery efficiency, this being measured by outputs against cost.

'By publishing their income and expenditure accounts and results of quality standards monitoring.' (A Local Access Forum).

A frequent view was that the demonstration of value for money should be by the delivery of agreed standards, centrally established and overseen, but taking account of local circumstances.

'Value for money will be demonstrated through the achievement of the outputs required in the new quality standards' (A National Park Authority) and

'A common set of measurable outputs, derived from the National Trail Quality Standards, should be collected centrally.' (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

Need for Performance Indicators

Key elements in response: development of; value of; links to management or action plan.

A large number of respondents were of the opinion that it was essential to have performance indicators established at the outset. Some stated that these should be specifically developed, whilst others focused on these being the means by which value for money would be assessed.

'The establishment of agreed, basic measures of outputs and associated costs related to the NTQS could allow indicators of value for money to be developed.' (A Government Agency).

The particular value of the use of performance indicators seemed to be both that it satisfied the need for national engagement/oversight and also allowed for a breadth of indicators to be included, which would accommodate inherent differences between trails.

A small number of respondents linked this to the need for an action or management plan setting out what was going to be achieved.

'It should be possible to devise a long term maintenance plan that is agreed by the partnership and National England - this would enable cost control and value for money to be guaranteed' (A User).

Importance of Trail corridor approach

Key elements in response: integrated approach & potential to underestimate the trail potential.

Many made the point that National Trails should not be managed in isolation and that objectives within the trail corridor were equally significant. There was also a feeling that concentrating on the trail itself would lead to missed opportunities to: link trails within a network of local paths; take an area approach to management; address landscape and biodiversity issues; and fully engage with the local community. There was a risk that this would potentially devalue the Trail, lead to missed opportunities and not achieve the Trail's full potential. It was suggested that Rights of Way Improvement Plans needed to play a role in this.

'Each partnership should coordinate the management of the Trail corridor, rather than just the Trail itself, to reflect the importance of link routes and the landscape and biodiversity of the corridor'
(A Non Governmental Organisation).

3.8 Users

This section focuses on users and draws mainly on responses to questions 10 and 11. Respondent comments relating to users within question 1 have also been addressed here.

Q10 Do you agree that users should be involved in monitoring quality of provision and have more say in how Trails are provided?

Q11 What could be done to get users more involved in looking after National Trails?

Of those that expressed a preference, **84% agreed** and **3% disagreed** that users should be involved in monitoring quality of provision and have more say in how Trails are provided. In many cases respondents agreed, but also specified some constraints or stated capacity concerns, regarding which users should be encouraged.

84% responded to the question asking how user involvement could be increased. Comments ranged from describing current good practice to new ideas for greater involvement in the future.

Respondents were keen to ensure that existing user involvement was recognised, with 26% stating their current contribution includes monitoring, feedback and acting as advocates for the National Trails.

5 key themes emerged:

- Management of user input
- Nature of user involvement
- Need for close working/co-ordination with professional staff
- Other people have much to offer
- Suggested approaches to increasing user involvement

Management of user input

Key elements in response: need for co-ordination, need for resources, need for professional support.

Although there was strong support for user involvement in monitoring and feedback, many respondents stated the need for co-ordinated input, suggesting doing so either through existing managing authorities or through Local Access Forums/Friends of groups. Respondents said resources were required to support user input and that professional support may be needed to assist with co-ordination.

'Users should definitely be involved but statistically reliable methods of capturing their data must be employed.' (A National Trail Officer).

'Yes important for users - both local and visiting (useful to be able to differentiate) to help with monitoring and say in how trails provided - BIG BUT - volunteers need constant coordinating/training/contact - monitoring methodology needs to be developed and needs to provide consistent comparable and therefore useful results - again fed into a central accessible research location. Therefore inviting "users" to assist with monitoring is not a cheaper way of achieving it. Should consider also links with RoWIPs and LAF's.' (A County Council).

'Agree but wider involvement from users could bring increased costs / pressures on Partnerships and LHAs. Input must be managed and Trail partnerships need to be clear to manage for the common good rather than being expected to satisfy individuals; LAFs would be appropriate advisors' (County Council 96%).

Nature of user involvement

Key elements in response: providing feedback, flagging issues, monitoring

A significant number of respondents supported the proposal that users should be involved in providing feedback. Some were more specific in their views, saying that users should be used for flagging issues and/or their input should be solicited for monitoring purposes.

'Customer feedback is vital, and TPs should be open to taking account of needs and preferences, but my experience is that surveys to test the route against a technical standard are best done by the Project Manager in partnership with the local councils.' (An Individual).

'There is a role for users to monitor quality of provision, but this very much needs to be managed in what they do, e.g. volunteers/users reporting back issues and carrying out checks of trail, and then following this up by co-ordinated works that are feed back in detail, so records can be kept. But there is still a need for very detailed annual surveys carried out by professional officers to develop action plans and funding bids for future works' (A National Trail Officer).

A small number of respondents expressed concern about user involvement in monitoring where more technical surveys are concerned.

'Customer feedback is vital, and TPs should be open to taking account of needs and preferences, but my experience is that surveys to test the route against a technical standard are best done by the Project Manager in partnership with the local councils.' (A Local Authority).

Need for co-ordination/close working with professional staff.

Key element of response: need to be aligned with professional input, resources required to manage volunteer input.

Over a third of respondents stated the need for user/volunteer involvement to be 'professionally' co-ordinated to ensure the effectiveness of such a resource.

'Volunteer wardens or lengths-men/women are very useful; local users surveying and reporting on the condition of their section of trail. This works effectively on the (National Park Authority name) where the National Trail Officer works closely with volunteer wardens.' (A National Park Authority).

'Establish volunteer schemes on all Trails. We have a well trialled and tested volunteer scheme. However it must be acknowledged that for volunteer schemes to be effective they must be well managed/coordinated. This takes considerable resources, but in our experience it has always been a cost benefit to the Trails.' (A County Council).

'...The tasks on site, and in the workshop, are always supervised by a member of the NTs Team and regularly include such works as mowing, scrub clearance, signposting, gate installation and repair, bridge installation and repairs and small surfacing projects.' (A National Trail Managing Authority).

In a fifth of the responses, the point was made that user/volunteer involvement has a cost and that to ensure effective use of this user resource, costs of 'professional support' to assist with their organisation should be considered.

'Volunteer input is not free, it needs to be a well managed and recorded process. there are some really good models of volunteering out there, so there is a chance to learn from others.' (A National Trail Officer).

'The fact that National Trails are often in locations remote from communities and their potential pool of volunteers needs to be taken into account when encouraging users to get more involved. For example, adequate resources would need to be allocated for coordinating the activity and sustainable travel of "user volunteers".' (A Highway Authority).

Other people have much to offer

Key elements of the response: need to involve landowners, local communities and businesses, raise ownership locally.

The discussion paper focussed on involving users, but a few respondents pointed out that others - including landowners, local communities and businesses - have much to offer the Trails and should be given equal opportunity to get involved.

'We regret that the focus is solely on users. Current partnership groups involve landowners as well as users and we believe that this represents a more robust approach. Landowners are responsible for the landscape through which trails pass. Many contribute time and effort to the trails.' (A National Organisation).

'There needs to be more local promotion of trails in an attempt to raise "ownership". In (name) we have been very successful with local Parish Groups and businesses adopting sections of the Shropshire Way long distance trail where they have realised the benefits of having a high quality "product" that brings benefits to the local economies.' (A Highway Authority).

Suggested approaches to increasing User involvement

Key elements of response: involvement of existing user/voluntary groups, managing body involvement, volunteer wardens, on-line support, raising awareness, widening the audience, provision of training.

30% of responses advocated a range of different approaches/steps that could be taken to encourage greater user involvement. The most commonly cited was to mobilise activity through existing user and voluntary groups.

'Most user groups have a National body with a local branch to contact and encourage members to get involved. Trail rangers and volunteers could encourage other users at a grass roots level to get involved.' (A User Group).

'The needs of different types of user need to be accommodated in much the same way that this is undertaken with other facilities such as canals or in national parks and such users can contribute accordingly. There are various ways that engagement can be encouraged: through 'Friends' groups, local charities such as 'Lions', residents' associations, sector interest groups such as cyclists and the work of local Government officers.' (A National Organisation).

10% suggested that support be made available through established formal organisations. They recommended that Trail Partnerships should play a key role in both generating and overseeing user involvement.

'Friends of' groups would bring together like minded individuals and businesses with the common aim of working together to manage and promote a route and its associated circular routes for the benefit of local communities and their visitors.' (A National Trail Officer).

'This is something that each trail partnership will need to consider. Many of the National Trails have a 'friends' group who already have an interest, but whether they are sufficiently resourced, or motivated to take on a greater management role, is for each group to determine.' (A National Trail Partnership)

Some respondents advocated the use of volunteer wardens as a specific approach to monitoring Trail quality, referencing experience of success of this approach on specific Trails.

'Volunteer wardens or lengthmen/women are very useful; local users surveying and reporting on the condition of their section of trail.' (A National Park Authority).

Regarding specific tools that could be provided to enable greater user involvement, 11% of respondents felt there was a need for an online support network to enable efficient data collection, feedback and support.

'Make it easy for the public to identify and report problems encountered, perhaps by online mapping and reporting system.' (A Local Authority).

Some felt that if more people were aware of National Trails and their benefits, including those they bring to users and the local economy, then this would encourage greater user support for the Trails. They were in essence advocating greater promotion of the Trails.

'Expansion of voluntary warden scheme by local 'promotion' through parishes and user groups. Involving local schools and/or colleges' (A Highway Authority).

'By advertising for volunteers, talks about a National Trail to communities close to the trail, use of local radio and media'. (A Local Access Forum).

Some stated that if greater effort was put into widening the user audience, this would automatically increase the number of people willing to get involved in trail management.

'National and Local groups of horseriders, walkers and cyclists have access to thousands of members who could be approached to find Trail Users willing to undertake periodic monitoring of routes or participate in User Panels asking for their views. These groups include the Ramblers Association, GLEAM, our organisation (PDGLA), Pennine Way Association, Peak Horsepower, British Cycling, and National Park volunteer rangers. Users will not only take part in monitoring quality but will also willingly take part in repair activities, as evidenced in the Peak District with horserider and local volunteers repairing the Taylor Lane bridleway, very successfully.' (A Local Association).

'... Many events are held using sections of NTs. The organisers of these could be expected to produce a form of 'payback' in terms of volunteer hours related to the distance used and numbers taking part.' (A User Group Volunteer).

Finally, some respondents reflected on the importance of providing appropriate education or skills both to give users confidence, and to ensure a beneficial outcome from their efforts.

'Providing training on route upkeep and fault logging might be welcomed. People need to understand their efforts are being valued. It must not come across as simple cost-cutting of paid staff for volunteer effort.' (Individual).

'In our experience good training, good equipment, an efficient and easy way of reporting and a well managed volunteer scheme is essential in recruiting and retaining volunteers.' (A County Council).

3.9 Raising the profile of National Trails

This section focuses on raising the profile of National Trails and draws mainly on responses to questions Question 12. Relevant comments contained within question 1 responses have also been addressed here.

Q12 Do you think we could improve the way that the family of National Trails is promoted?

Of the 106 respondents that ticked a preference box, **92% felt that Natural England could improve** the way that the family of National trails is promoted and **8% disagreed**.

69% of respondents across all categories felt there was scope for improvement in the current promotion of National Trails.

Six key themes emerged:

- Support for promotion at the family level;
- Need for promotion to be properly resourced;
- Need to focus promotion on different markets

- Need to work more closely with the tourism industry
- Need for improvements to the website
- Need to explore the commercial potential around the National Trail family

Need for continued support for promotion at the family level

Key element of response: need for central/national leadership

There was clear support for continued promotion of the National Trails at a 'family' level (59%). Many of the respondents asked for this promotion to be centrally/nationally led. There were differing views as to whether Natural England should play the lead role or whether this should be another body (sometimes specified), central/national leadership being the key point raised.

'The family of national trails as an entity still needs to be marketed and promoted at a national level (via Natural England and Visit England).' (A Highway Authority).

'Provide professional marketing support centrally, as most partnership are made up of 'countryside staff' that have a fixed level of marketing knowledge'. (An Individual).

Need for promotion to be properly resourced

Key elements in response: requirement for financial and expert support

A recurrent theme was the need to properly resource any marketing/promotion activity, both financially and in terms of relevant expertise provided.

'... To do this will cost money: effective marketing cannot be done on a shoe-string. We recognise that with the current freeze on marketing NE cannot fund this work now, but in the future it most definitely should. It needs professional tourism marketers to develop and deliver a marketing plan for the family of Trails that will include appropriate targeted campaigns for the different markets that are relevant to our Trails and effective PR' (A National Trail Officer).

'The most important requirement for promotion of the family of National Trails is that it is properly resourced. Sadly this has not been the case now for a number of years. Key sponsors should be sought, but it is essential that Natural England retains overall control of the promotion that takes place.' (A National Park).

Who should be the focus of promotion?

Key element in response: need for promotion activities to focus on new/wider audiences

29% of respondents cited the need to focus promotion away from the 'converted' and specifically called for more effective promotion to the national and international tourism markets.

'We feel it is vital that the Trails are marketed as a family both nationally, so tax payers are made aware of the opportunities provided by Trails that have been paid for by their taxes, and internationally so foreigners become aware of the experience that Trails can give to enjoy England's fabulous landscapes.' (A National Trail Officer).

'Encourage use by schools/colleges; continental trail holidays; Scouts; Guides; Duke of Edinburgh; target travel companies;'. (A Local Access Forum).

'Current promotion seems to be targeted at the converted- information in local tourist centres, and on information boards to visitors who are already there, many of whom will use, however minimally, the local trails. The people who need to know about the national trails are the people who are not aware of them!' (A Non Governmental Organisation).

Recommending greater partnership working

Key elements in response: specifically with tourism organisations and trail managing bodies.

Greater partnership working was frequently proposed by respondents. The two most commonly suggested groupings being tourism organisations (35%) and individual trail authorities/representatives (34%).

'There needs to be greater integration with other agencies that promote to visitors such as National Parks, Local Authorities and VisitEngland. This can be through websites, digital media or promotional print. Trails lend themselves to spectacular colour imagery and high quality digital images should be made available free of charge.' (A National Organisation).

'Promotion could be undertaken by another body such as Visit Britain with local trail partnerships advertising specific trails' (A Non Governmental Organisation).

The need to update the website/communication mediums

Key elements in response: improve/update current website, develop material for the 'mobile' market

43% of respondents cited the need for the current National Trails website to be updated. Many felt that whilst it was a good website, it was now outdated and needed to incorporate some of the advances in website design and better support the mobile market, for example, by providing Apps and mobile optimised content.

'The current website is acknowledged as exceptionally good but rather tired. The SWCP website, exciting as it is, is very heavy on broadband width and so very slow depending upon ones download speed. However it is a good place to start rethinking our web presence.' (A Trail Managing Authority).

'An improved central website for all trails - with videos, interactive mapping with ability to build day / short break itineraries, customer blogs, image library etc. (Content for individual trails to be populated by local partnerships such as day / short break itineraries, circular walks, attractions, transport, accommodation etc.) • Platforms for social marketing at a local level • Investment in new technology such as mobile Apps, GPX downloads,' (A County Council).

4 Significant additional comments

4.1 National leadership

This section covers National Leadership and draws almost entirely on the responses to question one.

In the discussion document we restated our role and commitment to National Trails but did not make any specific proposals or ask any specific questions about it. However, a number of respondents chose to comment on this key issue and so we have treated this as an additional topic in this report.

The key themes to emerge were:

- National champion
- Independent trails
- Natural England's role
- More integration with protected landscapes

National champion

Key elements in response: strong voice, ambition, lobbying

There was a strong feeling that national involvement is an important part of the model for National Trails. Many respondents commented on the importance of a national champion. A number of respondents felt that the role of a national champion was to raise the profile of National Trails and be a strong voice influencing at the national level, including exerting pressure on Government to ensure sufficient resources are provided. A few said that they were disappointed by the level of ambition in the consultation paper and that, whilst accepting current pressures on resources, they felt that the future ambition for National Trails should be bigger and more inspiring. It was said that National Trails should be internationally recognised and that international synergies could be further developed.

'...the ambition for the National Trails should be that 'they are on a par with international best practice with regard to management of the resource, promotion and partnerships as well as with regard to the conservation and enhancement of the trail corridor.' (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

'...the Review places too much emphasis on local partnerships without enough attention on securing an effective national champion to act as an advocate, coordinate the marketing and to ensure effective development and learning between the Trails.' (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

Independent trails

Key elements in response: single body for trails, independence from Government

Our proposals were focused on improvements to the delivery arrangements and assumed that, in the future, Natural England would have a similar role to that at present. However, this assumption has been challenged in some of the responses from national user groups. They suggested that a new independent structure should be established, comprising a national body and local trusts which they felt would be better able to champion and deliver the Trails. An alternative model along these lines has been strongly advocated by one respondent (The Ramblers) in a proposal

that they have recently published and campaigned for. Nationally, it is suggested that such a body should be established, by statute if necessary, which potentially could have executive functions including assuming some or all of Natural England's statutory and grant giving responsibilities.

It was also proposed that trail partnerships should be more independent from local Government at the local level and possibly formally constituted, for example, being operated as an independent trust. Several national stakeholders have suggested this, indeed the idea is currently being considered locally by some trails or local groups. These proposals go beyond the scope of the present review.

'We see the need for a national body or association working together with local partnerships, to support them, to speak collectively for them on a national stage and to share best practice between them to help develop and maintain a vital network of Trail Partnerships.' (A National User Group).

'... Trail Partnerships should be fully incorporated trusts to give extra accountability and certainty in exchange for the continued public funding...' (A National User Group).

'Natural England should not shed its responsibilities for national trails, they need a strong national champion which should be Natural England. However, if for any reason Natural England cannot fulfil this role, another body must be created, by statute, which can perform this vital function.' (A National User Group).

Natural England's role

Key elements in response: oversight of delivery, national support, voice within Government

There was some debate about the role that Natural England currently plays within the delivery of National Trails versus the wider role of a champion for National Trails. Respondents felt strongly about this and that a national role is important within the delivery model, and some discussion arose about how this is best fulfilled. This theme is discussed in more detail within the Trail Partnership topic (see section 3.6). Several respondents reaffirmed key aspects of Natural England's role to be standard setting, monitoring & evidence gathering, channelling funding, national promotion and carrying out our statutory functions concerning approval for the route of trails. In addition, a national support role was suggested to assist the development and learning between Trails. It was also suggested that Natural England (or Defra) had an important role within Government to advocate National Trails and influence policy.

Several respondents referred to the need for a wider championing role to increase support for National Trails, including putting pressure on Government to secure resources, and commented that Natural England as a Government agency could not fulfil this remit.

A suggestion made as part of some AONB responses was that central Government support for National Trails should be provided directly by Defra, rather than by Natural England.

'There will still be a need to draw the family of National Trails together so that the 'National' standing for these trails is recognised and allows experiences and practices to be fully shared and developed. The vibrancy and dynamics of managing and promoting National Trails needs to be constantly worked if they are to remain relevant and valued by local people and visitors alike.' (A National Organisation). *'[a national champion] is critical for working with other Government bodies in developing and influencing policy (e.g. Planning guidance) and linking with other Government programmes that the National Trails can help deliver (e.g. agri-environment schemes, health agenda, delivering economic growth through tourism, local nature partnerships etc)'* (A Local Group).

Integration with protected landscapes

Key elements in response: integrated management, local and national champions

A number of AONBs responding to the consultation suggested there would be benefit in further management integration between National Trails and protected landscapes (Heritage Coasts, AONBs and National Parks). It was felt that National Parks along with others have a special responsibility for National Trails, having a shared history and statutory remit) to be champions for recreation. There was also reference to the fact that although funding and management has been separate for a long time, there are now many examples of a more integrated approach being adopted , for example, the South Downs Way, the Cotswolds Way and the North Downs Way. It was suggested that protected landscape organisations would make ideal managing agents in many instances and that further integration of National Trails into protected landscapes management groups could maximize opportunities for partnership working, sharing governance arrangements, marketing, promotion and generating external funds. It was further suggested that because protected landscapes have national umbrella bodies they might be well placed to fulfil a national leadership on behalf of National Trails.

'All 15 National Trails could be integrated with a lead National Park or AONB.' (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

'...further integration of National Trails into Protected Landscapes units can maximize opportunities for partnership working, sharing governance arrangements, marketing, promotion and generating external funds.' (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

'... there should be a dedicated national role, perhaps integrated into an existing or new national Protected Landscape association.' (An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

4.2 Other additional significant comments

This section covers Additional Significant Comments and draws almost entirely on comments contained within the responses to question one.

In addition to the main topics that we asked about directly in the consultation, a few respondents chose to raise other concerns or went on to make suggestions for change.

Two additional key themes to emerge were:

- National recognition for long distance routes
- Integration with the England Coast Path

In addition, two other themes were commented on:

- Use by motor vehicles
- Supporting local contractors and farmers

National recognition for long distance routes

Key elements in response: membership of the national family, enhancing and upgrading trails, multi-user routes, recognition for other high quality promoted routes

National Trails are formally recognised through a statutory approval process. Several issues were raised about the rationale behind the routes, which together form the current National Trails family:

- A general question about whether the current family represents the optimum national series of routes.
- Whether the existing routes follow the best possible alignment.
- That consideration should be given to upgrading more/all National Trails to multi-user routes.
- That other long distance route should be upgraded to National Trail status/quality standards (e.g. Icknield Way, Wainwright's Coast to Coast, Trans-Pennine Trail).
- Whether a 'kite mark' or similar is needed to recognise other high quality long-distance routes that are not National Trails.

'...where appropriate action could be taken to upgrade national trails to become multi user routes. This will encourage a greater cross section of society to become engaged in the future of their local trail.' (A Local Access Forum).

'Because of the economic benefits ... we wish to see an increase in the total funding for National Trails, and in particular the upgrading of other popular trails to National Trail status, so that they are properly promoted, and maintained.' (A National User Group).

Integration with the England Coast Path

Key elements in response: applying the new model to coast, additional resources

A number of concerns were raised about the integration of National Trails and the England Coast Path, and how it will work in practice, for example, whether Coastal Trail Partnerships should be developed? An associated concern was that the size of the funding pot needs to grow as new sections of the England Coast Path are opened.

'The national trail network is being increased by the addition of the English coastal path. This would imply a need for additional funding' (A Local Access Forum).

Use by motor vehicles

Key elements in response: restricting motorised use

Concerns were raised about the use of sections of National Trail by motor vehicles, including a suggestion that a new class of public right of way should be introduced for National Trails that excludes them.

'There may be a case in the future for giving National Trails a special right of way designation where all recreational vehicles are excluded.' (A Local Access Forum).

Supporting local contractors and farmers

Key elements in response: benefit to the local economy

One of the national organisations we received a response from, commented that the discussion paper refers to the benefits of user spend, but that National Trails can also benefit the local economy too by offering work to local contractors and farmers.

Annex A: List of consultation questions

- Q1** Do you agree that these propositions describe the right direction of travel?
- Q2** Do you agree with the proposed approach to quality standards for National Trails?
- Q3** Do you have any comments on the proposed framework or the draft Family and Trail Standards listed in the Annex on page 16 of the discussion paper? (See 'Natural England Discussion Paper on the Future Management of National Trails from April 2013').
- Q4** Do you agree with our proposals for how we provide the central Government contribution for local delivery?
- Q5** What special features do you think should be taken into account in determining the level of award to individual Trails?
- Q6** Do you agree that we should no longer specify that a proportion of any grant must be used to fund a National Trail Officer?
- Q7** Are there any other issues you'd like to raise about our funding proposals? Please explain.
- Q8** Do you agree that Trail Partnerships should be responsible for local delivery?
- Q9** How can Trail Partnerships demonstrate value for money?
- Q10** How can Trail Partnerships be involved in monitoring quality of provision and have more say in how Trails are provided?
- Q11** What could be done to help users get more involved in looking after National Trails?
- Q12** Do you think we could improve the way that the family of National Trails is promoted? If so, how?

Annex B: Consultation analysis methodology

The objectives for the eight week consultation exercise held between 10 May and 5 July 2013 were to:

- Provide a targeted and structured opportunity for all the delivery partners, key interest bodies and representatives of user groups to see our proposals and to have an opportunity to provide detailed comment on them¹;
- To take a rigorous approach to the recording and analysis of the consultation responses, to ensure we obtained a thorough understanding and an accurate record of the thoughts of consultees.
- Ensure we have the findings presented in a format which would allow those leading the development of the delivery model to meaningfully take account of them.
- Make a summary of key findings available to respondees within a reasonable time period, following the closure of the consultation comment window.

This Annex sets out detail of our approach to analysing the consultation responses.

First principles applied to the consultation analysis

- Treat **personal data** with care.
- Understand who the **stakeholders** are and their categories.
- Be **neutral** – **capture, accurately record and interpret but do not judge**.
- Take an **organised, systematic and evidence based approach**.

Project management

Applying the basic principles of project management

To ensure that the process of data logging, analysing the consultation responses and writing up the findings went smoothly, a project management approach was taken and the basic principles of project management applied. This meant taking time from the outset to:

- Identify individual roles within the team;
- Identify the tasks to be completed and the processes for completing them;
- Identify risks and how they may be mitigated;
- Agree a timetable with reasonable deadlines .

¹ Natural England's duty under section 3(2) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 states that when we undertake a review we must consult those bodies that "appear to Natural England" to have an interest in the matter. Discretion is built into this duty whereby Natural England can determine whom it should consult, as it neither requires nor anticipates that there will always be a full public consultation. In this case we were consulting on operational and technical matters around the management model and funding formula for the National Trails, and our legal advice was that a public consultation was not appropriate. This consultation was freely available to the public, and indeed, we received and considered a number of responses from individuals and others not directly approached by Natural England.

Team roles

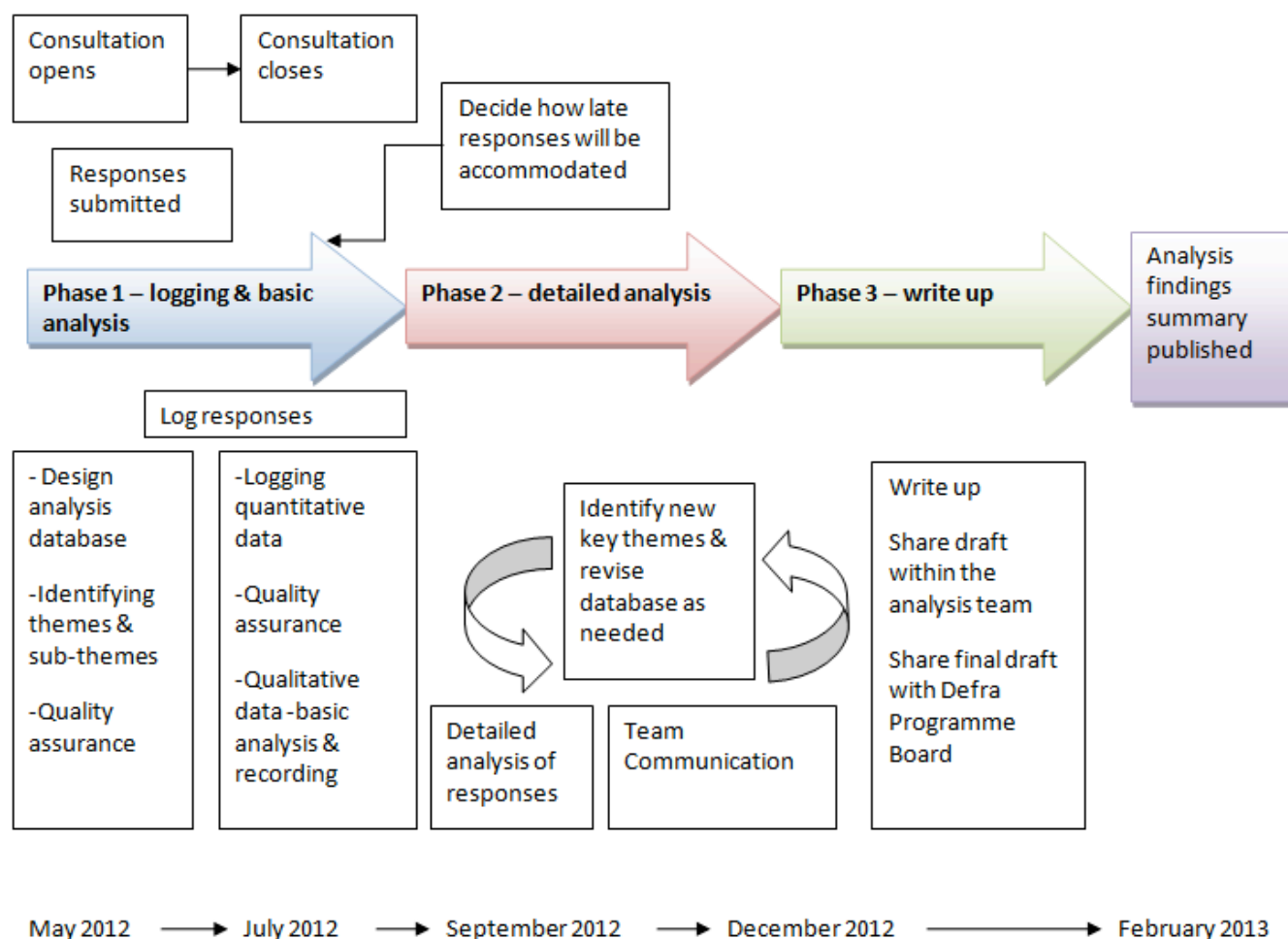
There were a number of specific roles within the analysis working group:

- **Project manager** – co-ordinated the work of the team, ensured any issues were addressed at the outset and kept the project on track;
- **Data manager** – ensured that there was a system for logging responses as they arrived and passed them on to the analysis team (for detailed logging and analysis), filed responses logged basic information about respondents into the master database;
- **Topic Leads** – took a lead role in all stages of the analysis process in relation to their allocated topics and questions. This included identifying key themes, sub-themes and issues, quality assurance and interpreting comments.

The consultation analysis process

The flow diagram below illustrates the main elements of the consultation analysis process.

Figure 4: The three stages of consultation analysis process



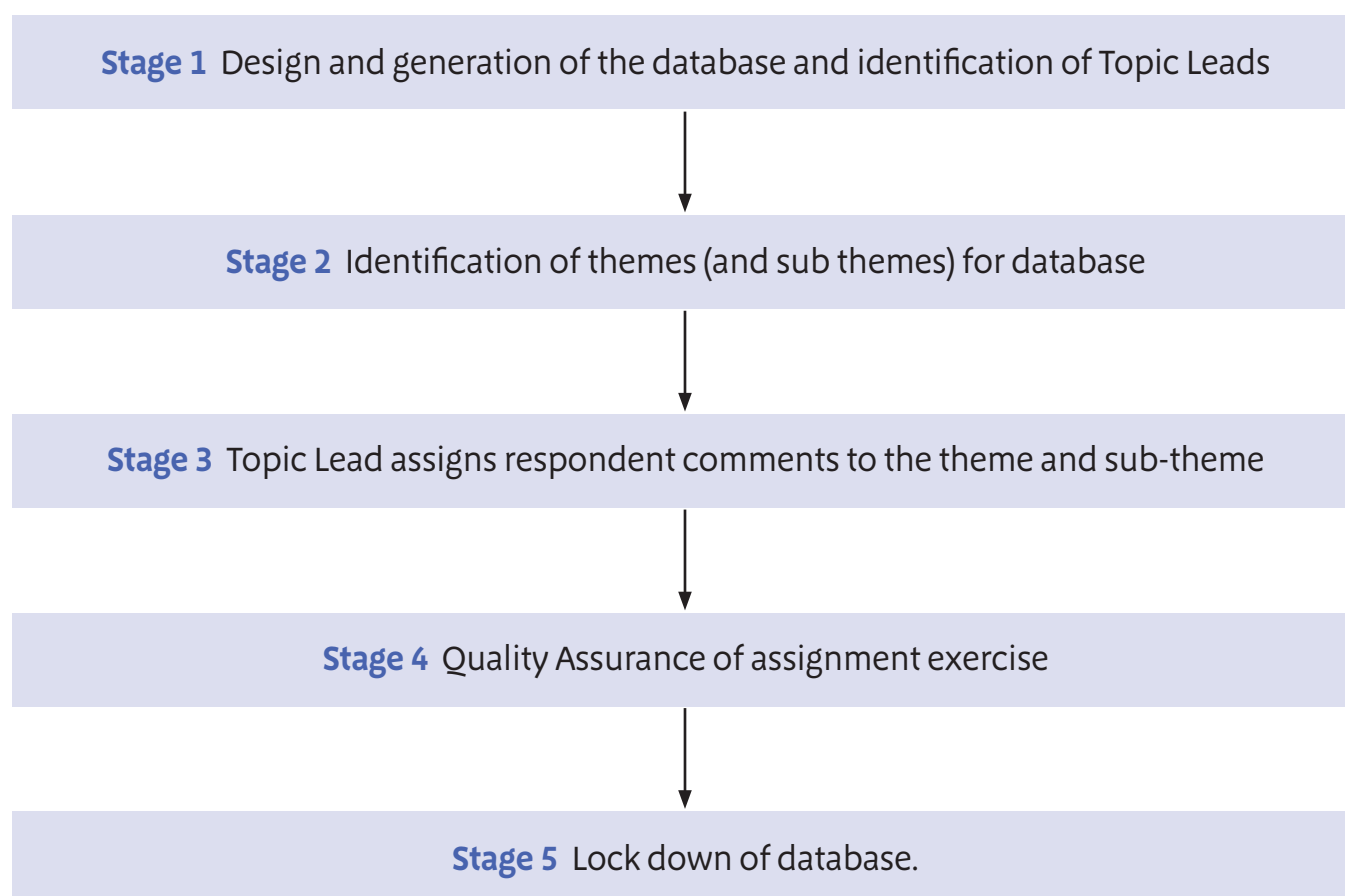
Phase One - Logging and basic data analysis

Overview

The purpose of the first phase was to move from a set of unknown responses, an empty database and only a partial view of key themes, to a populated database containing a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative quality assured log and presentation of the range of key themes and sub-themes derived from the responses. This was designed in a way that would enable the different views held by different sets of respondents to be interrogated, with individual pieces of underpinning evidence captured ready for the Phase two analysis.

Process

Figure 5: The five logging & basic analysis stages.



Stage 1 – design and generation of the database and identification of Topic Leads

Receiving, filing and logging consultation responses: The majority of the responses were received in an electronic format on the word and smart survey forms we had provided. Other responses (e.g. by letter or email) were scanned to ensure they could also be recorded on the database. The main database held the original copies of all responses received.

Duplicate responses were removed e.g. where electronic responses were followed up with hard copy.

Each response was allocated a number and then saved electronically on the main database using a filename of the following format:

[unique number, respondent's name, the organisation they represent, date of receipt]

To plan the timetable for logging and analysis, and to maintain adequate control over of the task, the Data Manager:

- Identified the key organisations from which responses were expected and recorded these responses as they were submitted.
- Provided early warning of emerging risks, and
- Alerted the analysts to any expected late responses. A reasonable window of opportunity for late submissions was allowed for (nine were received after the consultation closed). In practice we were able to accommodate all responses.

Identification and responsibility of Topic Leads

The master database was designed with each question recorded on a separate sheet to facilitate the data logging and analysis stages. Each analyst was allocated one topic and given responsibility for all stages of analysis in relation to that topic. This included, for example, accurately recording (logging) and then analysing the content of the questions which related to their specific topic. The topics and their respective questions were broken down as follows:

- Topic 1 Direction of Travel: Q1
- Topic 2 Standards: Q2, Q3
- Topic 3 Finance: Q4, Q5, Q7
- Topic 4 National Trail Officers: Q6
- Topic 5 Partnerships: Q8, Q9
- Topic 6 Users: Q10, Q11
- Topic 7 Promotion: Q12

Figure 6: .An example question database spreadsheet template.

A	C	D	E	F	G	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD	AE	AF
						Understanding of									There are varying demands with regards to the scope of the quality standards	
Respondent ID	"Strongly agree"	"Agree"	"Neither agree nor disagree"	"Disagree"	"Strongly disagree"	Yes is understood & likes it	Yes understood but no change needed	No change needed - because we use the Welsh Standards	Approach proposed is over-simplified	Nested hierarchy not understood	Family level element of the nested hierarchy is not understood/ objected to	Concern/confusion between national trail level & local standards	Delivery solutions should be locally determined	Local standards able to cater for special circumstances	Need to properly deliver equalities legislation	Needs to demonstrate VFM
85			1									1				
86		1														
87		1							1							
88	1															
89		1														
90	1							1		1		1				
91		1														
92		1														
93	1						1									
94				1												
95		1														
96		1										1				
97		1														
98		1														

The master database spreadsheets had a simple structure (see Figure 6 above) with one spreadsheet per question and categories including strength of feeling, overarching themes (shown in blue) and any sub-themes (shown in grey) associated with them. Along the vertical axis each consultation response was assigned its own row. At the bottom of the spreadsheet analytical tables were set up to calculate key statistics which would enable more sophisticated analysis by sector. The Topic Leads were each provided with a working version of the database within which to record and analyse their question responses. The Data Manager had overall responsibility for pulling the working database spreadsheets together into a single master database once phase one data logging and quality assurance stages were completed. They also copied and pasted the original respondents reply's to each question, to save the Topic Leads having to continually refer back to the original response and reduce the level of time needed for this part of the analysis.

The Data Manager owned the master database, ensuring that any amendments to its structure were agreed in advance. This helped ensure quality control.

By the end of stage one, roles within the team had been agreed including decisions on who had responsibility for analysing each question. The Data Manager created the database spreadsheet template (one for each consultation question) and populated it with the base information of: respondent's details, the strength of feeling score and a copy of the original text from each respondent lifted from their submitted response.

Stage 2 - identification of themes (and sub themes) for database

The core purpose of this stage was to properly understand what was contained in the responses to each question and to record the emerging themes and sub-themes as presented in the collective set of respondent comments. The theme and sub-theme set were then captured in the individual question spreadsheet (as per the blue and grey sections in Figure 6) and used by that question analyst to assign respondent comments.

In order to ensure maximum objectivity and a high level of quality assurance in terms of identification of themes, three people (including the identified Topic Lead) looked independently at each question and recorded emerging themes (and any related nuances around these themes (recorded as sub themes)).

Question by question, as each set of themes was identified, a series of team teleconferences were held to discuss the assessments and to agree a final set of themes and sub-themes for each question. In practice this was more difficult for some questions than others. For question one, for example, respondents had often gone beyond the scope of the actual question and covered a wide range of issues. The approach taken, demonstrated the value of involving all of the team in each question discussion.

At the end of stage 2 we had a single set of themes and sub-themes for each question. We also had a high degree of confidence that the points raised in the bank of respondent comments had been accurately interpreted and recorded, grouped into themes and sub-themes.

As each discussion was concluded, the Project Manager made a record of the final agreed set of themes and sub-themes for each question and entered these into the question template using the blue row for themes and grey row for sub themes (see Figure 6 above).

Stage 3 - Topic Lead assigns respondent comments to the theme & sub-theme

Working on their assigned questions in turn, the Topic Leads worked through each individual respondent's comments for that question and assigned each point raised to one of the themes and sub-themes in the spreadsheet template. They marked each point raised with a '1' (see sample spreadsheet in Figure 6)

It was common for respondents to make multiple points in their response to each question; each respondent would therefore have had a number of themes and sub-themes marked with a '1'. This exercise proved to be quite lengthy and took the Topic Lead on average two days to complete for each question.

Stage 4 – Quality assurance of assignment exercise

Throughout the assignment process there were regular team calls which enabled Topic Leads to discuss any problems that they had with the assignment process. For example, if they found some comments difficult to assign, they would raise this with the group who would advise if further themes/subthemes should be added to the database. This level of engagement by team members facilitated identification of cross cutting themes and where there had been repetition. If new themes/sub themes were identified, the Project Manager took the responsibility of amending the question spreadsheet template and the Topic Lead then re-visited the responses they had already gone through and amended their comment assigning work to reflect the new theme option. Our experience showed that this was necessary on only a very limited number of occasions, due to the rigorous approach taken to identify and agree themes initially.

This detailed approach served the purpose of both populating the spreadsheets and ensuring that a basic level of analysis had been completed by each question lead. A final quality assurance stage was then completed by the Data Manager who looked at one in ten of the Topic Lead's assignment of comments for each question and agreed with them any final amendments. At the end of this stage the individual question spreadsheets were fully populated with a high level of confidence that they had also been fully quality assured.

Stage 5 – Lock down of database

To protect the completed and quality assured data logged into the individual question spreadsheets, the Data Manager created a Master Database (with one spreadsheet page per question). This was then locked down and password protected to prevent it being amended by mistake. A complete and secured record of the logged and basically analysed content of all responses to all questions was now held by the Data Manager, who then provided a full question by question copy to each of the Topic Leads for Phase 2.

Phase Two – detailed analysis

Overview

The focus of the second phase was to support in depth analysis which drilled down into the detail and provided an interpretation of the underlying meaning behind the respondent's replies. The experience of going through a detailed stage by stage logging and basic analysis phase, resulted in the Topic Leads having a sound understanding of the content of their respective questions responses.

Ways of working

The analysis team identified and agreed ways to stay in close touch by regular teleconference, both to check progress and to manage workloads, but also importantly to share emerging findings, especially where these were likely to impact on another colleagues' analysis. Cross cutting themes were also identified and assessed.

Quantitative analysis

The overarching aim of the quantitative analysis was to be able to support the qualitative analysis with statistics to show which types of respondent answered which question, what their key concerns were and how strongly they expressed them.

The core purpose was to identify and segment the main trends in the consultation responses. Key areas where we needed evidence were:

- How many respondents there were and from which sector;
- How many / proportion of respondents addressing each questions / themes / topic;
- To identify the trends and themes that respondents from different sectors were interested in.
- To understand the different categories of concern
- To understand the strength of feeling/concern

The key tool for delivering these statistics was the individual question spreadsheets themselves which had been designed to make data manipulation as straight forward as possible.

The approach to detailed qualitative analysis

Each Topic Lead took overall responsibility, not only for the analysis of their question, but also for any issues raised under other questions (particularly q1) that related to their topic area. Since there were a large number of responses, many going into considerable depth and covering a number of issues, the priority was to identify, analyse and convey the meaning behind the key themes in responses to each question. It is important to note that there was also significant level of variation in the number of themes and sub themes identified under different questions.

Table 2: The total number of themes and sub-themes for each question

Question	Theme	Sub Theme
1	10	54
2	6	42
3	10	57
4	13	53
5	13	61
6	3	19
7	11	52
8	7	50
9	6	34
10	8	37
11	11	43
12	6	26
Total	104	528

Whilst the qualitative analysis was supported by the quantitative analysis, Topic Leads also referred to the approximate proportion of respondents putting forward a particular a view or comment. This would help to indicate whether a particular view or comment had been put forward by a small number of respondents, or a much larger proportion. Respondents may have had views on many issues which they did not mention directly; therefore carefully reading the responses to get a sense of these indirect messages was a critical part of the analyst's role.

Phase Three – write up

The production of the final report was a team effort, coordinated by a Project Manager providing a steer to all Topic Leads in terms of the presentation of each section. Prior to the production of the report Topic Leads had already provided emerging summary finding briefings to the National Trail Programme Board for both their October and December meetings. In addition to detailed consideration of the issues, Topic Leads were also expected to identify appropriate quotes to support appropriate points. This accorded with Defra's consultation report guidance. Statistics and data tables were also verified by the Data Manager. It should be noted that the themes are also different in nature, some are clear and distinct, whilst others are less precise. The analysis approach to the level of categorisation and quantification was therefore different for different themes. Within all the themes, we identified the principal types of response and issues raised, described these qualitatively, and illustrated the text with verbatim quotations.

Annex C: List of respondents

Name	Organisation
Adam Taylor	Medway Council
Aidan Rayner	North Yorkshire County Council
Alan Hulme	Yorkshire Dales NPA
Alan Kinds	Land Access and Recreation Association
Allison Thorpe	South Downs NPA
Amanda Brace	English National Park Authorities Association
Amanda Watson	Newcastle City Council
Andrew Blake	Wye Valley AONB
Andrew Coleman	Cumbria County Council and Cumbria LAF
Andrew Poad	National Trust (Hadrian's Wall Country Group)
Andrew Saint	Surrey Countryside Access Forum's
Andy Johnson	Fieldfare Trust
Andy le Gresley	East Sussex County Council
Anne Clark	Walk England
Annette Venters	Chilterns Conservation Board
Averil Sleeman	The British Horse Society
Ben Stafford	Campaign to Protect Rural England
Beryl Bird	North East LAF
Bob Milton	Individual
Brian Lawson	Chilterns Society
Brian Scott	The Hadrian's Wall Trust
Brian Tordoff	Individual
Carole Ruse	Individual
Caroline Romans	Central Bedfordshire and Luton Joint LAF
Catherine Flitcroft	British Mountaineering Council
Catriona Cook	British Horse Society (local group)
Charlotte Gilbert	Peak Horsepower
Chris Massey	Derbyshire County Council
Chris Slade	Dorset LAF
Claire Robinson	NFU
Colin Palmer	CTC
Dan Barnett	Exmoor NPA
Darian Jeffs	Oxfordshire County Council
Dave McGlade	Individual
David Breeze	Individual
David Gibson	Individual
Densia Delic	The Kennel Club
Derek Bodey	Individual
Derek Bright	Walk a While
Dick Greenaway	West Berkshire Countryside Society

Doug Moffat	Pennine Way Association
Eleanor Sherwin	Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Fiona Farnell	North York Moors LAF
George Hill	Individual
George Keeping	Rights of Way Review Committee
Grant Addison	Individual
Helen Abraham	Peak District Green Lanes Association
Helen Meech	National Trust
Helen Reynolds	East Riding of Yorkshire and Kingston Upon Hull Joint LAF
Hilary Winter	Devon Countryside Access Forum
HLF Folkard	Individual
Ian Bapty	Offa's Dyke Association
Ian Blackhouse	Individual
Ian Ritchie	The Friends of The Ridgeway
James Brockley	Cotswold AONB
James Scobie	Cornwall Countryside Access Forum
Jayne Benson	IPROW
Jim Stabler	Shropshire Council
John Jones	Norfolk County Council
John Lane	Gloucestershire County Council
John Perks	West Sussex County Council
John Taylor	North Yorkshire LAF
John Tickle	Hampshire County Council
Jont Bulbeck	Countryside Council for Wales
Jos Joslin	Oxfordshire County Council
Julian Kellett	Cotswold AONB
Julie Thompson	Individual
June Harrop	Defence Infrastructure Organisation
Justin Cooke	The Ramblers
Justin Roche	Kirklees Council
Karl Gerhardsen	North Yorkshire Moors NPA
Kate Ashbrook	Open Spaces Society
Ken Whetter	Rotherham LAF
Kent County Council	Kent County Council
Lisa Bainbridge	Campaign for National Parks
Lorna Lazzari	Northumberland NPA
Malcolm Hodgson	North Yorkshire Moors NPA
Mandy Loach	Trans Pennine Trail
Mark Owen	SWCP Management Group
Mark Richards	Individual
Mark Turner	Pennine Prospects

Mark Weston	The British Horse Society
Martin Brunt	Sustrans
Martin Lane	Cotswolds Conservation Board
Martin Rhodes	Peak District LAF
Michael Hill	Kent County Council
Michael Holcombe	Newcastle City Council
Mike Eastwood	Cornwall County Council
Mike Jeffrey	Northumberland County Council
Mike Ogden	Durham County Council
Mike Rhodes	Peak District NPA
Mike Walker	ADEPT
Mr Jon Young	exeGesIS SDM Ltd
National Association of AONBs	National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Nick Johannsen	Kent Downs AONB Unit
Nick Osborne	Lancashire County Council
Norman Jones	Individual
Oliver Cripps	North Wessex Downs AONB
Patrick Wharam	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Paul Harris	Individual
Paula Craddock	Ryedale District Council
Peter Rawcliffe	Scottish Natural Heritage
Phil Evans	Visit England
Professor Les Lumsden	Individual
R Coatsworth	Individual
Rachel Finney	Borough Council of Calderdale
Rhoda Barnett	Peak and Northern Footpaths Society
Richard Broadbent	Thames Path & Ridgeway National Trails Management Group
Richard Broadhead	Wiltshire Council
Richard Holmes	Individual
Richard Mayon - White	River Thames Society
Richard Partington	Exmoor LAF
Richard Thomas	Individual
Richard Toon	Lancashire LAF
Rob Dance	Oxfordshire County Council
Rob Dingle	Individual
Rob Fairbanks	Surrey Hills AONB
Robert Talbot	Individual
Rosemary Wicks	Bracknell Forest Council
Ruth Croker	New Forest Access Forum
Ruth Hutton	Thames Strategy
Sam Littlechilds	YHA

Sarah Slade	Country Land and Business Association
Sarah Tunnicliffe	English Heritage
Scott Lee	Individual
Spencer Clark	Spencer Clark
Steph Carter	Long Distance Walkers Association
Steve Ankers	South Downs Society
Steve Church	South West Coast Path Association
Steve Mitchell	Surrey County Council
Stuart Macintosh	Powys County Council
Susan Rogers	Individual
T Wells	Oxfordshire LAF
Tara S Hansford	Dorset Count Council
Terence Cavanagh	Unitypartnership Oldham MBC
Tim Ducker	Sunderland City Council
Tim Lidstone-Scott	Peddars Way & Norfolk Coast Path
Tim Venes	Norfolk Coast Partnership Manager
Tom Chevelier	Icknield Way Association
Victor Cadaxa	Tyne & Wear Access Forum
Zoe Bremer	Individual

Front cover image: Walking in nature's garden - the Cleveland Way National Trail
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Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

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