



# The New deal

Management of National Trails in England  
from April 2013

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NATIONAL TRAILS



NATURAL  
ENGLAND

# The National Trails Family



# National Trails

National Trails have been created over the last sixty years to provide access to our most special places. Three factors set these routes apart from other long distance promoted trails:

- They have national quality standards;
- They are created using statutory powers set out in an Act of Parliament<sup>1</sup>; and,
- Their upkeep is partly paid for by central government through grants made by Natural England<sup>2</sup>.

Collectively, 15 routes across England and Wales are promoted as the family of National Trails and identified by the acorn symbol.

## The new deal<sup>3</sup>

National Trails are managed locally but within a national framework of guidance and support. Central government support is provided through Natural England, which is responsible for setting standards and investing in trail maintenance, while trail partnerships take collective responsibility for local delivery.

## Quality Standards

Natural England's vision for National Trails is that they are a family of the highest quality recreational routes connecting our finest landscapes for extensive off road journeys. National Trails provide public enjoyment and they also bring local economic benefit through tourism as well as opportunities for improving the environment and for getting local communities involved in caring for them.

Revised Quality Standards will be introduced from April 2013<sup>4</sup> (see further detail inside the back cover). These are underpinned by a set of management principles:

- Experience - enable as many people as possible to enjoy a wide variety of walking and riding experiences along National Trails and through the English landscape
- Enhancement - make constant improvement to the Trail and its associated routes. Contribute to the enhancement of the landscape, nature and historic features within the trail corridor.
- Engagement - build and sustain a community of interest in caring for the Trail and the landscape through which it passes.
- Economy - creates opportunities for local businesses to benefit from the use of Trails.

The scope of the Standards is broad and ambitious to provide a menu for long term development and investment, linked to the overall benefits of having National Trails. Building on the previous 2004 Standards, they are focussed on the features shared by all members of the National Trail family but provide scope for local flexibility on how the Standards are achieved. Within the Quality Standards

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<sup>1</sup> Natural England holds statutory powers to propose new trails, and amend existing ones, under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. We also have a responsibility to provide information about them to the public. The acorn symbol is a registered trademark that we own jointly with Natural Resources Wales.

<sup>2</sup> In England. Natural Resources Wales fulfil an equivalent role for Welsh National Trails.

<sup>3</sup> The operational arrangements described in this document apply to England only.

<sup>4</sup> The revised Quality Standards were developed by an independent stakeholder group as part of a review of National Trails management carried out in 2012/13.

are some minimum requirements that must be delivered. For example, there are Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) included which are linked to the public funding provided and the need to ensure clear accountability. Other indicators enable us to track progress across the full range of standards and to provide us with evidence on the value for money of the investment in the Trails.

## Trail users and other stakeholders

Ensuring user enjoyment of the Trails is our main focus: all of the National Trails can be completed on foot and several can also be used by horse riders and cyclists. Some people complete a whole trail in one or many visits, but many use trails for shorter walks or rides.

We can only achieve the best for our trail users by working with a range of stakeholders, including:

- the landowners who host the trail;
- the local tourism businesses that provide services to trail users;
- the local communities through which the trail passes and who might use the trail or be involved in providing services or looking after the trail; and,
- other agencies and organisations who can promote the wider advantages of using the trail including for people's health and well being.

In addition, all of the Trails provide opportunities for environmental volunteering.

Trail Partnerships will need to ensure that there are opportunities for local people and stakeholders to engage with their work and we will require that each Trail must have a single, named point of contact and regularly report to us on levels of user satisfaction.

## Roles and responsibilities

### Local delivery

Local Trail Partnerships will have collective responsibility for providing a well managed and promoted high quality trail across the whole of the trail length. Each Trail Partnership will ideally be overseen by a lead partner who will receive our grant. The Partnership, through its identified lead partner, is accountable to Natural England for reporting on the local delivery of National Trail standards and the use and deployment of the central government support received for the Trail. The Partnership will need the support of all of the local highway authorities who have statutory responsibilities for rights of way and trail management, and will need to be constituted to take into account the views of trail users and other stakeholders.

A Trail Partnership's ambition should not be limited to the direct financial support that we (or the local highway authorities) can provide, and they should seek to secure additional resources to further enhance the trail and provide benefits.

We will work with Trail Partnerships to assess their performance and encourage them to work collectively and share best practice.

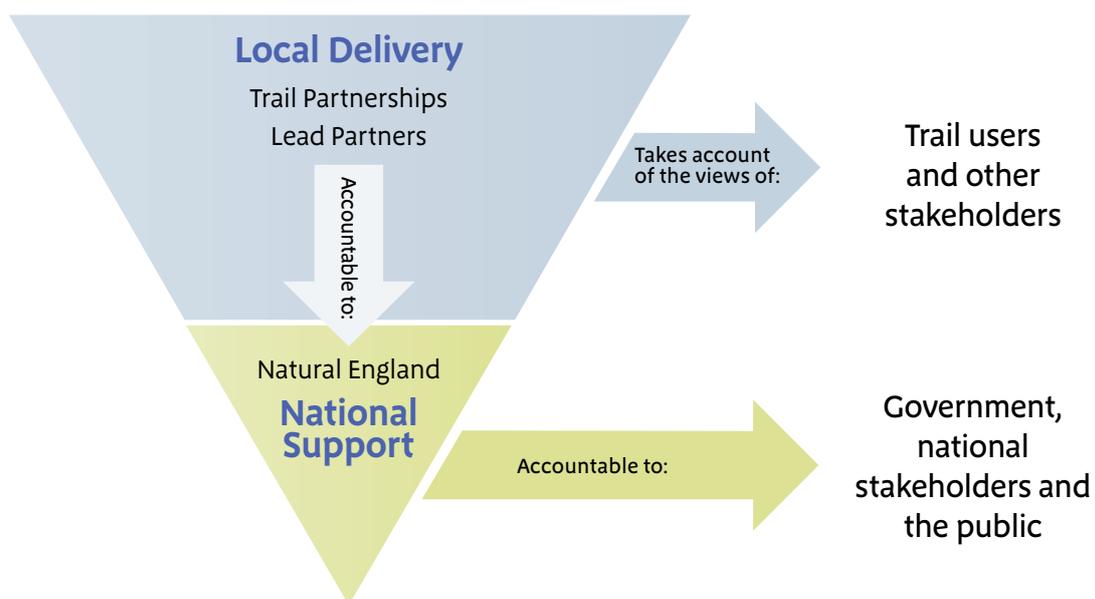
## National support

Natural England will:-

- Maintain an overview of delivery across all National Trails in England and be accountable to Government, national stakeholders and the public.
- Compile evidence and publish an annual performance report, based on the Standards, that shows how central government resources have been deployed and outlines the results achieved and progress towards meeting the agreed standards. This report will also show what additional resource leverage central government funding has delivered.
- Act as the national champion and advocate for National Trails and make the case for central funding for the family of trails.
- Continue to use our statutory powers as appropriate to propose new trails and amend existing ones, and including the establishment of the England Coast Path as a National Trail.

We will work with other stakeholders at the national level, including Defra who will play its role in championing National Trails with particular reference to the contribution these trails make to the enjoyment of protected landscapes as well as the wider countryside, and the economic benefits this brings.

### Accountability within the management model



## Delivery Frameworks

Each Trail will have a unified Delivery Framework that translates the nationally-set Quality Standards into local outcomes and describes how these will be delivered by the Trail Partnership. We expect that the Trail Partnership will take a consultative approach to developing its Delivery Framework. Where appropriate, delivery will be integrated with other local programmes and initiatives, either within the Trail Partnership, or via the network of its individual partners and stakeholders, or both. Evidence of a suitable Delivery Framework which has been endorsed by all of the partners involved will form the basis for our making a grant offer. We will prepare national guidance about the preparation and content of Delivery Frameworks.

# Promotion

We will protect the National Trails Brand and ensure that national and international marketing and promotion of these trails is secured. From January 2013, Walk England have been appointed to the role of promotion lead for the family of Trails. Walk England will work alongside Trail Partnerships who will continue to be responsible for providing information on their trail and its local promotion.

## National financial support

Natural England will:-

- Provide a financial contribution towards the upkeep of Trails, which from April 2013 will be distributed according to a new national funding formula<sup>5</sup>. Our intention is to provide Trails with a 3 year budget planning line.
- Provide grants annually as a single sum (rather than an itemised grant) so that partners have flexibility to manage their budgets locally.
- Require Delivery Frameworks as evidence that essential requirements will be met. A summary of how funds have been utilised will need to be included in grant claims, together with a report on progress in achieving the Quality Standards (KPIs and other indicators).

We will require local contributions at a ratio of at least 1:3 (match contribution to Natural England grant), and details of the total investment made will need to be included in grant claims. The main reason for this is that we want to know the genuine cost of caring for the trails and have assurance of the value for money of this investment.

All of our planned expenditure on National Trails will be allocated in the grants that we make at the start of the year, and we will not be retaining any project specific contingency funds. We recognise that responding to exceptional events, such as the loss of a section of path following a major landslide, puts pressure on local highway authorities and we will consider positively requests for additional assistance, if this comes with supporting evidence from local partnerships, subject to availability of funds.

## Monitoring and performance

Monitoring information will be collated and reported nationally, and Natural England will prepare an annual report setting out progress in achieving the overall vision for National Trails. Reporting in this way with robust and comparable evidence will be important to demonstrate the ongoing value of National Trails and to justify future investment. We will provide a standard template to ensure consistency.

National Trails are starting from a strong position and have a good track record of delivery, and it will be important that Trail Partnerships are able to share good practice and offer advice to other Trails. We will facilitate regular reviews, focussing on the main areas of the quality standards and including trail condition and performance of the partnership. If performance were to be assessed as below an acceptable level then we will increase the level of scrutiny and it might be necessary for the Partnership to develop a recovery plan and we will look to other Trail Partnerships to offer guidance and review as peers.

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<sup>5</sup> The funding formula was developed by an independent stakeholder group as part of a review of National Trails management carried out in 2012/13.

# Implementation

We are currently in discussions with our local delivery partners about implementing changes, and some trails will be early adopters from April 2013, whereas for others the impact of changes will be greater and introduction of changes will be phased over a longer period. We will apply the arrangements set out to the England Coast Path as it becomes established as a National Trail, taking into account any special circumstances applying to this path.

The 2012/13 review was concerned with arrangements for management and funding between Natural England and those managing the individual Trails. However in response to the consultation, many raised questions and wider issues about National Trails that went beyond the scope of the current review. From April 2013, we will be working with Defra to examine some of these issues and will be setting up a new working group, to make recommendations to the Secretary of State on the longer term shape and national stewardship of National Trails, and whether they could make an even more significant contribution to local economies.

# National Trails Quality Standards in England from April 2013

Management Principles	Experience	Enhancement	Engagement	Economy
Quality Standards and Indicators	<p>Continuous, long distance routes that can be completed as a journey or in stages.</p> <p>Easily accessible routes. Routes matched to terrain and landscape.</p> <p><b>KI: visitor satisfaction</b></p> <p>Connection of the trail with the landscape, nature and history.</p> <p>Friendly website with accurate and up to date information to help with planning and providing feedback.</p> <p><b>**KPI: informative website**</b></p> <p>Good range of accommodation in type and price.</p> <p>Route design and development of associated routes is responsive to changes in use and to new uses.</p> <p><b>KI: level and type use of the trail</b></p> <p><b>KI: awareness of brand and degree of engagement</b></p>	<p>Development of the Trail that enhances experiences and ensures condition of route matches with types and levels of use.</p> <p>A high quality of path infrastructure including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Structures are always safe, comfortable, easy and convenient to use.</li> <li>■ Consistent high quality design, style and use of materials to suit the character of the local landscape with historical features maintained where possible.</li> <li>■ Route is easy to follow with consistent, accurate, unobtrusive way marking and destination signage.</li> <li>■ Surfaces in good condition and appropriate to the geology and soils over which the trail passes.</li> <li>■ Readily passable routes free from undergrowth and overhanging vegetation.</li> <li>■ Safe road and rail crossings.</li> </ul> <p><b>**KPI: trail condition**</b></p> <p>Presumption of routes being traffic free.</p> <p>Supporting local services (e.g. ferry crossings, transport links, taps) are available and information is up to date and accurate.</p> <p>Conservation measures within the trail corridor that protect and/or improve habitats or historic features.</p> <p><b>KI: quality of the trail corridor</b></p> <p>Variety of high quality short and circular walks and rides</p> <p><b>KI: improvements in accessibility</b></p>	<p>Consistently high quality of delivery up and down the trail through collaboration between local delivery partners.</p> <p><b>**KPI: effective partnerships**</b></p> <p>Land managers/ owners that host the route consider it to be well managed.</p> <p><b>KI: land manager satisfaction with management of the route</b></p> <p>Sense of local pride and ownership achieved through local community participation and connections.</p> <p>Trail partnership has involvement of users and local community</p> <p>A range of opportunities for people to get involved with trail management</p> <p>Active and thriving user association/friends group for the trail.</p> <p><b>KI: level and type of local engagement/ voluntary participation engagement/voluntary participation.</b></p>	<p>Creates opportunities for local businesses to benefit from the use of Trails.</p> <p>Encourages use of local contractors and materials.</p> <p>Easy to find out about and access a range of relevant local businesses and facilities.</p> <p>Local businesses consider the trail to be well managed and cite its presence as beneficial to their business.</p> <p><b>KI: service providers satisfaction with the management of the route</b></p> <p>Diverse and exciting programme of initiatives as Trail is seen as an attractive prospect for investment.</p> <p><b>KI: benefit to the local economy</b></p>

**Front cover: 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.**

Catalogue Code: NE426

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Printed on stock comprising 75% recycled fibre.

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