

Sent by e-mail; 6 February 2009

Dear Peter Ashcroft

Natural England consultation document- Review of Trails and Routes

Please find attached the response to the above consultation on behalf of Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS). CAFWS is an **independent statutory, advisory body** established under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to give advice on countryside access matters. It has a balanced membership of knowledgeable and experienced users (walkers, cyclists, horse riders and carriage drivers), landowners and other interests (including conservation, disabled access, landscape).

This e-mail constitutes formal advice from the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex. Highways Agency is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this forum in carrying out its functions.

Please can you confirm receipt of this response - many thanks.

With best wishes

Jane Noble

Forum Officer to CAFWS - <http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/cafws>

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NATURAL ENGLAND CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

REVIEW OF TRAILS AND ROUTES

Response from the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex (CAFWS)

This draft response has been compiled from information supplied by those members who responded

Q1. The Best Trails and Routes

The findings of the review suggest that national standards should be set for routes other than National Trails.

a. How useful do you think highway authorities would find this?

Very Useful/ **Quite useful**/ Not useful

Make any comments to explain your answer here

Standards are welcome however proper resource must be provided in order to ensure they are deliverable. They would help to prioritise maintenance and funding to where it is most needed. They also need to have flexibility for circumstances where local conditions mean they may not be achieved – without this key links can ‘remain on the shelf’.

Standards look good on paper but are only of use if they can be delivered - it can already be a struggle to maintain National Trails to standards. It may concentrate the mind – can the Highways Authority keep a new route maintained to the set standard? Not necessarily mandatory.

b. How useful do you think the public, both users and potential users, would find this?

Very useful/Quite useful / Not useful

Make any comments to explain your answer here ...

Making trails continuous, identifiable and accessible are the key things. It would give users, especially disabled, confidence. It would help users to find an appropriate route for their needs and give new users confidence in using slightly ‘wilder’ routes.

- c. If national standards were set, what criteria do you think should be used to help define the 'best' routes?

The route is :	Priority		
	High	medium	low
Promoted and managed by the local authority		✓	
Way marked throughout its length	✓		
Promoted on dedicated webpage/leaflets	✓		
Maintained to a high standard	✓		
Stile free		✓	
Available to all users (multi-use)		✓	
Managed by a dedicated trail officer (ft or pt)		✓	
The route :			
Passes through landscapes of high scenic quality		✓	
Passes places of interest		✓	
Passes places to eat or drink		✓	
Starts and finishes in urban settlements		✓	
Has main access points served by public transport	✓		
Others, please specify Identifies with specific landscape or historic route			

Make any comments to explain your answers here ...

For a route to be of national importance it should be of more than local interest and should have a secure management regime.

Although we have ticked boxes to indicate priorities above 'best trails' may not always meet these criteria (may not pass places to eat and drink/start in urban areas etc) and should not be excluded – each routes needs to be judged on it's own merits.

- d. Should the public be involved in selecting the best routes?
Yes / No – Via RoWIPs, LAFs, and through recognised user groups such as RA, BHS etc
- e. Is Natural England the right organisation to lead on this?
Yes / No
- f. Who else should be involved?

Users Groups including Sustrans, Ramblers' Association, CTC, British Horse Society, Highway Authorities, Landowners

Make any comments to explain your answers here ...

Is this consultation going to tie in with Coastal Access work?

Q2. Visitor Information

The findings suggest that information about the best trails and routes in England should be available in one place.

- a. Do you think this would be useful to highway authorities?
 Very useful **quite useful** not useful
- b. Do you think this would be useful to the public, existing users and other groups?
Very useful quite useful not useful

Make any comments to explain your answers here ...

Internet is almost 'one place' (although it is recognised that not everyone has access to the internet) – a simple search usually finds the popular sites. Good design, content and search data are most important. Internet is likely to be the principal way to access the information and therefore a central directory is essential with appropriate links to other sites.

On-line information is great for planning a trip but a guide in the hand is really useful when you are on a route.

- c. It is likely that this central source of information will be on-line. Which of the following features do you think would be useful to customers?

There are plenty of examples of routes promoted by a variety of organisations – no one solution fits all. Despite the web, most users are going to depend on OS maps (or a good route guide) when they are on the ground and there needs to be proper scrutiny before OS agrees to a promoted route – they are not always good enough.

	Priority		
	High	medium	Low
Detailed maps showing where the trails and routes are	✓		
Birds eye views of routes (eg Google earth)	✓		
Free downloadable route maps/directions	✓		
Reviews from other users	✓		
Audio route guides			✓
Ability to design personal itineraries		✓	
Maps/directions for short circular walks from trails and routes		✓	
Place to leave comments/complaints	✓		
Pictures of trails and routes		✓	
Public transport information	✓		
Information on places to eat or drink	✓		
Information on guided walks & events		✓	
Information on accommodation	✓		
Information on cycle hire	✓		
Others – please say which	✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car parking (people will always drive) • Information for equestrians and carriage drivers including horse box parking, livery stables • Information on emergency (and other) closures. • Usability by disabled/families etc • Detailed information of the surface condition/ terrain would enable people to make the choice whether the route is suitable for them. • Information about who can use each section of a route not just the whole route ie many trails have sections open to carriage drivers (a great way for disabled people to experience them) but they are seldom referred to at all. • Information on suitable traffic-free links from nearby urban areas to try and reduce dependence on cars to access trails and routes (information on public transport is useful but often not practical with a family or by horse/carriage or even by bike) 			

- d. Please indicate how your organisation would be willing to contribute to a central source of information:

Contribution	Yes	No	Possibly
Data			
Funding			
Staff time			
Volunteer time			
Other Advice	✓		

- e. What roles do you think the private sector could have in either managing or sponsoring such an information source?

Contribution	yes	No	Possibly
Hosting			
Funding			
Staff time			
Data collection/sharing time			
Sponsorship			

Make any comments to explain your answers here ...

Private sector could do any of these for individual routes (examples of this in West Sussex are Footprints of Sussex who do much of the above for several routes in the county) but would probably be looking for some reward / return. Local authorities and voluntary organisations often do not have the time.

Prefer sites without advertising content.

Q3. Management Information

The review found that little data is collected on how routes, other than National Trails, are managed and used, or on their financial costs and benefits.

- a. How useful would you find national advice on how to collect and share such data?
Very useful useful **not very useful**
- b. What information would you like access to nationally consistent data on, and what could you use this data for?

Information would probably be of interest but who would actually collect it – would this detract from dealing with issues on the grounds?

Q4. Natural England Grants for National Trails

The review found that the current grant system for National Trails leads to inefficiencies and missed funding opportunities.

- a. If your authority currently receives a grant from Natural England for the management of a National Trail please tell us if you think changes to the system could be made to improve effectiveness and value.

Not in a position to comment

Yes – it could be greatly improved

Yes – but it could be a bit better

No – there is no need, the system works fine

- b. If some aspects of spending could be scheduled over several years would this increase efficiency?

A great increase a slight increase no difference

Please give examples of potential increased efficiencies here

- c. What other changes could be made to improve the current system ?

Not in a position to comment

Q5. Volunteering

The review found that volunteers are actively involved in the management and monitoring of some routes and trails.

- a. Do opportunities exist to engage more effectively with volunteers on trails in your area?

Many opportunities Few opportunities No opportunities

- b. What do you think are the main volunteering opportunities

	High	Medium	Low
Wardening and reporting problems	✓		
Practical volunteering tasks in organised groups	✓		

Lengthsmen involved in maintenance work	✓		
Working with the public, eg guided walks and talks	✓		

c. What do you think is required to encourage more people to volunteer their time and expertise to contribute to the management and promotion of trails and routes?

Ownership by National Park or similar body. Needs to be carefully organised. The commitment may be beyond most people.

Q6. Trails and Routes Staff

The review found that the expertise held within National Trail teams and local authority staff is not being shared. Natural England is keen to ensure that expertise is shared between all people managing routes.

a. Do you agree with this finding?

Yes / no

b. Do you have ideas on how to improving sharing of knowledge and expertise between professionals?

Probably needs to be led by Natural England with information disseminated on-line, with possible get together of relevant people once/twice per year

Q7. A New Management Model for National Trails

This question is aimed at highway authorities who currently contribute to the management and funding of National Trails

No comments as question not aimed at LAFs – please see additional comments at the end

a. As individual National Trails reach maturity there are more opportunities to work with health, education, agriculture and other sectors to improve the delivery of appropriate local and national targets. This could help attract more funding. Would you be willing to work to increase funding both from local authorities and elsewhere to provide a better customer focussed product?

Yes Maybe no

b. What else could be done to encourage highway authorities and other organisations to contribute a larger share of the costs of managing and promoting National Trails?

c. Which aspects of the current spending on national trails provide the best opportunities for gaining better value/reducing costs

	High	Medium	Low	Please say why
Trail Staff				
Support Costs				
Trail maintenance				
Trail improvements				
Marketing				

Please make any comments to support your answers here

d. The review findings suggest that there are opportunities to improve trail corridors though new ways of working with stakeholders. Examples include development and promotion of link routes, circular walks, and improved environmental quality through better targeting of agri-environment schemes.

Do you agree with this finding?

Yes In part No

Please make any comments to explain your answer here

OTHER COMMENTS FROM CAFWS

- 1) It is a good idea to give national recognition to a tier of long distance routes / trails immediately below National Trails in importance, so they can get an enhanced standard of maintenance. This will give users confidence in using such routes.
- 2) Resources are a big issue. It is essential that whoever manages such routes and trails has the resources to carry out the work to the expected standard without funding/staff being taken from other services, in particular rights of way management.
- 3) Very surprised that Coastal Access is not mentioned as it should be considered as part of this consultation - how does this all fit in with Coastal Access. Implementing and managing the new Coastal Access Corridor will be a major managerial challenge.
- 4) There needs to be a protocol agreed with OS that only national trails and best trails should have recognition. Others may disappoint. Perhaps a local tier to recognise the importance of routes.

Thank you for your time

Please email your response to peter.ashcroft@naturalengland.org.uk

or post to
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The closing date is 6 February 2009