NATURAL ENGLAND CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

REVIEW OF TRAILS AND ROUTES

Joint response of the Peak District National Park Authority and Peak District Local Access Forum

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 …
>
> Potentially useful for areas without any National Trails – invites highway authorities to give greater publicity and promotion to their best waymarked routes. But if these national standards are to require better route maintenance, waymarking, promotion, and so on, adequate resources MUST be forthcoming so that other routine rights of way spending doesn't suffer as a result. We must avoid ending up with a tiered system where the network as a whole suffers because resources are channelled into a handful of elite local trails.

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 …
>
> Very helpful – could provide a linking network of high quality routes making overall route-planning easier and encouraging more interest in exploring totally new routes and planning more imaginative trips; would again promote interest in areas without National Trails (eg Midlands); might also help to encourage more overall use of the rights of way network by exploring local routes.

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

	Priority

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

Make any comments to explain your answers here …

   If a route is not promoted and managed by a local authority there must at least be an agreement with or acknowledgement by the highway authority of its responsibilities to 'service' a defined, high-standard route. However, there are several examples where independent user groups (eg South West Coast Path Assoc, Offa's Dyke Assoc) already play an important role in the wider management of individual routes and this should be encouraged so more people are involved and pressure on central funding may be relieved.

d.   Should the public be involved in selecting the best routes?

   Yes / No

e.   Is Natural England the right organisation to lead on this?

   Yes / **No**

f.   Who else should be involved?

Should be Highway Authority –led.

User and representative groups like the LDWA, RA, BHS and long distance horse riding groups; existing dedicated trail groups (Friends of the Ridgeway, Hearts of England Way Assoc, etc), as well as the actual highway authorities. Perhaps invite outdoor media (eg walking/horse riding/cycling magazines and websites) to ask readers for comments and suggestions?

Make any comments to explain your answers here …

This should NOT be left to local authority officers to decide or solely recommend, since the danger is that it might turn into a beauty contest with each vying for the most funding or prestige routes. Instead, the actual people who walk/ride the routes should be encouraged to give their opinions (as well) with NE ultimately appraising the whole network to get a representative spread of routes.

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 …

It would be much easier and clearer for everyone to have a single portal for such information, saving time and confusion.

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?

	Priority		
	High	medium	Low
Detailed maps showing where the trails and routes are	X		
Birds eye views of routes (eg Google earth)		X	
Free downloadable route maps/directions	X		

Reviews from other users	X		
Audio route guides			X
Ability to design personal itineraries		X	
Maps/directions for short circular walks from trails and routes	X		
Place to leave comments/complaints		X	
Pictures of trails and routes		X	
Public transport information	X		
Information on places to eat or drink	X		
Information on guided walks & events		X	
Information on accommodation	X		
Information on cycle hire	X		
Others – please say which Toilets and rest places			

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

Contribution	yes	No	Possibly
Data			X
Funding		X	
Staff time			X
Volunteer time			x
Other			

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			X
Funding			X
Staff time			X
Data collection/sharing time			X
Sponsorship			X

Make any comments to explain your answers here …

   This would need tight controls

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?

Levels and patterns of usage, so that we can a better idea of how well the rights of way network is serving users, especially those groups with specific demands and who are probably not being particularly well catered for at present (eg cyclists and horse riders).

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.

Yes – but it could be a bit better

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

        A great increase

        Please give examples of potential increased efficiencies here

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

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		X	
Practical volunteering tasks inh organised groups		X	
Lengthsmen involved in maintenance work		X	
Working with the public, eg guided walks and talks		X	

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?

Local authorities need to be more open and welcoming, as well as explain trail management more effectively to the 'layman'. People (volunteers) need to be allowed and encouraged to get a sense of 'ownership' of their local routes, perhaps going so far as to include them in some sort of decision making/monitoring process – or setting up trail advisory or liaison groups.

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?

Give more prominent role to likes of IPROW, use national networks like CRN to disseminate good practice. Also Trails management meetings.

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

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?

More grant-aid

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	X			
Support Costs	X			
Trail maintenance	X			
Trail improvements	X			
Marketing	X			

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

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