

REVIEW OF NATIONAL TRAILS AND ROUTES

Introduction

There are 13 National Trails in England, providing around 2,200 miles of high quality routes for walking, cycling and horse riding across our finest landscapes and mainly along public rights of way. They have been established by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. According to the Long Distance Walkers Association there are around 600 other strategic recreational routes which have been created without the benefit of these national statutory powers, procedures or funding arrangements.

Natural England holds the statutory responsibility for planning and establishing National Trails. Their day-to-day management is carried out by the relevant highway authority with the majority of the costs of this work supported by grants from Natural England and before that, from the Countryside Commission and Countryside Agency.

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the review is to identify a sustainable, customer focused and prosperous future for long distance routes for walking, cycling and riding across England, including National Trails, and to define Natural England's role in relation to them.

The review will:

- examine how the family of trails and routes work together;
- find out what users and potential users want compared to what they get;
- identify new options for their management, funding and marketing;
- indicate what Natural England's role should be; and
- recommend a way forward.

Timescale

By the end of June we will have defined the scope, agreed the questions to be answered and commissioned the necessary research and consultancy,

By end of September we will have completed the market research and have devised the management options.

By the end of December we will have completed consultations with stakeholders.

By the end of March 09 decisions will be made and plans ready for implementation.

Involving Stakeholders

This is an open review with all aspects accessible to those with an interest.

The review is being advised by a steering group which represents our main stakeholders including National Trail Officers, highway authorities, the National Trust and Visitbritain.

Opportunities for LAF engagement

LAFs will be invited to advise on the review options from September. This could be the focus of a more detailed presentation at the next England Access Forum meeting?

Meanwhile LAFs will be kept informed of progress through reports sent to the LAF regional coordinators.

The review is being project managed by Peter Ashcroft, who would welcome comments and suggestions from LAF members at any time.
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