

Our Approach to Footpath Management

This document outlines our approach to repairing and maintaining footpaths on Trust land.

Our aims for footpaths on Trust land

1. We repair and maintain paths on Trust land so that those visiting can safely access and enjoy the land in our care and to avoid erosion and damage to sensitive habitats.
2. We are open to the creation of new paths on Trust land where doing so will clearly enable more people to experience the wild places in the Trust's care and would be in keeping with Trust wild land management standards and the protection of wild places. New paths are created in a sensitive, low impact way, designed to link with existing infrastructure (e.g. Trust car park and interpretation).

Our approach to footpath management

3. The Trust balances an 'access neutral' approach (i.e. maintain what is there rather than extend access) to path management in wild places with an approach to creating new paths at gateway points to Trust properties where these will clearly enable more people to experience wild places and help to reduce visitor impacts on the land. The Braes of Foss Loop Path from the Schiehallion car park is an example of a new path created to improve access to wild places for all.
4. We will maintain what we have through sensitive low-key works on existing paths in order to prevent excessive wear and erosion of surrounding habitats, while keeping the overall visual impact to a minimum.
5. There is a presumption for minimum signage on paths. However, sensitively sited signage (e.g. on existing fences marking a route) and donation points can aid access and awareness of the Trust's work.
6. The approach taken to manage each section of a path will always take into account:
 - a) The wild setting and the immediate surrounding landscape.
 - b) Variations in the nature of paths at different sections.
 - c) Maintenance of maximum variation in path width between different sections.
7. Wherever possible, we will employ local contractors and work will be carried out by hand with no large-scale machinery, using locally sourced materials rather than importing. Where this is not possible, then the import of materials will be done in the most sensitive and low impact manner available.
8. Any repair work will be carried out using sensitive path techniques. The visual impact of the path will be a primary consideration and paths will be built using local materials. Designs will be as simple as possible and maintain natural variations in terms of width and materials. (cf. Wild Land Management Standard Number 23)

Aspects of path management

9. Management of paths will include all aspects of the following:
 - a) Surveying and monitoring.

- b) Maintenance programme.
- c) Construction of modifications, or reconstruction of sections.
- d) Design and control of access points and related facilities.
- e) Promotion of and interpretation associated with paths at access points or in external media.
- f) Prediction of potential interaction between the users of any path and its surroundings - given the conservation aims for the immediate area.

Surveying and monitoring

10. A programme of monitoring of the condition of each path will be established and incorporated into the management plan for each property. The principal paths on each property will be surveyed using the “Amber Survey”¹ approach in order to prioritise resources, plan work and maintain a continuity of approach across different properties.

Checklist prior to work

11. The impact of a variety of factors will be considered in the planning stages of any path work or management on Trust land:
- a) IMPACT - on a person’s experience of a wild place – the use of a path may make the going easier but diminish the experience.
 - b) NEED – is there evidence that doing nothing will result in unacceptable damage?
 - c) PURPOSE - of path & users: destinations, recreational benefits, fitness & wellbeing benefits, impact of user numbers and their distribution.
 - d) SAFETY – how any risks or hazards would be affected by any construction or other management actions.
 - e) NAVIGATION – will it encourage a significant number of visitors to proceed further than previously intended or enter different areas?
 - f) WILDLIFE – habitats, species, designated features.
 - g) ARCHAEOLOGY and historic value – impact on archaeological artefacts by proximity of walkers and avoiding use of any archaeological materials in path repairs or constructions. Some paths (e.g. stalkers paths) may be of historical interest and should be conserved using original techniques.
 - h) VISUAL INTRUSION – how any existing path or planned work would sit within its environment and affect the wild place experience of any visitors.
 - i) USER ENJOYMENT – what part the path takes in visitor’s enjoyment or appreciation of wild places and what impact any works will have on their experience.
 - j) PROMOTION of paths – how other parties promote paths on Trust land.

Path safety when works are underway

12. When path repairs or maintenance work is underway the following should be considered:
- a) Respecting the needs of walkers and ensuring that where possible they can still access sections of path and that their route is not radically disrupted.

¹ For an explanation of the ‘Amber Survey’ please see <http://themountainsandthepeople.org.uk/cms/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/TMTP-Education-Pack-Section5.pdf>

- b) The use of signage to alert users to the presence of path workers, particularly if machines are being used (more usually in car park settings).
- c) Communicate works in advance through local or social media outlets.
- d) If the works are of the scale to trigger Construction (Design and Management) Regulations then a full Construction Phase Plan should be produced, and its recommendations implemented.
- e) Path contractors should undertake and submit a full risk assessment prior to commencing any works on site, with the mitigation actions implemented on site.

Path safety following natural damage / landslip etc

13. Where damage to a path occurs through a dramatic event such as a landslip then endeavours should be taken to repair the section and or divert the route as soon as is reasonably possible. The popularity and location of the path will also have a bearing on the appropriate course of action. Prior to a full repair being undertaken the following actions should be carried out:
- a) Inform users of the hazard through a combination of on-site signage and through local or social media outlets as appropriate.
 - b) If possible, signpost an alternative route around the hazard.
 - c) If not possible then it may be necessary to formally close (for a period of time) the path or section of the path, and again this should be broadcast through the appropriate channels and on site.

Reconstruction

14. In general, best practice in line with the Upland Path Action Groups Construction Standards will be followed but with a strong emphasis on a 'low impact and low engineering' approach following guidance from the Upland Path Advisory Group, namely:
- a) Some erosion may be more acceptable than engineered path repairs – especially at higher altitudes.
 - b) Sensitive techniques (such as subtle path realignment) are preferred over more engineered approaches.
 - c) On-site materials are used wherever possible.

External influences on path management

15. Relevant external factors to path management will be considered, including:
- a) Influencing others in our approach towards maintenance of paths in wild places.
 - b) Visitor management plans/strategies on Trust and adjacent land.
 - c) Access points to paths governed by car parks or access roads outwith Trust land.
 - d) Print and web-based guides and maps not controlled by the Trust.
 - e) The availability of funding for path work.
 - f) Contractor availability, suitability and seasonal nature of repair works (which can impact on how quickly a path can be repaired).
 - g) Plans for long distance or other path networks.

Partnerships for footpath maintenance and repairs

16. Where we have the resources, we will support community partners to repair existing paths into wild places.

Skill development and volunteer opportunities

17. Trust staff should take opportunities to develop and refresh their skills and to engage with national bodies and initiatives to share and promote best practice.
18. Path maintenance work is often undertaken by volunteer work parties and appropriate support and guidance should be provided to ensure both the safety of participants and that the work undertaken conforms to this policy.
19. On occasion colleges and school groups undertake training on Trust properties. This will also be in the presence of a qualified contractor or tutor and on ground suitable to the skills and abilities of the group in question. Again, such work and training should have regard to this policy.

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