

Supporting guidance for Improving Public Access

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Introduction

Improved paths and outdoor access can bring many benefits.

For land managers they can help to integrate public access within the working of the unit, and can open up social and economic opportunities.

For the public they can encourage healthy physical activity and increase enjoyment of the outdoors, whilst for local communities, good path networks provide a valuable resource for local people and for visitor enterprises to develop connections with their area.

Access improvement projects may be quite small scale, to enhance a single path or improve signs and gates; or they may tackle larger network improvements or long distance paths, possibly involving collaborative working across several neighbouring units, to improve connectivity.

Drawing up your plan

Map your unit and surrounding areas to show how paths connect up as useable networks.

Show any existing core paths, local paths, arrival points like car parks, and places where people are likely to be going to, such as a viewpoint, a historic feature or a loch-shore.

Mark the lengths of paths that are to be improved, and where facilities are to be installed, under the proposed scheme.

Guidelines

Project work could include a range of improvements such as:

- preparatory work to survey, remove or make safe trees, and prune low branches
- construction of new paths or upgrade of old paths – providing properly drained and bottomed paths, wide enough for expected use, with good surfaces of mineral dust or semi-bound materials
- equipment for the paths like gates, bridges, boardwalks, ditches, seats, retaining walls or stock fencing
- signposts, waymarks and information boards

Adding value

Preparing the access map can help you to explore and explain how projects can bring added value. It may be that work on quite a short length of new path will insert a 'missing link' that opens up an attractive circuit path or a broader network of routes. Working with neighbours may set up a new long-distance path, or upgrade a core path. The path works may integrate with other projects which the local community is pursuing (e.g. a local heritage trail), or may be able to leverage additional funds for associated work.

Useful references

- Countryside Access Design Guide (Scottish Natural Heritage)
- Lowland Path Construction (Scottish Natural Heritage / Paths for All)
- Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access (Scottish Natural Heritage / Paths for All)
- Path Bridges – Planning, Design, Construction and Maintenance – (Scottish Natural Heritage / Paths for All)

- The Path Manager's Guide to Grading – standard waymarked path grading system for Scotland (Scottish Natural Heritage / Forestry Commission Scotland / Paths for All)