

How to apply for Improving Public Access

This is an old version of the page

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For recent changes to this guidance, please see the [bottom of the page](#).

Important note: Improving Public Access (IPA) guidance and scoring criteria has been revised for 2021. The scheme opened for new applications on 1 March 2021 and will close on 30 June 2021.

Requirements

Connectivity

You must establish a new path, or carry out improvements to an existing path, in at least one of the following categories:

- a core path, a link to or between core paths (see local authority or national park authority for a map of core paths in your area).
- a path providing access to a point of public interest such as a viewpoint, beach, lochshore, riverside, natural, cultural or historic feature etc.
- a path which links directly to other paths, including at the boundaries of your land, to form effective and convenient parts of wider local path networks or of a long distance path or trail.

Accessibility

As far as practicably possible, the new or upgraded paths should be as **accessible as possible** and suitable for use by walkers, cyclists, horse-riders and wheelchairs/mobility scooters, providing an accessible path for everyone to enjoy and benefit from. They should, where possible:

- Provide gentle gradients (up to 1:12)
- Avoid the use of steps e.g. on bridge approaches
- If using gates, use two-way self-closing gates (not stiles or kissing-gates these do not comply with equalities legislation)
- Provide benches as rest points for the less physically able. Provide well-placed and clear directional signage to re-assure and guide users

Path design and considerations

Paths must be fit for purpose, designed to last, be safe to use and low maintenance. Each capital item on the menu of path infrastructure options has its own requirements detailing the minimum specification. In summary you must ensure the new or upgraded path:

- Has adequate **drainage** to prevent water based damage to the path.
- Is **surfaced** either with a dust unbound and compacted surface (e.g. whin dust, granite dust) or with a semi-bound surface. Fully-bound or sealed surfaces such as tarmac or concrete are not eligible.
- Is constructed at a **standard 1.8 metre width**; in exceptional circumstances the path width may be permitted within a range from 1.2 to 2.5 metres e.g. a wider path justified by predicted significant and heavier volume of use. **Note** path quantities for IPA are measured in square metres.
- **Signposted** at the start, and end points and any junctions as appropriate.
- **Not for motorised use**; use as a vehicular, quad, tractor, forest or farm track is not eligible; note that the path construction specifications are not designed to support vehicular use

Summary table of capital items and standard costs

Full details of capital items and costs - available on the [Capital items page](#)

Paths and path infrastructure		
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1 - New path - Unbound Surface	For the construction of a path with unbound compacted surface (whinstone / granite dust), with full tray excavation half tray or raised path.	£18.20 / square metre
2 - New Path – Semi-bound surface	For the construction of a path with a semi-sealed and binding surface material such as road planings, Ultitrec or equivalent, with full tray excavation, half tray or raised path.	£28.15 / square metre
3 - Upgraded path	For the re-conditioning of an existing constructed path, scraping to expose remaining sub based, re-construction of a fresh sub-base and dust surface material such as whinstone or granite dust.	£6.20 / square metre
4 - Gate - Self-closing two-way opening	For the installation of a two-way opening, self-closing gate (galvanised steel or timber) of 1.5 metres width. A gate also performs as a vehicle barrier.	£440 / gate
5 - Gate - Self-closing, one-way	For the installation of a one-way opening, self-closing gate (galvanised steel or timber) of 1.5 metres width. A gate also performs as a vehicle barrier.	£350 / gate
6 - Bridge	For a bridge crossing over small watercourse(s) connecting to an existing, upgraded or new path at either end	£1,100 / square metre of clear user deck
7 - Gabion basket retaining wall	Construction of metal mesh stone-filled gabion baskets to create revetments for the purpose of stabilising new or upgraded paths.	£100 / cubic metre
8 - Boardwalk	For a wooden or recycled plastic boardwalk with edge rails, giving a clear user width of at least 1.2 metres.	£91 / square metre of clear user deck
9 - Timber board and aggregate steps	For steps as part of an existing, upgraded or new path. Steps can only be considered in exceptional situations where the terrain naturally restricts access.	£150 / metre
10 - Drainage ditch	For drainage in conjunction with new path construction or upgrading, as an open machine-dug V or U ditch, 200 to 300 millimetres deep with stable angled sides and landscaping.	£1.88 / metre
11 - Piped culvert (300 millimetre pipe)	For a 300 millimetre twin-wall plastic culvert pipe with built stone headwalls in conjunction with the new path construction or upgrading.	£143 / each
12 - Piped culvert (450 millimetre pipe)	For a 450 millimetre twin-wall plastic culvert pipe with built stone headwalls in conjunction with new path construction or upgrading.	£395 / each
13 - Stock fence / stock gate	For a stock fence alongside a new or upgraded path, minimum of six line wires or two line wires with stock netting. For stock gates three metres wide in the new path side stock fence where justified, but not across the new or upgraded path.	£5.50 / metre £170 each
14 - Bench seat	For a timber bench on a level and surfaced area close to a new or upgraded path.	£350 / each
15 - picnic table	For a timber picnic table with easy-access seats, on a level and surfaced area close to a new or upgraded path.	£700 / each
16 - Fingerpost	For a fingerpost indicating path direction, distance and destination on a new or upgraded path.	£150 / each
17 - Waymarker post	For a treated timber or recycled plastic waymarker post indicating path direction	£29 / each

	using symbols such as routed arrow, disc and/or colour bands as needed.	
18 - Information panel	For a minimum size A3 information panel sign, mounted on timber posts, to provide information for path users including Scottish Outdoor Access Code advice.	£262 / each

Application requirements

Maps

As part of the application, you must prepare and include two types of maps:

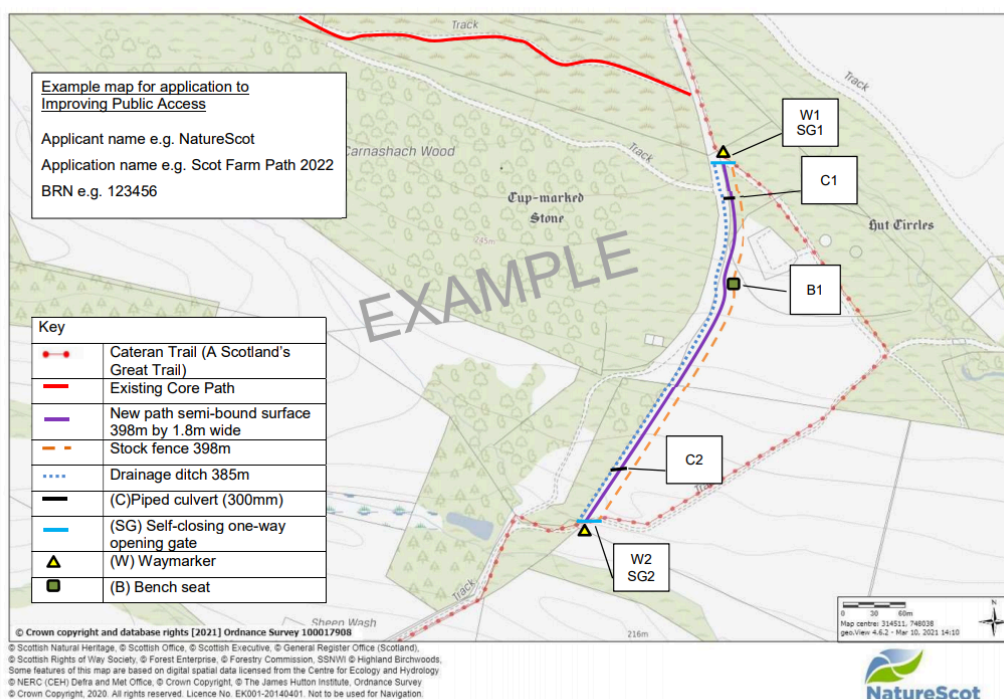
- A **context map** or maps with a clear key/legend that shows the relevant access context within the unit and surrounding area, such as:
 - Core paths
 - Rights of way
 - Cycle routes eg National Cycle Network
 - Trails or longer distance paths eg Scotland's Great Trails
 - Local paths
 - Features of interest

A **capital items map** or maps clearly showing the locations of all the proposed capital items in your application, with a clear key/legend of symbols used for each type and number of capital items as shown in the application schedule of works. The map must have:

- A clear legend using standard symbols and references.
- The exact **width and length** of new and/or upgraded path must be shown
- Any sections of path that have a different width must be clearly marked.
- Locations of each capital item must be mapped as accurately as possible.
- The map must be in colour and easy to read.

For guidance on software available for Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications, see [mapping](#) .

An example of a map for IPA.



Planning your paths

You may find it helpful to use a path professional or agent to help prepare a paths plan. The key aspects to consider identifying the best route alignments, assessing gradients, drainage requirements and signage locations. Refer to the good practice [construction guides](#) available to help plan and design your path and supporting infrastructure. Things to consider include: for:

- The alignment and gradient of the path, taking into account users needs, particularly for a range of users; as well as any access required for construction and materials.
- Drainage requirements to protect the path along its length, considering water flow, and water courses and planning for extreme rainfall events.
- Choice of construction plant machinery, materials, location of quarries, delivery and storage on site
- The locating, sourcing and installation requirements for infrastructure items such as self-closing gates, bridges, boardwalks, seats, retaining walls or stock fencing
- Managing access and people through careful consideration of usability and locating of waymarkers, fingerposts, and information panels that meet national path grading standards and promote the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)
- Planning of your path project in stages to help manage cash flow through interim claims. This is permitted once a line on the Schedule of Works is completed eg the length of path as detailed.

Planning and other consents

Planning permission will be required in most cases of **new path construction**. Applications must provide evidence in the form of a supporting document, showing whether a planning application is required or not. This must be a copy of a letter or e-mail from the planning authority.

If a planning application is required applicants are encouraged to begin the process immediately to avoid any delay should their application be successful. A contract issued to successful applicants would be issued in early 2022, it will not be offered if planning permission is not in place, following a decision to approve. Or alternatively evidence should be provided from your planning authority showing that it is not required.

Occupancy of land

To apply to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, you must either own and occupy the land, have a secure tenancy or have a contractual licence for the land included in the application. If you are not the landowner, then you must submit evidence that you have an agreement in place for the works to take place and be maintained for the required period (5 years from the date of final payment by RPID).

If using a contractual license it must clearly detail and show:

- A map of the land and proposed path
- Dates that extend from January 2022, cover the build year, claim period and 5 years past the anticipated final payment date (this could be up to end 2028)
- Landowner details, agreement to license, for what purpose, to whom and signed/dated.

See '[Occupancy of land](#)' for full details and requirements for contractual licences, landlord declaration form, shared boundary agreement etc.

Additional supporting evidence

You can submit a short access statement that illustrates the support, benefits and added value of the proposed path improvements. This additional information will be considered in the application assessment and scoring.

You can also, where applicable, contact your local access officer (Local authority or national park authority) and request comments in support of your application. They may also suggest improvements to the proposal that could strengthen your application.

Useful references

- [Outdoor Access Design Guide \(Paths for All/NatureScot\)](#)
- [Lowland Path Construction \(NatureScot / Paths for All\)](#)
- [Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access \(NatureScot / Paths for All\)](#)
- [Path Bridges – Planning, Design, Construction and Maintenance – \(NatureScot / Paths for All\)](#)

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

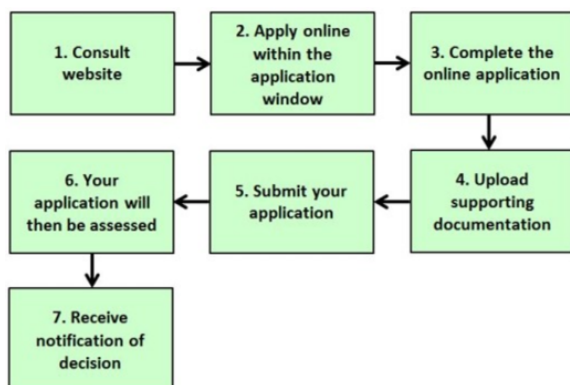
Check list of items required to be submitted with on-line application:

- Context map(s) (showing wider area)
- Capital items map(s) of planned path using standard symbols and legend
- Evidence from Planning Authority of any consents required or otherwise
- Contractual License (if required)
- Supporting documents or statements from Access Authority (local authority or national park authority),

The Rural Payments and Services portal will generate:

- Schedule of works
- Eligibility check list items
- Decision letters/e-mails
- Contracts if application approved
- New contract if variation requested and successful.

Application process



1. Consult website

You should first check the relevant sections of this website to get a better understanding of the rules of the scheme, and to check that you will be eligible to apply.

2. Apply on line within the application window

Your application for support under this scheme must be submitted online by registering and logging in to Rural Payments and Services.

[You can register for this service here.](#)

3. Complete the online application

Once you have logged in to Rural Payments and Services, you will be able to submit an application online.

You can do this by clicking 'Applications' from your customer home page and selecting 'Agri-Environment Climate Scheme' and 'Improving Public Access' from the dropdown list to start a new application.

You will be asked a series of questions about your application.

The application system will prompt you when errors arise during the completion of the application. For example, you will be prompted when information requested at a particular section has not been provided to allow you to progress to the next stage of the application process.

4. Upload supporting documents as described in [Application requirements](#)

5. Submit your application

Once you have completed your application successfully, the system will display a summary of the items you have applied for.

A more detailed Schedule of Works will also be available, setting out the proposed claim profile or payment details for capital items as applicable to your application.

If you are satisfied that the summary and Schedule of Works are in order, you will be asked to confirm you have read the declarations and undertakings.

You will then be directed to click 'Submit application'. An acknowledgment of your application will appear on screen along with your application reference number. This reference number can be used to track the progress of your application.

6. When you submit your application, it will be assigned to a case officer in NatureScot. Applications will undergo an initial assessment by a case officer which may include a discussion with you. Most applications that meet the basic eligibility requirements will have a site visit undertaken by the NatureScot case officer to verify the application details, ensure understanding of scheme requirements and to score the application. See scoring criteria for more information.

Scoring criteria

There is a specific set of [criteria](#) used to score applications for Improving Public Access.

7. Notification of decision

Once your application has been assessed you will be notified as to whether or not your application has been approved or rejected. If your application is approved you will then be sent a contract, which you must sign and return to us.

The contract will specify what the funding is to be used for – this will be based on the information supplied in your application.

We expect you to return the signed contract to your NatureScot case officer within 28 days of the date that the contract was issued. If you do not return the signed contract within 28 days, we will send you a reminder letter.

If you do not return the contract within six weeks of issue then we may cancel your contract.

An Agent, acting as an Accountable Person, can only sign on behalf of a business if they have the mandated authority to do so.

If you are an agent signing a contract on an applicant's business' behalf, the case officer will contact the relevant RPID area office to request confirmation that you have the authority to sign the contract.

Any mandate in place will apply to the office that an agent works from. It does not apply to the agent as an individual.

When the case officer receives the signed contract they will send you a letter confirming receipt. You may only start work when you get that confirmation letter and if you are compliant with any contract conditions or other regulatory requirements such as planning permissions.

You are under no obligation to accept the contract offer. If you decide not to proceed, please tell us and we will cancel the contract. The case officer will formally acknowledge your rejection.

Recent changes

Section	Change
Whole page	Changed to demonstrate how to apply for IPA

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)