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 further revised for 2022. The scheme is open for applications from 28 February 2022 to 29 April 2022.

Requirements

Connectivity

You should 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 interest or a specific feature or destination such as a significant viewpoint, a local landmark, park, nature reserve etc.
- A path which links directly to other paths, including creating new or improved path links to other paths at the boundary of the landholding unit, forming effective connections to another path or the wider path network.

Acessibility

As far as is practical, the new or upgraded paths should be as **accessible as possible** providing barrier free shared multi-use giving access opportunities to most or all types of users such as walkers, cyclists, horse-riders, wheelchair users, adapted bikes and push-chairs. Providing an accessible path for everyone to enjoy and benefit from. They should, where possible:

- Provide gentle gradients (ideally 1:12 or no more than 1:10).
- Have a width of 2 metres (1.8m in previous rounds).
- Avoid the use of steps.
- If gates are required (consider if they are really needed), use two-way self-closing gates (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 and information signage to re-assure and guide users.

Path design and considerations

Paths and path infrastructure must be well designed taking into account environmental factors and the locations characteristics; be fit for purpose and suitable for the anticipated users. Each capital item on the menu of path infrastructure options has its own requirements detailing the minimum specification. In summary you should ensure the new or upgraded path:

- Has adequate **drainage** to prevent water based damage to the path.
- Is ideally constructed to a **2 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.
- **It must be signposted** normally at the start, and end points and any junctions as appropriate.

IPA paths must not be used for motorised use; use as a vehicular, quad, tractor, forest, farm track or similar is not permitted; 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		
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 - 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
3 - 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
4- 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
5 - 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
6 - 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
7 - 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
8 - 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
9 - 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
10 - 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
11 - 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
12 - 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 stock fence adjacent to the new or upgraded path where justified, but not across the new or upgraded path. Stock fence only eligible if required to safeguard the path from livestock damage.	£5.50 / metre £170 each

13 - Bench seat	For a timber bench on a level and surfaced area close to a new or upgraded path.	£350 / each
14 - 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
15 - Fingerpost	For a fingerpost indicating path direction, distance and destination on a new or upgraded path.	£150 / each
16 - 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.	
17 - Information panel	For a minimum size A3 information panel sign, mounted on timber posts, to provide information for path users.	£262 / each

Application requirements

There are a number of documents and details that are required as part of your application, please ensure these are provided to ensure the application is eligible and not rejected before assessment:

- An accurate schedule of works (RP&S on-line).
- Map(s) – capital items - to the required standard and reflecting schedule of works detail (supporting document).
- Map(s) – context - showing the access/path locations (supporting document).
- A statement from the planning authority for all IPA applications (supporting document).
- A valid Contractual license (if not the landowner or tenant) must meet scheme guidance requirements (supporting document signed, dated and including map).
- Supporting evidence which may include an access statement and/or letters of support for the proposals including from the access authority.

Further detail on these requirements is provided below:

Maps

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

A **context map** or maps preferably colour and 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 (SoWs). The map must have:

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

Capital items maps will be used for the site based assessments and for contracts in any successful applications, it is therefore **essential that the maps are accurate**, easy to understand and relate directly to the proposals and their position on the ground.

For guidance on software available for Agri-Environment Climate Scheme applications, see mapping .

An example of a map for IPA.
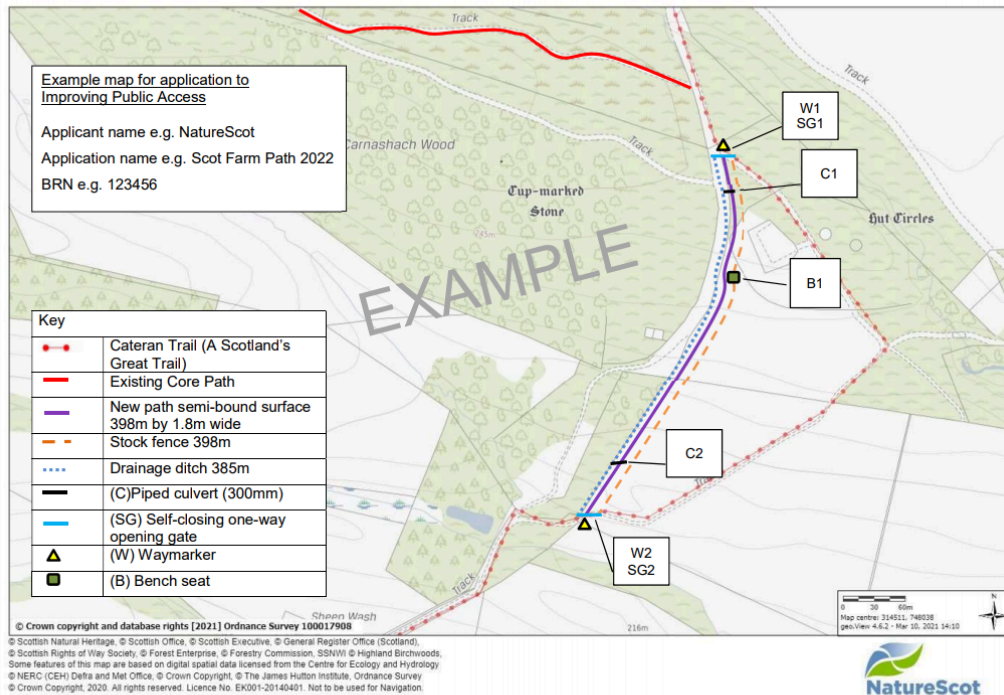
Planning and designing your paths

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:

- The alignment, width and gradient of the path (keep gradients low eg 1:12 or 1:10) 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 ideally meet national path grading standards and promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code
- Planning of your path project in stages this may help manage cash flow through interim claims. This can be done by claiming once a line on the Schedule of Works is completed.

Planning permission and other consents

Planning permission will be required in most cases of **new path construction** and maybe required for upgrades or new infrastructure such as bridges. **All applicants must contact their planning authority and 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 relevant planning authority, and for the paths as proposed for IPA.

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 2023 normally Feb/March, it will not be offered if planning permission is not in place.

Occupancy of land

To apply to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme and IPA, you must either: ·

- Own and occupy the land,
- have a secure tenancy or
- have a valid contractual licence for the land included in the application.

If you are not the landowner, then you must submit a contractual license as evidence that you have a signed agreement (include a path location map), in place agreeing to the proposed path works and to the five year maintenance period which must be specified (a minimum of 5 years from the date of final payment by RPID).

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

- A clear map of the land and proposed path.
- Dates that extend from January 2023, covering the build year, claim period and 5 years past the anticipated final payment date (this should allow for up to the end of 2029).
- 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. NatureScot will also contact the access authority to notify them of all eligible applications and seek comment as part of the assessment process.

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 (NatureScot / Forestry Commission Scotland / Paths for All)

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
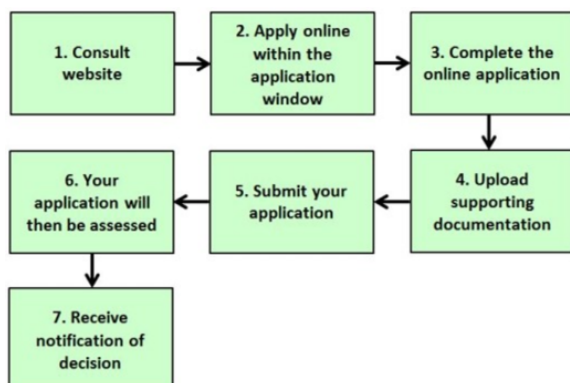
1. Consult website

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 (please check this carefully), 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 eligibility assessment by a case officer. Most applications that meet the basic eligibility requirements will have a site visit and applicant discussion 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. Scoring is used to rank the applications and set a threshold, as IPA is a competitive scheme with only the higher scoring applications receiving funding, subject to the available budget.

Applicants should read the score criteria to help shape their applications.

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, once any planning permission has been obtained, 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.

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	Updated to explain how to apply for IPA in 2022 application round.

Previous versions

Previous versions of this page