

# Natural England Standard Public Engagement on Natural England's National Nature Reserves



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## 1:0 About this standard

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### Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of the NNR Public Engagement Standard is to provide a framework within which Natural England can fulfill its aim to “Engage the public with their natural environment by providing local places where they can experience, enjoy and participate in looking after their natural heritage”.
- 1.2 We have developed a series of principles to guide this work, each of which addresses an outcome we expect to see delivered at all NNRs, as far as is practicable. Within each principle are one or more activities to be undertaken in order to meet the standard. These are sufficiently broad to enable all NNRs to progress within this framework whilst recognising the unique features and situation at each site. These principles are listed below and expanded at Section 2, which provides a fuller explanation and guidance around delivery.
- 1.3 Natural England has also developed Management Standards for all NNRs, including those managed by Approved Bodies. The NNR Public Engagement Standard supports the elements of the Management Standards that relate to public enjoyment, provision of information for visitors, and community and stakeholder involvement. Natural England's [Engagement Standard](#) provides further context.

### Who is this standard for?

- 1.4 This standard is primarily for Natural England's NNR reserve staff and engagement specialists across the People and Access team. There is likely to be an overlap with the wider work of the Access and Engagement Function. It is not intended for NNR Approved Bodies, though we will share it with them for consideration if they wish to aspire to it.

## Principles of Public Engagement at NNRs

- 1.5 All NNRs are different in what they can offer the local community and other visitors, and the degree to which that potential is already realised. To enable all NNRs to participate in this programme, we have developed the following principles which are relevant to all NNRs and towards which all can progress.
- i. Natural England's NNRs are known about in the local community.
  - ii. People feel welcome and able to visit our NNRs.
  - iii. In advance of their visit, people can find out about the reserve and how to reach it.
  - iv. During their visit, people can find out about the special features of the NNRs and, where possible, have the opportunity to learn about these and experience them directly.
  - v. Our NNRs are accessible to as wide a range of visitors as possible.
  - vi. People have an opportunity to strengthen their connection with and enjoyment of the NNR.
  - vii. Our public engagement on NNRs complements other organisations, facilities and greenspace in the local area.

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## 2:0 The Standard

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- 2.1 The objective of this Standard is that all NNRs will maximize their potential to engage the local community. Not all NNRs will be able to meet all the standards to the same extent, but all are expected to make progress along the lines suggested, as far as is practicable in light of local circumstances and resourcing. They will also be expected to provide a record of the work taken towards meeting each standard. Where a standard is not fully met, the rationale for this must be explained.
- 2.2 The order in which the principles and standards are listed does not indicate that they be tackled in that sequence. Ideally, before developing an action plan the needs and aspirations of the local community should be explored to find out what they would like us to provide at the NNR. This will encourage community involvement and support, and give communities the opportunity to help us deliver. In this way, we seek to maximize positive outcomes for the NNR and for the local community. As far as possible, we will engage with the whole breadth of people who comprise the local community, giving particular attention to those with whom we do not currently engage.
- 2.3 The points given in column 2 of the table below are the minimum actions that should be undertaken towards each principle. Column 3 includes some ideas of ways to deliver the standard and links to additional sources of information.

These are only ideas: not all will be relevant on all NNRs, and there are likely to be other options to explore.

- 2.4 For those NNRs where public access is restricted, we should seek ways to fulfill the principles to some extent – for example, publishing information on the website and/or providing a limited programme of guided walks or volunteering opportunities where the landowner gives permission.

## NNR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STANDARDS

Principle	Minimum activities to be undertaken	Options and suggestions
<b>1. Natural England's NNRs are known about in the local community</b>	<b>1.1 Information is published locally about the reserve.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify places or means of connecting with the local community – e.g. Parish magazines, partners' newsletters, village shop, pub, notice boards, at partners' reserves, doctors' surgeries, schools etc.</li> <li>• Consider providing regular news updates on the NNR.</li> <li>• Small numbers of leaflets or information sheets could be made available at local outlets e.g. village shop, village hall, pub etc</li> <li>• Encourage Volunteers/Supporters Groups to maintain their own notice board, with information about opportunities, events, arrangements for and content of work parties etc. They could also be invited to participate in other ways, e.g. draft articles for local magazines</li> </ul>
<b>2. People feel welcome and able to visit our NNRs</b>	<b>2.1 Gain insight into the needs of the local community</b> so that the opportunities we provide are relevant to their interests/needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methods to gain insight include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Discussions with visitors, volunteers, partners, local academic institutions etc;</li> <li>○ Provide a simple feedback form, available at events or for informal visitors to complete and leave in a collection box;</li> <li>○ Ask the Advisory or Volunteering Group to help collect this information, or comment on management plans.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<b>2.2 Website text and signage makes clear that people are welcome to visit</b> the reserve (making clear any restrictions).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and update existing website text (note: this will be undertaken in 2012/13 as a separate programme).</li> <li>• Update the wording when the signs are next replaced. Include information on access, car parking etc, and ask the local community what other information they would find useful.</li> </ul>
	<b>2.3 Welcome signs are in</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signage is particularly important where Rights of Way or</li> </ul>

	<p><b>place</b> at all main access points to the NNR</p>	<p>waymarked routes enter the reserve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Off-site signs (e.g. on approach roads) are helpful but not mandatory as it is not always feasible to install them.</li> <li>• A noticeboard could be installed at the main entrance(s) which can be updated with information about wildlife sightings, events and any current management information</li> <li>• The signs guidance notes and templates are available for Natural England staff, including current information about the signage programme was provided in NNR notes 69 (currently).</li> </ul>
	<p><b>2.4 Entrance points, waymarked routes and all infrastructure are maintained in good condition</b>, free from litter and vegetation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This should be undertaken routinely as part of site management, alongside a regular assessment of visitor safety.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>2.5 Investigate demand for proactive engagement (e.g. guided visits/events) for local people and meet these as far as resources allow</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the potential to engage local communities more proactively. Discussions with local people, volunteers, visitors at events etc may provide insight into what would be relevant.</li> <li>• Volunteers provide a good link to the local community, and may be able to help as they will have wider contacts.</li> <li>• Think about all groups that make up the local community, not just your usual visitors (include diversity and 'hard to reach' groups in your planning, where possible). Schools and other local groups may provide a means to attract families as well as children.</li> <li>• Advertise events locally using free outlets and in places that may attract new participants.</li> <li>• An event resources kit is available within each area team to support open days etc. More information about events management support, promotion, production of events calendars and publicising events is available to Natural England staff.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wherever possible, advertise your event on the NNR Events Finder (available on the NE Internet). It is important to get details to the <a href="#">Events team</a> before 5th of the month if you want them uploaded for that month.</li> <li>• Engagement specialists in the People &amp; Access team may be able to provide support and ideas and, where there is capacity, may be able to help with delivering the event. Volunteers should also be invited to help with planning and delivery of events, and partners or other supporters may be prepared to get involved.</li> <li>• Consider what other visitor opportunities are offered in the locality, and aim to fill a gap in provision where appropriate.</li> <li>• Aim to recover the cost of events by making a small charge, where this does not act as a deterrent to local people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. In advance of their visit, people can find out about the reserve and how to reach it</b></p>	<p><b>3.1 Website information is up to date and in the current format</b>, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a downloadable information sheet/leaflet; and</li> <li>• information about transport options and availability of parking in the area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website information should explain the designated features of the reserve and their importance and, if access is restricted, when/where people can visit.</li> <li>• The website information should be in the format currently adopted by the Web team.</li> <li>• Include links to any relevant information or research about the reserve which might provide visitors with a better understanding of the importance of the reserve</li> <li>• Maps provided on NNR leaflets should incorporate wider access network and include details of main car parking and public transport facilities</li> <li>• Consider what information is necessary in respect of children and less able visitors</li> <li>• If the NNR is remote from the nearest road or public transport stop, website information should give basic directions, location of the nearest car park or provide links to eg Transport Direct</li> </ul>

		<p>website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place information on or links to web sites relevant to local area eg village web sites, AONBs, Hidden Britain etc.</li> <li>• Guidance for the following is available to Natural England staff, and includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Guidance on producing hard copy leaflets</li> <li>○ Example <a href="#">waymark trail sheets</a>.</li> <li>○ Templates for welcome sheets, guided trails information, upcoming events calendars and guidance notes.</li> <li>○ Online training for using software is available through Skillport.</li> <li>○ Guidance on visitor travel plans.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>3.2 Contact details are available and a process in place to follow up enquiries.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All calls should be responded to within 2 working days. If the contact telephone is not checked at least 2 days, forward calls to another number.</li> <li>• NE central Enquiries line is 0845 600 3078.</li> <li>• Follow-up of enquiries is an important aspect of our Customer Service Excellence work. Guidance is available on the Natural England internal website.</li> <li>• NNR staff should wear branded clothing when on site, and be prepared to answer any questions. (Volunteers should also be encouraged to do so.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. During their visit, people can find out about the special features of the reserve and, where possible,</b></p>	<p><b>4.1 On-site information is provided</b> about where people should go to see features of interest on-site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This could be through provision of signage, a self-guided trail or, where the site is small, an orientation panel or notice board (subject to budget). Include information on access provision, car parking and any restrictions.</li> <li>• Volunteers available on-site at peak times or during events can</li> </ul>

<p><b>have the opportunity to learn about these and experience them directly</b></p>		<p>provide useful information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice boards could explain information about ongoing management and what makes the reserve important to the local community (e.g. special features, ecosystems services etc)</li> <li>• Provide a simple activity pack with signage or a leaflet to provide information about what people are looking at. Consider the needs of children and less able groups as well as your adult visitors.</li> <li>• Best of Both Worlds website gives best practice guidance on access planning, managing visitor risk perceptions etc <a href="http://www.bobw.co.uk">www.bobw.co.uk</a></li> <li>• Natural England is reviewing whether new technology (e.g. apps, QR codes, sound posts, podcasts etc) are worth pursuing.</li> <li>• Guidance for the following is available to Natural England staff, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Guidance on signage,</li> <li>○ New technologies case studies,</li> <li>○ Use of e-comms and <a href="#">Natural England's twitter</a> account.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>4.2 Consider the potential to engage wider audiences and meet this as far as resources enable</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some NNRs may be significant at a regional or national scale for engaging the public around the natural environment. We should recognise such potential where it exists and take steps to develop corresponding engagement programmes, where resources allow.</li> <li>• Provide feedback questionnaires at events. Feedback from these will help gain insight into the needs and aspirations of our visitors, and help us improve and make relevant the opportunities we provide.</li> <li>• When developing opportunities for new audiences, consider their abilities and expectations (which may be different from your</li> </ul>



		<p>regular visitors). For engaging with disabled audiences, work with the Sensory Trust in 2012 provides guidance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where our own resources prevent us implementing enhanced programmes, we will consider the opportunities offered by working in partnership with others, including groups within the community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Our NNRs are accessible to as wide a range of visitors as possible</b></p>	<p><b>5.1 Accessibility of the site is enhanced as far as practicable, in light of all groups who comprise the local community</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As much of the reserve as possible is available for visitors to explore. Where restrictions are necessary on grounds of nature conservation, safety, land management etc, these are the minimum necessary to meet the need.</li> <li>• Consider the needs of cyclists and horse-riders (where permitted on site) with clear signage as to routes where this is permitted. This should be co-ordinated with any facilities etc for higher rights users arising from the Access Dedication programme.</li> <li>• Children and elderly visitors may need special consideration: think through these in light of the terrain, length of trails etc.</li> <li>• Providing events for school/family groups is a good way to create links to the local community and attract wider audiences.</li> <li>• Consideration should be given to providing a disabled access route. Where this is not easily achievable, remove any easily-moved obstacles from principal routes. Consider replacing stiles on main routes with suitable gates.</li> <li>• If there is a particular demand from a local group with special needs, work with them to provide specific facilities e.g. tapping rails for partially sighted, sound posts for hard of hearing (guidance from Sensory Trust to follow)</li> <li>• Photographs of the main route(s) could be placed on the website to illustrate the site and any obstacles (see Direct Enquiries website for examples, at <a href="http://www.directenquiries.com">www.directenquiries.com</a> )</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide links to NNR web page from local diversity groups websites (and vice versa)</li> <li>• Ensure any specific facilities are actively promoted to groups who will benefit from them</li> <li>• Guidance for the following is available to Natural England staff, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ guidance on Visitor Engagement Planning</li> <li>○ online training on Equalities responsibilities, which is recommended for all staff (and volunteers, if appropriate)</li> <li>○ guidance from the Sensory Trust provides advice on facilitation access for</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Management Plan should record the steps taken to assist accessibility by wider audiences.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. People have an opportunity to strengthen their connection with and enjoyment of the NNR.</b></p>	<p><b>6.1 Opportunities to get involved in management of the reserve are available and drawn to the attention of local people</b> e.g. through volunteering, a Supporters'/advisory Group, or other means.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our engagement with people should let them know that we welcome their involvement in the management of the reserve. Identify who they can contact if interested</li> <li>• Where there is sufficient interest, consider setting up a volunteering group, supporters' group or other advisory group, so that local people have an opportunity to be involved in some way. You could consider holding a meeting locally to gauge support.</li> <li>• Where interest is limited, you could hold an open day or other annual event to enable local people to find out more about the reserve. If the reserve is remote, this could be in a village hall or pub nearby.</li> <li>• Consider working jointly with local partners to share a volunteer or supporters group that works across two or more sites.</li> <li>• Where there is potentially strong local interest but limited NNR staff time to manage it, consider other management options, which could include partnership arrangements or training a</li> </ul>

		<p>volunteer to help co-ordinate activities. See Supporters' Group guidance for the range of options.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where there is little local interest or no local 'community' in the vicinity, an existing group at another reserve within reasonable travelling distance could be invited to get involved. Occasional volunteering days of guided visits to explore options and/or initiate interest at the new reserve could be offered.</li> <li>• Guidance for the following is available to Natural England staff, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">volunteering guidance and/or website pages</a>,</li> <li>○ supporters' group guidance (including case studies).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Our public engagement on NNRs complements other organisations, greenspaces and facilities in the local area</b></p>	<p><b>7.1 Assess what public engagement is offered by potential partners and explore opportunities for joint or complementary working.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners, volunteers and local people as far as possible to help create links and sharing of resources/effort.</li> <li>• Meet with local managers of reserves, greenspace etc to explore opportunities for joint working and/or co-ordination of activities.</li> <li>• Work with neighbours, partners and Local Access Forums to integrate the NNR in the local access network</li> <li>• Where partners offer a range of engagement opportunities, consider establishing a partnership of key stakeholders (eg local authority, other conservation organisations, private landowners, community interest groups) that can meet periodically to discuss joint working or mutual support.</li> <li>• Volunteers or other supporters could be involved in developing and delivering a programme of activities</li> <li>• If there is a Local Access Forum or other Greenspace forum in the locality, find out whether information about the NNR can be circulated to members.</li> </ul>

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**Quick reference**

<b>Type of Standard</b>	Operational Standard.
<b>Purpose:</b>	To set out common principles for the provision of public engagement at all Natural England's National Nature Reserves, and a framework within which to enhance delivery.
<b>Owner(s):</b>	Access & Engagement (National Nature Reserves)
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0.1	Draft v0.1	Susanna Perkins	24 May 2012
0.2	Amended to include comments from internal circulation	Susanna Perkins	11 July 2012
0.3	Amended to include comments following user testing	Susanna Perkins	22 Mar 2013
1.0	Final version signed off by Amanda Craig and Liz Newton	Fiona Markwick	25 March 2013