

Norfolk Trails Path Survey Manual

Introduction

The aim of this guidance is to enable volunteers to assess the condition of the Norfolk Trails in a consistent manner across the entire Network. *This is a long document, but our volunteers are not expected to know it off by heart.*

The key elements are to get an understanding of what to look out for when surveying (i.e. what standard is acceptable) and where standards aren't met the distinction between the categories.

- *The Green category is the standard we aim to achieve. This means that the route is easy to use, safe and well waymarked.*
- *Yellow category relates to issues that need addressing but are not immediate health and safety issues or issues that present a hazard to our users .*
- *Red category issues are those that need immediate attention and include health and safety issues and the safety of our users.*

This is important because we want to ensure the path is maintained to the high standard that can be expected for a number of routes that are used by thousands annually and attracts visitors from around the world. Undertaking this survey and keeping it regularly updated will greatly help the management of the path by:

- Providing an inventory of all infrastructure
- Recording where the path or infrastructure does not meet the Trail Quality Standards to guide work programmes.
- Identifying potential projects that would improve the enjoyment of walkers.
- Providing the Norfolk Trails team with an accurate assessment of the condition of the measured against Trail Quality Standards, and how these change over time.

Whilst we do not have the resources to resolve immediately all the issues that will be identified during the survey, recording them is still useful in demonstrating where improvements are needed. These will form the basis for funding bids to make them happen.

Infrastructure

All items of path infrastructure (gates, stiles, bridges, signs etc.) should meet two key quality standards:

- Structures are always safe, comfortable, easy and convenient to use. *Ease of use is especially important on well used sections of the trails that are used by 'casual' walkers.*
- Consistent high quality design, style and use of materials to suit the character of the local landscape with historical features maintained where possible. *i.e. wood and stone should be generally used rather than metal or plastic, so that they look nice rather than purely being functional.*

We have asked that volunteers checking our trails to colour code their response after conducting the audit.

This will allow the trails team to prioritise the response required to the reports we receive. It is worth noting at this point that the work that our volunteers carry out is incredibly valuable to Norfolk Trails and we appreciate every report form we receive. We have received feedback from volunteers asking for more communication and we are currently working on this and will try to provide both more information and more support for our volunteers.

Condition categories

Condition	Grade to be recorded
Meets all Quality Standards	Green
Structure is in need of maintenance as is no longer functional, or difficult to use. If it is hazardous (e.g. rotten structure, protruding nails, slippery) or unusable (e.g. structure broken and can't be bypassed) please also report ASAP to the trail officer.	Red
Structure awkward to use, or is an unsightly design or materials. i.e. maintenance or replacement desirable rather than essential.	Yellow
Structure missing – but still needed.	Red
No longer needed and detracts from user experience sufficiently to require removal (rather than wait for it to fall down).	Yellow
If item is no longer present, but there is no need to replace it, delete it from the survey.	Yellow
If currently recorded as 'Redundant – Retain', it is because the item is no longer needed, but does not cause sufficient visual intrusion, hazard, or barrier to warrant the effort of removing it. But when it eventually falls down / disappears, it won't be replaced.	Yellow but with an additional note
Structure still functional and safe, but likely to need replacing in next year or so.	Green but with an additional note

Barriers – notes

There are several different types of barrier that may be recorded by surveyors:

- **Safety:** These prevent access to cliffs or other hazards. Please include areas where fence lines are needed
- **Prevention:** These are typically barriers to stop people taking short cuts across zig-zag paths or to manage unauthorised access to Norfolk Trails.
- **Chicane:** These are off-set barriers across a path to deter cyclists or restrict access by cattle and horses.
- **Bollards:** Set in the middle of the path to prevent vehicular access

Safety fencing on cliff tops - notes

Fences are often intrusive in the landscape, introduce an additional maintenance liability and can encourage a false sense of security (people lean or sit on them!). This is guidance is when fencing should installed as opposed to less intrusive options, such as warning signs, moving the path away from edges, or merely expecting users to be capable of dealing with the risk. In summary, safety fencing should be considered only in locations where the risk is high, and other measures are not deemed sufficiently effective, such as:

- To use rollback process following a cliff fall
- Around car parks situated very close to a cliff edge and sections of path with an urban feel, where users may not be immediately aware of the dangers or it is likely that many children will not be under close supervision. Many car parks are owned and managed by other organisations such as district authorities so highlighting fencing will assist with making sure the public are safe
- On heavily used sections of path where exposure to the cliff edge is short and infrequent and it is not feasible to move the Coast Path away from the edge.
- Where feasible, and resources allow, hedges, stone or earth banks to match local styles will be used as these are less intrusive and require less maintenance.

Issue	Grading to record
Safety barriers not effectively restricting access to hazard.	Red (if a fence is needed in that location. This can be reported to the authority managing that area or car park)
Rotten Structure / missing rails.	Red.
Unattractive design or materials.	Yellow
Missing.	Yellow. Often barriers are no longer needed if vegetation restricts access.

Removed.

Delete from survey

Boardwalks and bridges – common issues

Norfolk County Council has a bridges section and they are responsible for bridges on public rights of way. Any bridges on Norfolk trails need to be assessed as part of the inspection process. If there is an issue the Trail Officer will use the information to report to the bridges section.

If it is easy to do safely, please check under bridges for signs of bank erosion undermining the abutments.

Issue	Grading to record
Steps, decking or handrails missing or unsafe.	Red
Supporting structures damaged or defective.	Red
Rotten Structure.	Red
Unattractive design or materials.	Yellow
Missing: A bridge or other means of crossing is required for any watercourse wider than 2 feet and 4" deep in normal conditions.	Red
No longer needed, but does not cause undue visual intrusion, hazard, or barrier to warrant effort of removing. But when it eventually falls down / disappears, there is no need to replace it.	Yellow
No longer needed and detracts from user experience sufficiently to require removal (rather than wait for it to fall down).	Yellow

Cut-offs / cross drains – notes

These are timber or stone barriers that are used to deflect water flowing along a path into a ditch to the side. They are an essential feature on steep sections of path that prevent the surface being washed out and the path gullying, but are only effective if maintained. The ditches are easily blocked by leaves and other debris – but can often be cleared merely with a boot. Doing this can prevent the cut-off being over topped during storms and so greatly reduce the erosive power of the water.

Common issues:

Issue	Grading to record
Blocked, not catching water, or water can't escape.	Red
Additional cut-offs needed because path is gullying.	Yellow. If more than 5 needed, record as path surface issue.

Gates – common issues

Issue	Grading to record
Too narrow - judged by a kissing gate being too small to get through with a large rucksack.	Yellow - unless permanent alternative gap beside
Difficult to open, close or swing.	Yellow
Immovable / inoperable e.g. secured shut by (tightly knotted) twine, rope, chain or wire.	Red
Barbed or electric wire or protruding nails attached to hand or catch area.	Red
Muddy or puddle in kissing gate enclosure that can't be easily avoided.	On popular sections Red if more than 1" deep – i.e. passable in trainers; Red if in more rural / remote sections water / mud should be no more than 2" deep – i.e. passable in hiking boots.
Unattractive design or materials.	Yellow
Latch not working properly.	Green , unless it creates a Hazard – e.g. has sharp edges in which case record as Yellow and report ASAP. Maintaining latches so that gates can be easily secured for stock is something a landowner can reasonably be expected to do (but please note it in the survey). If it is a very recent breakage, is worth letting Trail officer know.
Missing.	Yellow. Generally not applicable as gates are only needed if landowner requests one, and a gap is preferable.

Steps – common issues

Issue	Grading to record
Steps too high / extra step required i.e. higher than 8" rise in well used sections, or higher than a 12" rise in more remote / rugged locations.	Yellow
Protruding stakes or step boards (if sufficient to cause trip hazard or make it difficult to use for a typical user in that location).	Yellow or Red depending on whether it seems hazardous or just awkward to use.
Boards slipped (this is often a sign of coastal slope instability).	Yellow or Red depending on whether it seems hazardous or just awkward to use.
Poor step surface / need stone clearing off treads.	Yellow or Red depending on whether it seems hazardous or just awkward to use.
Rotten or missing step boards	Yellow (if slope is sufficient to need steps).

Stiles – notes

- There is an assumption that stiles will be replaced in order to minimise any obstructions to access. The first point will be to remove any obstruction and then go through a process of assessing an adequate replacement where required that does not hinder access.
- If a new fence is put across the path, than authorisation is required by the landowner in advance from the Highway Authority for a new stile – but generally permission will only be granted for a gate. So if new stiles appear, please check with the Trail Officer as to whether they have been authorised. These then need to be added to the definitive map and recorded.

Stiles – common issues

Issue	Grading to record
Hand / foothold missing or unsafe. Stile missing a handhold on summit.	Generally Yellow but it could be Green if it is still relatively easy to climb or get around with minimal risk to users. If it is hazardous it should also be reported directly to the path manager as a Red issue
Difficult to climb – as a gauge it should be less than 500mm (20 inches) between ground and 1 st step and between steps and less than 750mm (30 inches) between top step and rail.	Yellow or Red depending on how well used and otherwise level the path is.

Slippery surface.	Yellow
Barbed or electric wire or protruding nails attached to hand or foot hold.	Red
No access for dogs – either by having a lift up post, or a gap beside.	Yellow
Poor landing (i.e. muddy, slippery or uneven).	Yellow or Red depending whether you consider it unsafe or inconvenient.
Rotten structure / missing rails.	Red if unsafe and needs immediate attention. Yellow if still functional but will need replacing in next year or two.
Unattractive design or materials.	Yellow
Replacing it with a gate would greatly improve accessibility for users – i.e. is on an easy section of path with few other obstacles, or there has never been a stile there before.	Yellow
Missing.	Generally not applicable as stiles are only needed if landowner requests one. These are likely to be gates to promote better access and NCC no longer installs as part of trail management.
Removed.	Delete from survey – please note on report
No longer needed, but does not cause undue visual intrusion, hazard, or barrier to warrant effort of removing. But when it eventually falls down / disappears, there is no need to replace it (unless the landowner insists on it).	Redundant remove – please add as a note to the inspection

Signing and waymarking

The Norfolk Trails Quality Standards we aim to meet are:

- The route is easy to follow with consistent, accurate, unobtrusive waymarking and destination signage.
- Consistent high quality design, style and use of materials to suit the character of the local landscape with historical features maintained where possible.

*In practice what we are trying to achieve is that walkers should be able to easily follow the Trails without having to refer to a map, and **all signs should be easily identifiable, easy to follow and have the appropriate way marking (acorn for National trail, Pink for linear, Blue for circular)**, and be attractively designed using materials (normally wood, stone or cast metal) that fit into the landscape.*

Where there are alternative routes which are of comparable quality - i.e through towns signage should still direct people to the trail route.

There is a certain amount of subjectivity to this, as there is a balance to be struck between making route finding clear and cluttering up the landscape with too many signs. No matter how many signs there are, some people will still manage to go the wrong way – so use your judgement as to what is reasonable.

Main access points: notes

These are the locations where people join the Trails such as car parks, edges of villages or junctions with other well used paths. At these locations, as well as accurate directional information and the waymarking, signs should offer additional information where appropriate – distance to next town village, facilities available etc

Other sign locations: notes

- Where only directional information is required, this can be achieved with a waymark post or similar. Whilst desirable, it is not a requirement to have bespoke words or distance & destination information. These can be used to re-enforce the route for new walkers.

Signs: Common issues

Issue	Grading to record
Route not clear to a 'typical' walker. Inaccurate direction.	Red if urgent and route unclear, Yellow if this is an improvement Red if sufficiently out of line to send walkers in the wrong direction. Yellow if this is for additional clarity
Not using appropriate signage: Such as acorn logo on national trail / Norfolk Trails approved waymarking on Other trails.	Red
In wrong location.	Red - if sufficiently out of line to send walkers in the wrong direction.
Overgrown or not clearly visible.	Either Red or Yellow; depending on the importance of having a directional sign in that location. Should be picked up by grass cutting contract please report on form

Insecure post.

Yellow – but only if likely to imminently fall over, and can't be firmed up by pushing a few stones in beside it. Do not test each sign, as this can make them wobbly!

Post out of ground.

If still needed **Red**. If it could be re-used, please alert the Trail Officer ASAP, and put the post somewhere where it's not likely to be removed. If possible please replace and make firm by treading into the ground.

Rotten or broken post or finger arm, illegible or faded text.

Red

Main access point sign missing Path Name, Destination, Distance or not showing side route.

Red

No status shown (if higher status than footpath – e.g. bridleway).

Red. Arrows should be the correct colour to match status:

Yellow – Public Footpath

Blue – Public Bridleway

Red or Black – Public Byway

Other – Permitted path (but ideally yellow or blue)

Other way marking should be included to ensure information is available for users

Signed one-way only.

Red - but only if there is a need to sign both ways

Warning signs: notes

In common with the other mitigation measures, the need for a warning sign is closely linked to the number and experience of the typical walkers on that section, with signs only rarely being necessary in remote or rugged wild areas. It is important to ensure that we do not detract from the beauty of these remote or wild areas by putting up signs that 'state the obvious'. The expectation is that walkers are capable of recognising that cliff top walks are hazardous, footpaths that run next to rivers and across roads and are sensible enough to avoid putting themselves at undue risk.

Examples of appropriate locations where it may be appropriate to install a warning sign include;

- Where the hazard created by the cliff edge or river edge is not obvious to the typical type of walker found on that section. For instance overhanging or unstable cliffs close to the path, and where there is evidence of people walking out to the edge, particularly on well-used sections.
- Where the path passes from a 'safe' honeypot / urban fringe area to an area where the user is suddenly exposed to an unfenced cliff edge. In these locations, generally there is some infrastructure to which the sign can be attached to. This can be similar to river bank sections where there has been river bank erosion.
- Where the path has been diverted slightly inland around a slip, (coastal access only) signs can be added to the barriers, or waymarks placed at each end to deter use of the old path.
- Where there is a known history of accidents or reported problems.

To enable a consistent approach to be made along any trails that may be subject to these types of risk warning signs can be installed by members of Trails Team.

Other signs: notes

- Any intimidating/threatening/misleading signs e.g. "keep out" or unqualified "Private" signs are NOT acceptable and should be reported ASAP.
- A "Bull in Field" type is acceptable regardless of whether Bull is present, (but some authorities don't accept them as they are deemed to be over-threatening; if the bull is dangerous it shouldn't be there, as in next example, if not dangerous warning is superfluous but alarming) but "Danger – Bull in Field" is not acceptable as animals known to present a risk should not be in fields crossed by public rights of way. The landowner has a duty of care to members of the public using footpaths that run over their land. Please report this to trail officers.
- "Private Road" and similar are acceptable, but only if the Trail is also correctly signed at the same place.

Path route and surface

Norfolk Trails Quality Standards:

To enable as many people as possible to enjoy a wide variety of walking experiences the route of the Path should:

- Be easily accessible, matched to terrain and landscape and a connection of the trail with the landscape, nature and history - i.e. the path is aligned to follow a route that is attractive, passes interesting and scenic places and is not unnecessarily arduous.
- Have a surface in good condition and appropriate to the geology and soils over which the trail passes – i.e. minimal mud, with artificial surfacing minimised outside of urban areas. In rural areas, surfacing material should be in keeping with the location.
- Be readily passable and free from undergrowth and overhanging vegetation – i.e. not overgrown.
- Have safe road and rail crossings, and where possible be traffic free - i.e. aligned to minimise risk of being run over, and where it runs along busy roads, have footways or verges that are managed to give walkers adequate refuge.
- Have conservation measures within the trail corridor that protect and/or improve habitats or historic features – i.e. land either side of the path well managed to protect wildlife and heritage.

Recording path issues:

Volunteers should record all locations where they consider the path does not meet these standards and aspirations.

Priority:

Each issue should also be prioritised as either:

- **Red:** Obstruction, or presents risk to users or if not repaired surface will deteriorate further (i.e. stitch in time needed)
- **Yellow:** Passable with care, but doesn't meet the standard you would expect of a National Trail approach to managing trails and improving it would significantly improve walker's experience.

Also please record:

- **Length:** An estimate in metres of the length affected.
- **Duration:** If problems are seasonal e.g. mud and standing water, record the approximate number of months each year walkers are likely to encounter the problem.

Path issues - surface

Our aim is to provide a good walking surface, which is not unnecessarily challenging. Make a note where you encounter locations where you don't think it is up to the standard you'd expect for a Norfolk Trail.

Generally if it is a recent issue please record as a **Yellow** issue and if it is a long-standing issue record as **Red** issue as this will help prioritise work.

Issue	Notes / examples
Path too narrow.	If terrain permits, on well used sections it is desirable that the path is wide enough for two walkers to walk side by side, and for walkers to easily pass each other. 1.2 metres wide as a minimum. Where the trail is also legally shared with cyclists or horse riders it should be 3 metres wide.
Standing / running water or is muddy / wet.	Record if awkward to step over or around for typical user. In dry weather (possibly summer?) you should be able to walk the entire path in trainers. After periods of rain, then sections of unavoidable mud or water should not overtop hiking boots (i.e. max 4") on rural or rugged sections of the path, whilst heavily used sections should still be passable year round wearing trainers. If due to excess animal grazing please record that in the notes.
Slippery surface.	Take into account the type of footwear typical walkers on that section are likely to be wearing.
Uneven surface / difficult walking.	Record if difficult for typical walker in that area, and there is potential to improve it.
People erosion - path wide or braided.	Record if there is a realistic scope to reduce the visual impact of the path by getting people to stay within a narrower strip (e.g. by surfacing) and to restore the vegetation either side.
Water erosion - path gullied.	This is where the volume of water is eroding the surface and so better drainage is needed to divert it off the path.

Path issues – vegetation

Stopping the path from becoming overgrown (along with dealing with coastal erosion) is the most expensive and challenging element of maintaining the path. Each year, over **(Sharon please add in the right figure here from our cutting contract)** of vegetation cutting is undertaken on the Norfolk trails network alone.

The timing of each cut is critical. If done too early the vegetation will quickly recover and it will need doing again within a few weeks – particularly during a warm wet spring.

It can also damage wild flowers which benefit from having the more vigorous plants controlled. If cut too late the path can become difficult to walk as the surface is not easy to see, and if it has been wet, or a heavy dew, then walkers will get unpleasantly wet.

To this end the trails network is cut 3 times per year late spring, summer, early autumn in order to maximise the impact of each cut. The timing of each cut varies from year to year depending on climatic conditions.

Record as **Red** if the surface vegetation is higher than 18” and there is less than 18” width of clear path – but also please report immediately to the Trail Officer with a precise location, so that the cutting programme can be adjusted.

Side growth should be recorded as **Red** if there is less than 3ft overall width free of side growth, and **Yellow** if wider but still makes the path feel too enclosed, blocks viewpoints, or is leading to erosion or a muddy surface by forcing walkers into a narrow strip and stopping the wind and sun from drying out the path.

Path issues – obstructions and hazards

These should also be recorded as **Yellow or Red** and also reported direct to the appropriate Trail Officer.

Issue	Notes / examples
<p>Physical obstruction making it difficult or awkward to continue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellow - Fallen tree or branch; • Red - Fence or other barrier; • Yellow - Cross field path blocked by crops i.e. less than 1 metre width available and crop over 9” high. For cross field paths, it is not acceptable for walkers to be diverted unofficially around the edge of the field. (trail officers will get farmers or land managers to re-instate)
<p>Electric fence too close, Barbed wire fence too close.</p>	<p>Red - Barbed wire fencing, particularly on slopes, should be at least 12” from where people are walking to minimise risk of snagging, or falling on the barbs if they slip. It is particularly important to record as a hazard when fencing constrains the path too close to an edge.</p>
<p>Threatening animal or person.</p>	<p>Do not approach if this happens, but please report ASAP.</p>
<p>Coastal or Riverbank erosion or Landslip.</p>	<p>Take care not to get too close. Record changes on survey and if immediate / imminent hazard report ASAP to the Trail Officer.</p>
<p>Protruding spikes (e.g. old WW2 or farm fencing).</p>	<p>As this is often difficult to re-locate, please describe location as accurately as possible, and ideally tie something to the spike.</p>
<p>Animal hole.</p>	<p>Record if in line of path.</p>

Path issues – potential improvements

We are continuing to look for opportunities to enhance the enjoyment of people using the Norfolk trails network, so please record potential improvements.

Issue	Notes / examples
Access for all.	Sections that could be made more accessible to people with reduced mobility e.g. by removing gates, widening or improving surface and removing short flights of steps or stiles.
Information provision.	Places where it would be good to have an information panel.
Heritage or Habitat management.	Areas where you'd like to see environmental improvements to make the walk more enjoyable or interesting.
Locations where Litter, Fly tipping, or Dog fouling are a problem.	These are not the responsibility of the Trail Officers, but if regular occurrence it is worth recording on the survey. Fly tipping if on private land should be reported to the Environment Agency, and on public land to the District or council.