A Space for Everyone

A good practice guide full of advice and resources to help you improve accessibility at your site.

The
Wildlife
Trusts

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 About this guide

This guide from The Wildlife Trusts is for landowners that want to make changes in green and blue spaces, so they are more accessible and feel safer.

Green and blue spaces usually describe places that have water, grass or trees. Examples include nature reserves, walking trails, lakes, and rivers, and they are often open to the public and usually free to access.

It includes practical steps that you can take to make your space easier for people to visit and enjoy. You can also read case studies and follow links to other research and resources that show how other organisations have made their spaces more accessible.

"Part of our vision is that everyone feels inspired to get involved in nature's recovery."
-The Wildlife Trusts

Change doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. All we must do is listen carefully to what people need, be willing to adapt and start by making small, practical changes that improve people's lives.

In developing this guide, we spoke to a wide range of people from organisations across the heritage, environmental, culture and sports sectors. We also ran a series of workshops to make sure the information in the guide is informed by feedback from the wider community.

This is version one of this guide. We welcome all your thoughts and comments and plan to update and improve the guide on a regular basis.

Contact The Wildlife Trusts' inclusion team by emailing **wildaboutinclusion@ wildlifetrusts.org** to share feedback or suggest a case study.

1.2 Why accessible green and blue spaces matter

For many people, green and blue spaces play an important role in their lives. They are a place to connect with nature, explore the outdoors and spend time with friends and family. That's why making sure they are accessible to as many people as possible is so important.

Everyone should be able to enjoy the physical and mental benefits of nature and being outdoors. And although change can take time, improving access to green and blue spaces is an essential part of making that possible.

"Our purpose is to bring wildlife back, to empower people to take meaningful action for nature, and to create an inclusive society where nature matters."

-The Wildlife Trusts

1.3 Who this guide is for

We know that some organisations are already doing great work to make their places accessible. In fact, the aim of this guide is to complement, build on and share that work, in the hope it inspires others to make changes too.

With that in mind, we think this guide will be most useful to those landowners that are just getting started. It's important that we work together as a sector to improve the overall standard of accessibility. That means all progress is good progress and starting small can lead to larger change.

However, we hope there is plenty in this guide for landowners who are a little further on too. There is always more we can do to make our spaces more accessible, which is why you'll find links to detailed guidance on specific areas.

1.4 Using this guide

The guide is full of practical advice and information that most landowners should be able to use. Each section includes things you can do easily and quickly, some things that may take more time and effort, and then some more advanced steps that will need more long-term investment.

The guide is organised in a way that makes it easy to find what you should do now, what might come next, and further considerations for later.

You'll find relevant links that detail changes you could make for specific groups of people throughout this guide, and we encourage you to reach out to others and connect, so you can share and learn from one another.

"The Wildlife Trusts are improving life for wildlife and people together, within communities of which we are a part."

-The Wildlife Trusts

1.5 Our research

Before we wrote this guide, we carried out research to look for existing research, policies and local change programmes on accessibility. We found more than 80 relevant research documents, networks, and organisations that are already driving change. We found great examples of inclusive volunteering, staff training, partnership working, creating warm welcomes and site adaptations to support specific groups of people from all walks of life.

We spoke to 14 organisations from across the sector to find out how this work might complement theirs. Many thanks to Natural England, RSPB, Groundwork UK, Marine Conservation Society, Sport England, Activity Alliance, Scot Link, National Academy for Social Prescribing, Historic England, Ramblers, Accessible Places UK, Leeds University, Smile Foundation and Ernest Cook Trust for their time and input.

We visited local Wildlife Trust sites and spoke to staff and volunteers. Like those from other charities and service providers, they told us that knowing where to start with accessibility can be the biggest challenge. Internet searches are overwhelming, advice can be conflicting, and everything changes so quickly, it is too difficult to keep up.

So, we ran two workshops to create a framework for this guide. More than 50 people from those listed above joined us. They helped us prioritise what matters most. We also tested some of the content. Therefore, we've designed this guide, so it meets the needs of those people who are responsible for making changes at sites.

1.6 Share your feedback

This first version of the guide was researched and created over three months. We want to maintain it, update it and add new content on a regular basis, which is why we welcome your feedback.

Please email **wildaboutinclusion@ wildlifetrusts.org** if you have any questions, suggestions, case studies or further reading you can recommend.

2. Getting started

2.1 Know Before You Go

That means your Know Before You Go information needs to do two things. First, it should showcase the site and help persuade people to come and see what it has to offer. Second, it's a place for you to set expectations and help people understand what it might be like should they decide to visit.

For people with accessibility needs, this second point is very important. The more information they have about how accessible the site is, the better informed they are to decide whether it will be suitable for them.

If you do nothing else, the biggest change you can make to help people feel welcome at your site is to have clear, detailed, accurate and high-quality information. Your Know Before You Go page is the perfect place for that.

Recommended reading

- The Wildlife Trust's Know Before You Go template

The Wildlife Trust has created a Know Before You Go template that any organisation or setting can use. The template is a Microsoft Word document and features a series of categories, questions and simple text fields.

- How to write well

The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has an online style guide that includes practical advice on how to write clearly for a range of audiences.

"A good Know Before You Go page will help people understand what the reserve is like and what to expect before they visit. For people with accessibility needs, the page will help them make an informed decision about whether the reserve is suitable for them to visit."

-The Wildlife Trusts

Changes you can make now

- Use our template to create your own Know Before You Go page if you don't already have one on your website.

- If you do have a Know Before You Go page, use our template to review it and look for places where you can quickly improve the information.

- Make sure your Know Before You Go information includes a section that outlines your approach to accessibility and any important accessibility information.

- Show your Know Before You Go information to visitors and ask them to share their feedback and share any gaps they might find.

- Use your site's communication channels to share and showcase your Know Before You Go page, especially when it is updated or if it is relevant to specific changes of season or events.

- Make your Know Before You Go information part of your long-term planning and use it to highlight key features that might encourage people to visit.

- Include photos and videos, as they provide a good way to show people what the site is like and highlight any accessibility issues or features.

- Invite local organisations to offer feedback or share insights on specific groups of people, such as what they'd like to know before they visit, so you can include that information.

Share what is not available

It's easy to share all the features and facilities that a site does have, but for many people it is just as important to know what a site does not have too. That's especially true when it comes to accessibility, as any lack of clarity may lead someone to stay away if they are not sure what to expect.

For example, if your site has accessible toilets, it makes sense to say so in your Know Before You Go information. But if your site does not have accessible toilets, saying nothing may cause confusion. It's much better and clearer to state, "Our site does not have accessible toilets."

This principle of being open and willing to share what is not available at your site can make a real difference to people with accessibility needs. It gives them the information they need to make empowered decisions about whether the site is suitable for them to visit... or not.

Photos and videos

While Know Before You Go information usually comes in text format, you can also include photos and videos to bring your site to life for potential visitors. It can also help you show rather than explain specific accessibility features or issues.

Here are example photos, videos and virtual tours:

- [Video showing accessibility at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire](#)

- [Images and maps on the plan your visit page for Avalon Marshes](#)

- [Video tour for Avalon Marshes](#)

In most cases, any way of showing your site's features and facilities is better than not including images or videos at all. Modern phones take high quality photos and footage if you don't have the equipment or funds to hire a professional photographer or videographer.

Remember, if you do create images or video content, make sure that it meets [web accessibility standards](#). That can include writing alternative text for images and providing captions for videos in multiple languages.

Example Know Before You Go information

[- Full list of The Wildlife Trust's nature reserves](#)

Some nature reserves that are part of The Wildlife Trust has their own page that includes Know Before You Go information. There are plans to update these using the new Know Before You Go template, but already there are many examples to explore.

Further reading

[- Checking the accessibility of an event or venue](#)

Disability equality charity Scope's guide highlights the questions disabled people will likely need answers to when accessing a venue. This resource also links to other websites with targeted recommendations.

2.2 Building a baseline

Once you have clearly understood and described your site as it is now, you may want to plan for improvements.

However, before you decide what changes you'd like to make, you should establish a baseline. Your baseline is an agreed starting point that you can use to measure progress and make comparisons with your site in the future.

To build a baseline for your site, it's important that you gather a range of insights and data that help you understand its current accessibility levels. This information can help you and those around you make decisions and support the whole sector in building understanding around accessibility.

Things you can do now

- Find out what data or knowledge is already available about the people who use your site and start keeping records that you can refer to later.

- Walk around your site and record who or what you see at different times of day and days of the week before you make any changes.

- Use your relationships with partners and local networks to find evidence or data that helps you agree on a baseline and what changes might make the most difference to the site's accessibility.

- Create a survey or questionnaire that a wide range of people can complete, so you can learn more about how they use the site and what they would like to see in the future.

- Run targeted adverts on social media to reach specific groups of people who you want to engage with and learn from.

- Identify people in your network that can help you move forwards. The more support and different perspectives you can get, the more likely your changes will be successful.

Evaluate and measure

Before you make any changes, think about how you will use the baseline data you have now, and how you will measure any changes in the future. What are you trying to change and how does it affect how you design any evaluation?

Once you're clear on your starting point and the goal, you can begin thinking about how you'll measure change. For larger projects, you can start by commissioning a high quality, independent evaluation that includes large sample sizes and well thought through methodologies. Some grants and types of funding include evaluation or reporting requirements.

Another approach may be to replicate projects that have been proven to work. However, context matters, so following best practice or implementing well evaluated changes from other sites won't guarantee success at yours.

If resources are limited, focus on just one or two things to measure. For example, increasing overall footfall, reaching specific groups of people or improving the knowledge of staff and volunteers.

It's helpful to build some principles that will guide your approach to measuring change. If you're making assumptions, list these clearly and add them to your records.

Understand the law

GOV.UK is the best place for you to find current laws and policies when it comes to your site. They can vary slightly across the four UK nations, so make sure that you are using the right website.

Some laws can be difficult to interpret, including those around making reasonable adjustments. Always work with your colleagues and speak to an expert if there is anything you are not sure about.

There are no legal requirements to evaluate the changes you make at your site. However, you should check and fulfil any existing contracts you may have that could include evaluation requirements.

Further reading

- 2021 Census data from the Office for National Statistics

You can explore the 2021 Census data to better understand your local population through a range of lenses.

- Local health, public health data for small geographic areas

Local Health provides local health data through 'quality assured small area health-related data visualised in maps, charts, area profiles, and reports'.

- The People and Nature Surveys for England

You can explore the results from Natural England, which 'gathers evidence and trend data about people's access, understanding and enjoyment of nature, and how it contributes to wellbeing'.

- The What Works Network

The What Works Network aims to improve the way government and other public sector organisations create, share and use high-quality evidence in decision-making.

- How to write effective questionnaires [PDF]

NHS England has a bite size guide to writing effective questionnaires that includes advice on how to write good questions.

- Guidelines for good practice in self-evaluation

The UK Evaluation society has written this guide to help organisations carry out their own self-evaluation.

- A guide for evaluating public engagement activities [PDF]

The Research Councils UK produced this guide to evaluating public engagement activities.

2.3 Accessibility audits

Before you can improve the accessibility of your site, you need to fully understand its current state. The best way to do this is to carry out an audit of your site. The audit process often involves a series of questions and criteria that you can score different elements of your site against.

For example, how much do you really know about your paths and trails? Are they wide enough for someone who uses a wheelchair? Is the ground surface slippery at certain times of year? Knowing the answer to these types of questions puts you in a great position to identify areas where you can make changes.

Digital accessibility also plays an important role in helping people understand and visit your site. You can carry out an accessibility audit of your website to spot ways that you can make it easier to use for people with accessibility needs.

Recommended reading

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance [PDF]

Sensory Trust has its Outdoor Accessibility Guidance that includes guidance on route standards, grades and audits.

- Accessibility checklist from Scotlink

Scotlink have produced resources including a digital accessibility checklist on their resource hub.

"[Auditors] must be fully aware of why the audit is being undertaken, of the standards they are auditing against, and the importance of ensuring consistency by auditing in the same way, every time."

-Sensory Trust

Changes you can make now

- Create a checklist or guide to audit your site and get feedback from the people who you want to use the site.

- Invite someone with relevant accessibility needs to an interview where they help you audit the site by sharing their experience and suggesting changes as they navigate the space.

- Involve people who currently visit your site when you do your audit, but also speak to people who do not use your site but may in the future.

- Focus on one area or group of people at first, as it can be a big job to cover everything in one audit.

- Create a self-assessment form and work with someone from a specialist local charity, such as Dementia Adventure, who can audit your site for you and share what they find.

- Audit your site at different times of day and with a range of people, as visitors will experience the site in very different ways. For example, a young woman jogging at the site will likely have different insights to an elderly woman having a picnic.

- Consider using a professional auditor, but plan carefully so that you understand and are clear about what you want the audit to achieve. Some auditors have specific experience with green and blue spaces.

Make auditing part of long-term planning

It's easy to think that once you have carried out an accessibility audit and made a few changes, you can forget about it for a while. It's much better to build the auditing process into the long-term planning for your site.

Try and establish a review schedule that sees you try new audits, but also repeat audits. Carrying out audits in the same way every time helps you measure the success of any changes that you make. You will also start to see patterns in the data that help you understand your progress over time.

When auditing becomes part of your routine, you should see your staff and volunteers' knowledge and skills improve too. They will come to better understand how accessibility benefits your visitors and become advocates for making positive changes.

Further reading

- Raising the standard: The Green Flag Award guidance manual [PDF]

Green Flag offers a library of free, high-quality sector knowledge curated from all over the world, including a useful scoresheet on page 17.

- Access Audit Checklist [PDF]

This example audit checklist from Disability Cornwall has been used by some Wildlife Trusts to carry out an accessibility audit at their nature reserves.

- Make your website or app accessible and publish an accessibility statement

To audit your website, there is good advice on GOV.UK that will help you make sure that your website or app meets web accessibility requirements.

- Trusted Provider Assessment Checklist [PDF]

National Social Prescribing Academy has a checklist for trusted social prescribing partners that forms part of its NHS Green Social Prescribing Toolkit [PDF].

- Collection of guides from the Sensory Trust

Sensory Trust have created Guidance advice that covers standards and legislation, technical issues like path widths and surfaces, and approaches like inclusive interpretation, nature-based activities and dementia friendly walks.

2.4 Community organising

Community organising is a way of working that puts people and communities first. It is where you build real relationships with local people to find out what they want to do in your area, so you can help them achieve it for themselves.

For example, The Wildlife Trusts helps communities organise themselves, find funding, learn skills and reach other people in their community, so they can continue their work independently, inspiring others in the process. This ripple effect is central to the success of this way of working.

While community organising is a long-term approach, its outcomes are more sustainable because social change is driven by the people directly affected. If you take the time to engage a wide and diverse group of people, you solve immediate problems and empower communities to tackle challenges together.

In the long run, community organising can save time and resources by making sure any changes you make are more effective and widely supported.

"Using the community organising approach has achieved and created more independence within each of the groups compared to the ways of working we have used before."

-Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Changes you can make now

- Work closely with local partners, from statutory services such as police, schools and healthcare to community groups and grassroots organisations.

- Engage with local communities, including both people who currently use your site, as well as those who don't. Visit and speak to local groups and people in different settings.

- Use a physical space or online tools to map what people need. It can help reduce their worries and other activities will help them feel like your green or blue space is for them.

- Co-design a plan for your site by running workshops where people can share their ideas around a specific problem or topic.

- Consider community projects on your site, such as den building in an area that might otherwise become a hot spot for anti-social behaviour or registering your cafe as a warm space in winter for elderly people.

- Find and involve groups of people from your community that may have been previously underrepresented, so that you are able to better understand and address their needs.

- Provide the space for people to share feedback and be clear about how you plan to act on that feedback. Give people the confidence that their suggestions are important and will be heard.

- Focus on qualitative evaluation, rather than output or outcome-based evaluation, which generally will drive specific behaviours that are not always strategic or support long-term change

- Start using The Community Organising Framework to plan and structure your activities and how you engage with local communities.

"The key to the success of the project was letting go and trusting the process, a move away from the comfort of traditional project planning."

-Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust

The Community Organising Framework

Community Organisers is an organisation that provides a range of online, and offline, support and consultancy services to individuals and organisations that want to try community organising.

This Community Organising Framework gives you a map of the process that helps you take practical steps when engaging with your local communities. The framework features eight stages: Reach, Listening, Connect, Organise, Power, Leadership, Strategy, Action, and Change.

If you are unsure where to start with community organising or feel like you are stuck, the Framework is a great tool that can give you good ideas and help you move forward.

Motivating people

What if you find it difficult to get people to take the lead or even show interest in your community organising initiatives? Everyone has different motivations and concerns, and sometimes it just takes the right approach to tap into and understand them.

Community organising is really all about finding common ground and building trust. If you find that people are not willing to step up, you may need to listen more closely to understand and address their priorities and barriers to fully taking part.

You might also want to change your strategy a little. Perhaps you can start smaller, find issues that resonate more, and try different ways to engage people. By building on small successes and gradually involving more people in new ways, you can still make meaningful progress.

The key to community organising is persistence, creativity, and being willing to adapt to your community's needs.

Community organising and nature recovery

Nature recovery initiatives often need scientific expertise and specific conservation work, but you can still involve your communities. Local people often have deep, generational knowledge of the land and can offer insights that external experts might miss.

If you give people a sense of ownership and connection to your project, they are more likely to support and maintain it in the long run. Through community organising, you can address potential conflicts early and make sure projects are embraced and supported by people who live nearby.

By bringing people together to share their perspectives and work towards common goals, community organising can turn nature recovery initiatives into collaborative efforts that benefit the environment and the people who rely on it.

Case studies

- Stories from the Nextdoor Nature Hub

A collection of case studies on the Nextdoor Nature Hub website that include examples of the impact community organising can have.

- Stories of community organising

List of case studies and stories from the Community Organising website that show how the process works in different places and settings.

- Reimagining Hartcliffe Millennium Green

Hartcliffe Millennium Green in Bristol has been chosen as an exemplar to show how changes can support people that struggle to access parks. This is the world's first park accessible to people with any impairment.

- Wild Wellbeing Derby

Wild Wellbeing Derby comprised a range of different projects, to suit various needs, all of which brought people into nature.

- Access for All Outdoor Conference

The Forest of Bowland National Landscape and Access the Dales hosted a two-day celebration of inclusivity in the countryside.

Further reading

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance from Paths for All

This guidance from Paths for All includes a section on community development and engaging with your community.

- By All Reasonable Means: Least restrictive access to the outdoors [PDF]

Sensory Trust describes an approach to good community engagement on page 20 of this guide, which is in the context of their wider framework for least restrictive access to the outdoors.

- Accessible and inclusive sports facilities

Sport England has created design guidance that helps built environment professionals, volunteers, clients, operators, user representatives and stakeholders follow best practice. It includes a section on consultation and engagement. Part G includes a section on consultation and engagement.

- The Nature for All Resource Hub

Provides tools to improve confidence, skills, and knowledge in equality, equity, and inclusion to increase the diversity, volume, and size of Scotland's voice for the environment.

- Engaging under-represented groups in nature

Natural England commissioned a publication to bring together evidence in one place in a way that allows practitioners to consider the needs of different groups that are often under-represented, and to build on previous experiences of how these needs have been tackled.

- Understanding the experiences of people with visual impairments that visit green and blue spaces

Natural England worked with partners to produce a report that shows the importance of inclusive nature experiences.

- Working with different groups

Buddle has created a suite of resources to help you reach and work with people from different groups.

- Resources for supporting people with long-term health conditions

The Richmond Group of Charities is a coalition of 14 leading health and social care organisations in the voluntary sector. They share helpful guides to supporting people with long-term health conditions.

- Outdoor Citizens

Hosted and administered by YHA (England and Wales), Outdoor Citizens is a free membership community. It's made up of small charities, not-for-profit groups and organisations that are working to support more people to access the outdoors.

2.5 Supporting staff and volunteers

Providing staff and volunteers with the skills, training and information they need is an excellent way to improve the accessibility of your space. They are the people who speak to and support visitors every day and who are responsible for putting your policies and initiatives into action.

To do that effectively, staff and volunteers need clarity. That includes guidance on what a more accessible space looks like and means to people – they need to know why it matters. But they also need practical guidance that explains in clear language what they must do to make the space accessible to more people.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do is create a working environment and inclusive culture that really values accessibility. That means good leadership, but also a willingness to listen to team members' own feedback, ideas and experience.

Finally, make your commitments public. Be willing to share what you are doing to improve accessibility and inclusion at your site. It will help you work towards a common goal and show the wider community that you are taking real action.

Recommended reading

- *Guidance on Inclusive Recruitment and Working Cultures*

Information from Scottish Environment LINK that covers inclusive recruitment practices and personal data collection during the recruitment process, as well as inclusive working culture and volunteering.

"To be an organisation that is truly inclusive, your organisation must have its cultural values stated on its website, advertising, and any other forms of media."

-Scottish Environment LINK

Creating and maintaining policies

If you don't have accessibility and inclusion policies in place already, make doing so a formal part of your future planning. Apart from formalising good intentions, policies are often a legal requirement and make it clear to staff and volunteers how they should work and behave.

You can even directly involve team members in the process of developing your site's policies too. Ask for feedback and invite them to workshops where they can share ideas based on their experience of working directly with visitors. It will lead to better policy decisions and help your team feel even more connected to whatever guidelines you decided to publish.

Once your policies are ready, agree on a regular timeframe for you to review and update them where necessary. As a team, you will learn as you go and find that the world around you is constantly changing. Maintaining policies is a key part of making accessibility one of your long-term commitments.

Changes you can make now

- Invest in your team to make sure staff and volunteers are available on site to offer accessibility support at key locations, such as a visitor centre, car park or other area where people first arrive.

- Creating a poster or document that shows your commitment to accessibility and can be displayed in a place that tells visitors, staff and volunteers what practical steps you are taking.

- Create and share a safeguarding policy that makes it clear how you cater for and protect the safety of team members. Publish it on your website and make a poster version for full transparency.

- Build accessibility into your team training processes so that it becomes a fundamental part of what you do and being a team member.

- Carry out workshops that explain different protected characteristics and types of accessibility needs. Use examples to train staff and volunteers how to support different visitors.

- Encourage staff and volunteers to show empathy and feel confident about asking visitors if they need support or have specific needs.

- Run a community session where people with accessibility needs are able to speak to team members and explain their own lived experience, including types of support that would improve their visits.

- Celebrate success stories and create a way of rewarding staff and volunteers who put in extra effort to improve the accessibility of your space for visitors.

- Run first aid sessions so that the team can understand how they should respond if there is a medical emergency on site that relates to a person's accessibility needs.

- Train team members how to use and explain any accessible maps, information or other facilities at your site, so they can help visitors use them too.

- Work with local partners or accessibility experts who may be able to share their own experiences or even run training sessions for staff and volunteers.

Protected characteristics

All your policies should show an understanding and commitment to The Equality Act 2010, which currently applies to Scotland, England and Wales. The Act makes it against the law to discriminate against or harass someone because of a protected characteristic.

There are nine protected characteristics:

- age

- disability

- gender reassignment

- marriage and civil partnership

- pregnancy and maternity

- race

- religion or belief

- sex

- sexual orientation

You should make it clear that your policies and approach are there to protect everyone that has contact with your site, including staff, volunteers and visitors.

Be confident enough to make your commitments public too. You can create communication materials that you can display on site or even run a recurring campaign that shows what you are doing to support people. It will also give you an opportunity to collect feedback and update your approach when needed.

Scotlink has information and links on protected characteristics that you can read to learn more and go into detail.

Although The Equality Act 2010 is the most comprehensive, other equality law is in place across the UK and crown dependencies. For example, Northern Island has separate equality law for different demographics.

Case studies

- *Amphibian and Reptile Conservation's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Poster [PDF]*

Using a simple poster, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation lay out their policy and commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion.

- *RSPB's online key management policies*

The RSPB outlines their key management policies online in one place, including their approach to safeguarding, EDI, and complaints.

Further reading

- *Protected Characteristics: What are they?*

Scottish Environment LINK outlines all the protected characteristics from England, Wales and Scotland.

- *Helping out: Taking an inclusive approach to engaging older volunteers*

A guide from the Centre for Ageing Better designed "to support organisations working with volunteers to engage over 50s and widen participation among different types of people".

- *How to Support Staff and Volunteers*

A guide from Scottish Environment LINK that includes how to best support someone when they disclose a protected characteristic to you or share their lived experience with you.

- *Vision for Volunteering*

Vision for Volunteering is a ten-year collaborative project designed to create a better future for volunteering.

- *Volunteering and community participation*

The Centre for Aging Better completed a joint review with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) into community contributions and volunteering, which offers six principles for engaging people and creating age-friendly and inclusive opportunities.

3. Welcoming Visitors

3.1 When visitors arrive

It is so important to make a good impression when visitors first arrive at your site. A warm welcome that meets or even exceeds expectations can set the tone for their entire experience. It builds trust and goodwill that can lead people to return to your site again and again.

When visitors arrive, they need to quickly know how your site will meet their needs. You can do this through good ground surfaces, clear signage and wherever possible, a welcome from a real person who is there to help and answer any questions.

It is these details that can make a real difference to the way people feel when they arrive at your site. Listen to what your visitors need and test any changes to your site to make sure those first impressions are positive ones.

Recommended reading

-Outdoor Accessibility Guidance from Paths for All

This guidance from Paths for All includes information on a wide range of topics that will lead to a warmer welcome for your visitors.

"While not everything can be made completely accessible to everyone, the ambition is to serve a diversity of interests and characteristics. As a result, when people arrive somewhere, with disabilities, young or old, from any faith or ethnic community, they can enjoy the experience on their own terms, independently or with family and friends."

-Outdoor Accessibility Guidance, Paths for All

Changes you can make now

- Make sure your online Know Before You Go information is up to date, so visitors know what to expect when they arrive.

- Place staff members or volunteers at the gate, entrance or another obvious place where they can welcome visitors to the site in person.

- Improve the ground surfaces, paths and any information on display in the areas that visitors first see and pass through when they arrive.

- Ask staff and volunteers to make it part of their routine to ask visitors if they have accessibility needs or require any form of support.

- Install clear signs before or at the entrance to your site that include information about accessibility features. Use appropriate language and images to also show where accessibility may be an issue.

- Create a video that shows key areas of the site, including any accessibility features, that you can display on a loop as people arrive.

- Use notice boards and displays to provide important information about the site for a range of visitors, including people with accessibility needs.

- Ask visitors for feedback that covers how they felt when they arrived at the site, including whether their accessibility needs were met.

- Start small and act quickly if there are obvious things that visitors say you can do to give them a warmer welcome when they arrive.

- Make sure your site does not rely on digital signage and tools, such as QR codes. It may exclude some people who cannot use them because of the cost or a disability.

Create a sense of belonging

One of the best ways to make people feel welcome when they come to your site is to make them feel like they belong there. That means they feel like it is a space where they can feel comfortable.

This sense of belonging can be tested too. Any information you provide or changes you make to offer a warmer welcome should be done with people, have a specific purpose and be well documented. You can then go back to those people to find out if your work has had a positive impact on how their needs have been met on arrival.

Meeting expectations

When people arrive at your site, they have certain expectations that you need to meet. If you say on your website or Know Before You Go information that you have clear signs in the car park that explain where to go, you need to make sure that matches the experience visitors have on arrival.

The key to getting this right is maintenance and constantly iterating and improving on what you have. Do not let car park surfaces get overgrown or broken up so they are harder for people to navigate. And update your online information regularly so it sets the right expectations for people.

Further reading

- Working with different groups

Buddle has created a suite of resources which includes tips for welcoming specific groups of people to your space.

- Accessible and inclusive sports facilities

Sport England has produced guidance for planners, designers, building owners and operators to support the design and operation of safe, welcoming, accessible and inclusive sports and leisure facilities.

3.2 Guided tours and groups

There are two types of guided tour, and both can make a huge difference to the experience of a visitor with accessibility needs. An in-person tour led by a trained guide can help people safely learn about the site and all it has to offer. A virtual tour allows people to get a similar experience from the comfort of home.

By running regular groups, you can engage directly with your local community and make your site a key part of attendee's regular routine. General groups allow people to meet and enjoy your site together. If you offer sessions for a specific group of people, it can give them the confidence to experience the site alongside others who have a shared interest or protected characteristic.

Both tours and groups create the space for you to meet accessibility needs in a safe and structured environment. Guides and group leaders can quickly tailor tours and sessions in line with the people who attend, which means they can become a key part of a more inclusive offer.

Recommended reading

- Working with different groups

Buddle have created a suite of resources which includes tips for welcoming specific groups of people to your space

- How to lead an accessible sensory walk

A detailed toolkit from Sense that gives you a range of practical guidance that will help you start accessible sensory walks at your space.

Changes you can make now

- Work with your team to set up and trial an inclusive guided tour that caters for a wide range of accessibility needs. Ask for feedback afterwards and use what you learn to make improvements.

- Create and share an accessible, virtual tour on your website, so that people can experience the space from home. Whether audio or video, it can become a useful part of your communications strategy too.

- Use your Know Before You Go information and website to explain what groups and tours are available, including how often they run and any accessibility information people need to be aware of.

- Run a survey to ask people what kind of group they might like to see you set up at your site. Offer suggestions and give some idea of how the potential groups might work and what they could involve.

- Start small by starting one group that you know there is demand for. You can then try your initial ideas and learn from the feedback you get from the people who attend.

Create inclusive and interactive experiences

Most guided tours feature a single guide that leads a walk through a space while describing its key features and history. For some people, including those who are visually impaired, these audio descriptions can bring a place to life and really improve the experience.

But there are other ways you can make a guided tour more accessible. Tactile maps can give people a better sense of where they are on the tour and an interpreter can offer the same information in a different language. You could even offer a sign language version or build a sensory experience into the tour.

If you run a regular group, give people the opportunity to talk to each other about their experience of visiting the site. If they need help, offer conversation prompts and ask questions that they can respond to.

Case studies

- Wilder Kent Safaris

Kent Wildlife Trust welcomes people to "visit beautiful nature reserves and uncover their stories with the people who know them best".

Further reading

- What to expect when you join a Ramblers group walk

Ramblers have a web page dedicated to helping new people receive a warm welcome, and clearly describe what walkers can expect.

- Black Girls Hike UK

Black Girls Hike provides a safe space for Black women to explore the outdoors. They host nationwide group hikes, outdoor activity days, and training events.

3.3 Sensory experiences

Each green and blue space comes with its own unique sensory experiences. Its sights, sounds and smells all depend on the location, wildlife and a wide range of other factors. But you can also design and highlight new sensory experiences too, which can make visiting your site more accessible for some people.

A good place to start is by creating dedicated areas and trails at your site that are specifically for people with sensory needs. Regular groups and events can also make people feel welcome and provide a tailored, safe time and space for them to visit. Backed up with good online information, you can set expectations and reassure people by providing a clear idea of what to expect when they visit.

Sensory experiences are also a fantastic way for anyone to enjoy being in nature. Children in particular like to use their senses to investigate the world around them and learn new things.

Recommended reading

- Design guide for creating a sensory garden

A more detailed guide to creating a sensory garden from Sensory Trust, which includes practical steps you can take.

- How to lead an accessible sensory walk

A detailed toolkit from Sense that gives you a range of practical guidance that will help you start accessible sensory walks at your space.

"For people with complex disabilities, sensory walks provide an opportunity to engage with the outdoors in ways that are innovative and meaningful, at the same time as supporting people to be active."

-Alissa Ayling, Head of Sport & Physical Activity, Sense.

Changes you can make now

- Ask visitors with sensory needs what sights, sounds and smells they might expect or want to experience. Learn and document what you can do to make their sensory experience of your space better.

- Include and then link to any online sensory experiences from your space's Know Before You Go information.

- Create information and educational materials in different formats, including visual aids and tactile maps for people who are visually impaired.

- Install or update signs that include pictures and symbols for people who either need or prefer visual information.

- Create an audio tour with headphones so that visitors can listen to sounds and descriptions as they move around the space.

- Share your audio tour online through your website and social channels so that people can enjoy it from home. You can also link to any live webcams that people can access too.

- Create quiet areas with comfortable seats and soft lighting where visitors can go to think, reflect and relax.

- Install a sensory area, garden or trail that features different textures, colours and smells for people to enjoy.

- Run a training session for team members and volunteers to help them understand and help people with sensory needs.

- Start a group or initiative for people who are neurodiverse and offer a tailored experience designed to meet their needs.

Make existing spaces sensory

You do not necessarily need to spend a lot of time and money developing new areas of your site. First, try thinking about how you might be able to change an existing space to make it a more sensory experience.

Sensory walking trails are a brilliant way for visitors to enjoy all that the reserve has to offer. You can take an existing trail and create a map that shows different parts of the route where visitors can stop to see, smell or touch something interesting. Add some instructions so they know exactly what to do when they get to each stopping point.

Quiet areas are also great for those visitors who may want a place to take a break and reflect. There's a good chance your site already has a suitable location where people often tend to stop and take a rest. Add a sign to make it official and include some ideas for what people can do while they are there.

Case studies

- SENsory Explorers – accessible nature discovery for families

Quiet sessions hosted by London Wildlife Trust for families with autistic children or children with additional needs to engage with nature.

- Sensory trails in the Peak District

Three sensory trails in different parts of the Peak District, including maps and instructions that explain what to do at different points on the route.

Further reading

- Do you cater for neurodiversity?

People who are neurodiverse may have access needs that aren't related to a physical or visible disability, and this guide to digital accessibility for events has many tips that are transferable to virtual and in-person venues.

- How to create a sensory garden

A short blog post by Kew Gardens that explains some of the benefits and approaches to making a sensory garden.

- Sensing nature: visual impairment and the natural environment

A two-year project to "improve the way we understand and enable more positive, inclusive multisensory nature experiences amongst people living with sight impairment, regardless of their life stage".

- Introduction to sensory walks

A useful guide written by Sense for Ordnance Survey that provides an overview and some of the benefits of sensory walks.

3.4 Maps and information

Providing good quality maps and information in a range of formats can transform the way people experience your space. It's also about identifying the right places to put that information, so that visitors can find and use it when they need it the most.

First though, make sure you provide the basics. If you do not currently offer a simple map and information about your site, make those things a priority and build accessibility features into their design. That can include clear language, large font sizes, high colour contrast and digital versions for your website.

Once you have those in place, ask visitors for feedback and find out how you can better meet their needs. Look at creating tactile maps, audio versions of information and materials in different languages. Then make sure you promote them in all the right places, so visitors know that they are available.

Recommended reading

- Accessible Maps, Images and Signage [PDF]

This document describes the types of maps offered by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), but it is also useful as a way of learning the different options available for improving the accessibility of your maps and information.

- How to write in plain English

A short guide from the Plain English Campaign that is full of practical advice to help you write in clear language.

"Tactile images, maps and touch installations enhance the experiences that people with sight difficulties have, making their visit more engaging, informative and stimulating, allowing greater independence and inclusion."

-Royal National Institute of Blind People

Changes you can make now

- Carry out a content audit to identify, list and categorise the information that you currently have available to visitors.

- Review and update your Know Before You Go information, so it accurately reflects the details you have on site.

- Use common icons and symbols on your map that are easy for people to understand, no matter what language they speak.

- Identify the main languages spoken in your local community and develop a version of your map and site information in those languages.

- Develop an accessible version of your map and information, which may include high contrast colours, large fonts or audio descriptions.

- Add information and wayfinding descriptions in Braille to your maps, information and even signs around your site.

- Create tactile maps with raised elements and tactile, physical aid and landmarks to help people understand where they are and move around using their hands.

- Keep maps and information that visitors can take away in places where they are likely to find or ask for it. Encourage staff and volunteers to ask people if they need accessible versions.

- Publish a digital version of your site map online, making sure it meets accessibility standards. That means it should work on screen readers and be available in different formats.

- Highlight information that may be most useful to someone with accessibility needs, such as what to do in an emergency and where to find accessible facilities or site features.

Use clear language

If the information about your site is in clear language, it will be easier for people to read and understand. Shorter sentences and everyday words will make your information clearer and punchier. By using pronouns and the active voice, you can speak to people directly and get your message across effectively.

The same principles apply to any audio or video versions too. Well written scripts will translate to clearer information for people to listen to as they move around the site.

Promoting your information

Do not treat any alternative versions of your information as secondary to any other formats. People with accessibility needs may rely on them to fully experience your space, so give them the same level of exposure and place them alongside other materials.

You should also promote your maps and information on your website and other communications channels. People won't know they exist if you don't tell them, so be clear about what is available. Blog posts, social media and even podcasts can help you spread the word.

Further reading

- By All Reasonable Means

A guide from Sensory Trust that features advice and standards to help owners and managers improve access to countryside and public greenspace. Page 40 refers to the 'on-site experience' and making accessible information.

- Tactile Images and Maps: Helping businesses to create an inclusive society [PDF]

A guide from RNIB that outlines some of the benefits of tactile maps, tactile images, hand-held maps and touch installations.

- Google Translate

While it is better to commission a full translation by a professional translator, Google Translate is a free tool to help you get started.

3.5 Dogs

Green and blue spaces are often wonderful places for people to visit with their dogs, especially if there are paths and trails to walk. But not everyone enjoys being around dogs and for people with accessibility needs, it can have a serious impact on their experience of your site.

Dogs are a difficult issue, and each space will have its own challenges getting the balance right between open access, wildlife, and meeting everyone's needs. Typically, the best approach is to first understand exactly how people with dogs prefer to use your site. Then you can begin to put some clear and sensible rules in place.

"Dogs bring love and laughter into our lives. But they can also, when not managed responsibly, have a detrimental impact on wildlife. Protecting nature whilst giving everyone equal access to our reserves is a constant balancing act."

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Case studies

- Dogs on nature reserves

Suffolk Wildlife Trust has a page on its website that outlines its rules and approach to having dogs at its many reserves.

Changes you can make now

- Write, publish and promote an official policy and code of conduct for people who visit and bring their dog to your site. Make your rules short and simple, so that they can be easily displayed around the space.

- Review and update your Know Before You Go information to share whether dogs are welcome or not, or if there are specific parts of the site where they are allowed.

- Consider making most of your site only available to dogs that are kept on a short lead. It will help protect wildlife and make other visitors feel safer, especially children and people with accessibility needs.

- Install signs on site that make it clear which parts of the site dogs are allowed on a lead, where they are allowed off a lead, and where they are not allowed at all.

- Use posters and your site's information to make it clear that all registered assistance dogs are welcome at the site and are legally allowed to be there.

- Install discreet dog waste bins on any paths and trails where visitors typically walk their dogs. Place water bowls outside buildings and at appropriate points on routes.

- Explain why dogs are not allowed on some areas of your site. For example, it may be to protect wildlife, conservation areas, and spaces dedicated to specific accessible experiences.

- Describe where visitors are most likely to find dogs at the site. It will help people who do not like being around dogs plan their own visit.

- Consider making some or all your indoor spaces dog-free zones, except for assistance dogs.

- Train your staff so that they understand the rules around dogs at your site. Make sure they know how to support anyone who finds it difficult to be around dogs.

- Set up a dog working group made up of staff, volunteers and dog walkers who can establish and embed rules around dogs at your site.

Create a dog code of conduct

You may want to create an official policy that outlines your approach to dogs at your site. That policy should be widely available, and your staff and volunteers should be clear about what it contains. A code of conduct is a series of short statements that communicate the key parts of your policy to visitors.

An example statement might be as simple as "Keep dogs on short leads". The aim is to make your rules around dogs as clear as possible, but also easy to share. You should be able to turn your code of conduct into a poster that you place in suitable places around the site.

The information on your code of conduct is there to guide dog walkers, but also to reassure people who may not like dogs that there are rules in place.

Promote responsible behaviour

Most dog walkers are responsible and will be more than happy to follow your code of conduct. You may want to create the role of 'dog ambassador', a person who leads dog walking groups to show and celebrate how it should be done.

You can also use your site's communications materials to highlight responsible behaviour. A short video on your website could feature interviews with dog owners and other visitors to talk openly about how your code of conduct is fostering a more positive environment for everyone.

Further reading

- The Doggy Dilemma [PDF]

An article from Suffolk Wildlife Trust that describes some of the challenges of having dogs visit nature reserves.

- Managing dogs and nature conservation

Article from Inside Ecology that covers some of the effect dogs can have on wildlife, as well as some of the measures you can take.

- Dogs on Reserves Policy [PDF]

Read an example dog policy written by The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire.

3.6 Safety and security

Visitors want to enjoy your green or blue space in a way that is safe and makes them feel comfortable. This is especially true for people with accessibility needs, as they may feel more vulnerable and unsure whether a site is suitable for them.

Of course, there are practical things you can do to make your space safer. Clear signage and well-maintained facilities will help reduce the risks for all visitors. But regular assessments, listening to your visitors' needs, having clear policies and providing good information will make a big difference too.

Crucially, without good safety measures in place, people may be put off visiting all together. It is your responsibility to make them feel confident that they will have a positive, safe experience at your site.

Recommended reading

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance [PDF]

Paths for All via Sensory Trust has its Outdoor Accessibility Guidance, which features information and practical tips on improving safety and security.

- Safer Parks: Improving access to parks for women and girls in West Yorkshire

Guide for creating safer access to parks for women and girls from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

"It is widely reported that concerns about personal safety and antisocial behaviour are higher for disabled people, women, minority ethnic people and people who identify as LGBTQ."

- Paths for All, Outdoor Accessibility Guidance

Changes you can make now

- Create a safety policy that outlines the different measures you have put in place to make sure the site is safe for staff, volunteers and visitors. Display any health and safety certificates and policies in a prominent place.

- Run a workshop or survey to ask visitors about their experience of using the site and any areas where they feel safety and security could be improved. Use what you learn to plan for the future.

- Consider installing lights in areas that are particularly dark or dangerous, such as where there is water or a steep drop. Lighting on popular paths and trails may encourage more people to use them at different times of day.

- Ask a member of staff or volunteer to be responsible for welcoming people to the site when they arrive. They can invite questions and check to see if they have any accessibility needs.

- Train your staff in first aid and display to visitors the name of the person who is responsible for medical support each day. Tell people where they should go and what they should do if they need medical help.

- Provide an emergency phone number that visitors can call if they have a problem while on site. Share the number widely, including on your site's website and Know Before You Go information.

- Install secure lockers that visitors can use to store their valuables while they are out exploring your site.

- Make sure paths, trails and facilities are regularly reviewed and maintained to make sure they are as safe as possible for people to use. Consider adding further features designed for people with accessible needs.

- Install clear signage to show where some areas may be inaccessible or if there is a particular risk. For example, if you have water at your site, you may want a sign that says, "No wild swimming".

- Create accessible versions of any written materials that describe your site's safety and emergency information. A video tour of the site can show people exactly what to expect when they visit.

- Share ideas for appropriate clothing or equipment that visitors may need at different times of the year or to do specific activities.

Describe the experience

People feel safer when they are well prepared. One simple thing you can do to help people prepare is describe exactly what it is like to visit. For example, you can share when the space is usually busier, as research shows people feel safer when they are around other people.

You can also describe the physical environment and any areas of the site that people should look out for. Be clear when things change too. If it's been raining a lot and the trails are now too muddy for a manual wheelchair, share that information so people can make informed decisions about their visit.

Further reading

- Northumbria Safer Parks Standard [PDF]

A set of principles for managing public park spaces in ways that prioritise women and girls' safety.

- Black Girls Hike

Black Girls Hike provides a safe space for black women to explore the outdoors. It hosts nationwide group hikes, outdoor activity days, and training events.

4. Making changes to your outdoor spaces

4.1 Wildlife

From beautiful birds and animals to fascinating fauna, wildlife is often the star attraction at many blue and green spaces. People visit these natural habitats to enjoy seeing unique species and to learn more about plants, creatures and their natural habitats.

Of course, wildlife and being close to nature can have a positive impact on our mental and physical wellbeing too. That's why making a space accessible to more visitors is important, even where the need for conservation means it isn't possible to change a site entirely.

Recommended reading

- A list of wildlife laws in the UK

The Wildlife Trusts website lists some of the Acts and legislation that protects wildlife and wild places in the UK.

- Natural England: Building partnerships for nature's recovery

Explains how Natural England will work with a wide range of people and organisations to take the action needed to rebuild a sustainable environment.

- The definitive guides to practical conservation work

Guides designed to help you become an expert in everything from tree planting to dry stone walling, woodland management to fencing, footpaths, hedging and more.

"Spending time in nature is essential for our physical and mental health and wellbeing. It should be accessible to every single person, no matter what their circumstances. To engage everyone in the fight against the climate and biodiversity crises, we need to foster deep connections with nature. Evidence shows a positive relationship between nature connectedness and mental wellbeing as well as positive environmental behaviours."

- Natural England

Changes you can make now

- Update your online Know Before You Go information to include information about what wildlife visitors can expect at different times of the year.

- Provide educational materials in multiple languages and use diagrams and images to explain information.

- Create and offer alternative versions of signs and information, including large print, Braille and audio descriptions.

- Explain any areas of the site some visitors may find hard to access, such as muddy trails and where there are steps.

- Review, improve and maintain paths and trails so make it easier for visitors to reach and enjoy wildlife spots, including people who use wheelchairs.

- Create specific, accessible viewing areas where visitors can find and watch the site's wildlife.

- Offer a regular wildlife tour where visitors are taken to key parts of the site by a guide who can explain where and what to look for.

- Install wildlife soundscapes, scent gardens or other sensory features for visitors who may be blind or visually impaired.

- Set up a camera and video stream areas that feature wildlife to people who want to watch from home.

Wildlife cameras and live streams

The concept of a wildlife camera is simple. Place a suitable video camera in a key location where birds and animals tend to go, and people can then watch the live video footage over the internet.

Wildlife cameras allow people with accessibility needs to see the wildlife a blue and green space has to offer, even if the site itself is difficult to access. People can watch the footage on a screen inside a visitors' centre, or even tune in to watch from the comfort of home.

If you do install a wildlife camera, go the extra step and include captions and audio descriptions for people who have difficulty hearing. If you host the live video on your website, make sure it meets web accessibility standards so it can be used with a keyboard or screen reader.

For inspiration, take a look at some of the webcams available at The Wildlife Trust reserves.

Nature first

In an ideal world, every green and blue space would be accessible to all. But these are often wild, natural settings and you should not make changes that will have a known negative impact on wildlife and habitats. If nature will suffer, any reasonable adjustment should not be thought of as reasonable at all.

Of course, that means good decision making is vital. And the best way to make good decisions is to be as informed and research led as possible. Apart from carrying out desk research and reviewing existing textbooks and evidence, you can also:

- find and speak to experts in both the changes you want to make and the wildlife you think might be affected

- develop good working relationships with local and national partners who can give you the help and advice you need

- consult your county's Local Nature Partnership, which are hubs for local nature organisations that play a role in biodiversity action planning

As a rule, think 'nature comes first' before you adapt your site. Seek out views from as many people as possible, including those with accessibility needs who you are looking to make changes for. There is a good chance they will have some great ideas about what you can do to improve things for them.

Further reading

- A guide to management planning [PDF]

This is a helpful, step-by-step guide to management planning from the South and West Wales Wildlife Trust.

- Complying with the biodiversity duty

Understand what the biodiversity duty is and how to comply with it if you are a public authority.

- Advice on planning decisions that affect ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees

Natural England and the Forestry Commission provide standing advice for development proposals that affect ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees.

- Trees, Planning and Development: A Guide for Delivery – Green Flag Award

The Trees and Design Action Group created a guide that addresses the main issues planners, developers, designers and other stakeholders.

- Advice for making planning decisions that affect wildlife

On GOV.UK you can find information and advice on making planning decisions for development proposals that affect a wide range of animal species, including bats, wild birds, fish and reptiles.

4.2 Paths and trails

Paths and trails are often some of the most used features of green and blue spaces. They allow visitors to move around and access activities, facilities and surrounding areas. These routes are also often how visitors find wildlife, birds and local fauna, which means they are crucial to visitors being able to enjoy everything a site has to offer.

By making your paths and trails more accessible, you can open your site to many more people. Wider paths with passing and turning places are helpful to wheelchair users, while alternative versions of signs and information can make it easier for a wider range of people to explore. In general, wider paths also make people feel safer.

Recommended reading

- Community Paths Guide from Paths for All

A useful resource that includes practical guidance if you want to start a new paths project, or if you plan to improve access to existing paths and trails.

- By All Reasonable Means guidance

This guidance from Sensory Trust includes advice and standards to help owners and managers improve access to countryside and public greenspace.

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance [PDF]

Sensory Trust has its Outdoor Accessibility Guidance that includes guidance on route standards, grades and audits.

"Knowing who is going to use the path, what they will use it for and how often, will help you determine how wide your path should be and what materials and infrastructure you need to put in place."

- Community Paths Guide, Paths for All

Changes you can make now

- Update your Know Before You Go information so people understand what to expect from your site's paths and trails when they visit. Review and change your information each season.

- Maintain paths and trails to make sure they are always as safe as possible for visitors to use in all weathers.

- Review your paths and trails and grade them in a way that allows visitors to understand which may be easier or more difficult for them to use. Ask for feedback on your grading and make changes where needed.

- Ask staff or volunteers to regularly walk and review paths and trails to look for obstructions, drainage issues or changes to the ground surface.

- Install benches or other furniture at regular intervals, so that visitors can take a rest when they need to.

- Install signs, maps and other useful information to make sure visitors know where they are and can feel safe while walking.

- Make sure any work on the trails and paths are planned as part of your long-term management plan.

- Install distance markers, so that visitors know how far away they are from the next bench, building or some other facility.

- Create a place or way for visitors to leave feedback at the end of their walk, so you can learn from their experience and make changes.

- Consider using portable ramps as a temporary measure if the cost of removing outdoor steps or lowering thresholds is too high.

- Recruit local volunteers who can walk paths regularly and carry out simple tasks, like cutting back brambles and reporting problems.

Gather feedback and insights

It's always a good idea to speak to and work with visitors and local community groups to learn how they use your paths and trails. The insights you gain can help you plan for the future and make changes that you can be confident will meet their needs.

You can collect feedback by:

- offering a feedback form at the site near where paths and trails end

- inviting people to attend open workshops

- sharing a survey that people can complete online

- collecting comments shared online

You can also connect with and learn from other organisations that can share the work they have done to improve their trails. They may also be able to share useful contact information for local suppliers of materials or outdoor design specialists.

Creating help points

It is important to consider safety when designing and managing your paths and trails. Secluded or hidden areas can feel unsafe because they are spaces where:

- threatening people can hide

- visitors can feel trapped

- others are unable to see people if they are in danger.

One way of improving these spaces is to add help points to your paths and trail routes. They can reassure people from a safety point of view and make it easier for visitors to get the help they need quickly.

Planning for change

There are a number of physical changes you can make to paths and trails, including making them wider and improving their drainage. However, you should always consider the environmental and conservation impact those changes may have on the space.

Of course, making paths and trails more accessible should form part of a long-term management plan. That should include a timeline for making realistic improvements and outline how you will fund and provide the staff needed to make these changes.

All paths and trails need managing, so always make sure the right resources are available to maintain these key routes and improve them over time.

Case studies

- Helping visitors explore Delapré Park

How Northampton's Active Quarter worked with local people and organisations working together to develop a new signposted 3km walking route.

- Path project success stories with the help of volunteers

A collection of case studies that show how organisations across Scotland have worked with volunteers to maintain and promote their local paths.

Further reading

- Community Paths Guide

Paths for All has a 'Community Paths Guide' for groups and individuals who want to improve and promote their local paths.

- Outdoor Access Design Guide

This 'Access Design Guide' from Paths for All includes consistent and clear advice on the selection and design of outdoor access furniture and structures, such as gates, fences and boardwalks.

- The Path Manager's Guide to Grading [PDF]

A useful if you want to learn more about how to grade your paths consistently and in a way is more accessible for visitors.

- Healthy Place Making

Healthy Place Making is a website from Active Together that is packed with information on how to create places that promote healthy living.

- Experience Community

Experience Community is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company that helps disabled people access the outdoors through a range of inclusive walking, cycling, conservation and arts activities.

- Route Categories

The Disabled Ramblers use a grading description to give members some feeling for the degree of difficulty of the rambles.

- What makes a park feel safe or unsafe?

This research report from The University of Leeds, West Yorkshire Combined Authority and Tracy Brabin Mayor of West Yorkshire, highlights 'What makes a park feel safe or unsafe?' for women and girls.

- Make Space for Girls Resources Library

Make Space for Girls has collected a wide range of information about teenage girls and parks, from research papers and consultations to good practice and briefing documents.

4.3 Bird hides, seating and other outdoor furniture

Ultimately, green and blue spaces are about the opportunity for us to be in the great outdoors. That means your site should include a range of seating, shelter and other outdoor furniture that allows everyone to enjoy the space. If your site has bird hides, it's important to make those accessible to all visitors too.

Provide clear information before people visit and look for opportunities to trial and then add new furniture in different locations. But make sure you maintain your existing hides and furniture too, as they are likely to change and be affected by bad weather and repeated use.

Recommended reading

- Developing a woodland space for educational access

The Royal Forestry Society provides guidance for woodland owners who are considering opening their space for educational access.

"For any site it is important to consider seating and shelter and to make sure it is available and accessible to all visitors, especially people who need it most. Taking the time to consider the use and location of seating and shelter can dramatically improve the experience for many of your visitors."

- Sensory Trust

Changes you can make now

- Update your Know Before You Go information to describe what seating and outdoor furniture you have available at the site.

- Run workshops and surveys with visitors and the local community to find out where you may be able to improve your current outdoor furniture.

- If you build new bird hides, do so in locations that are easy to access. Add ramps, emergency information and any other facilities that make the hides available to everyone.

- Add the position of bird hides and seating to your site map and any other information that helps people plan how they move around. Make clear where there is outdoor furniture designed for people with accessibility needs.

- Where it makes sense, provide seating options throughout your site, so visitors have options when they need a break. Where possible, add water stations and medical facilities on paths and trails.

- Install extended picnic tables designed with spaces for people who use a wheelchair. Alternatively, try cutting a section of an existing picnic bench to create space for a wheelchair.

- Install permanent shelters or structures in your outdoor spaces. Check whether you need planning permission and make sure they are in a position that is accessible to everyone.

- Provide sheltered spaces that are easy to access throughout the site. Even a simple tarpaulin will provide shelter from both wet and very hot weather.

- Invest in equipment and training that allows you to create a sheltered space very quickly and at short notice. If the weather quickly changes, you can set up sheltered spaces quickly.

- Install talking circles, den building areas and places for children and teenagers to enjoy the site.

Provide a variety of seating and furniture

Perhaps the best thing you can do to make your outdoor furniture more accessible is to provide a range of options. People have different needs, and the weather and physical environment can change from one day to the next.

For example, Sensory Trust suggests,

"Provide a variety of seating with different heights to allow visitors, including older people, wheelchair users, people with limited stamina, people of various heights and family groups to find some form of seating that is appropriate for them."

Ultimately, there is no one seating option that works for everyone. Audit your site, gather feedback from visitors and try to give people as much choice and information as possible.

Further reading

- Benches and Seating in Public Spaces

This guide from Wheels for Wellbeing includes detailed advice on how to install seating and other outdoor furniture in a way that is accessible to all.

4.4 Signs

Signs play a crucial role in making green or blue spaces more accessible. They are an obvious place to start if you want to make it easier for everyone who visits your site to move around the space. First, it's worth understanding the different types of signs you can provide.

In its Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access, Paths for All classifies signs into two categories. Advisory signage helps people understand what to expect and provides information that can help people with accessibility needs make informed decisions about their visit. Directional signage helps people find their way and get to the different parts of your site.

You likely have a range of signs already, but perhaps the most important thing to do first is understand how people are using them. Through surveys, workshops and community organising, you can identify common issues that might be solved by better, clearer signage.

Recommended reading

- Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access

This guide from Paths for All is for groups or individuals who are interested in improving their outdoor signage. It includes information on how to design, position and choose the right materials for your signs.

"Signage is one of the most important tools for the management of responsible access. It is first and foremost a simple and effective method of communication between the people who own or manage land and water and those who take access on it. Signs offer an obvious welcome and have a significant role to play in promoting paths and encouraging and supporting people in their use."

- Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access, Paths for All

Changes you can make now

- Carry out a review of your existing signage to identify where signs are currently placed and what condition they are in. Ask visitors to share their experience of navigating the site.

- Update your Know Before You Go information to describe the different types of signs at your site. Explain how easy it will be for them to find their way around and get to the facilities and activities.

- Install signs in places where visitors first arrive at your site, including directions to key locations. It reassures people they are in the right place and should help them understand where they should go first.

- Use standard safety signs and icons that are common and universally understood, especially if they relate to accessibility.

- Place signs in places where visitors can see them.

- Maintain the area around signs to make sure that they have not been obstructed or covered up by plant growth. Schedule seasonal reviews to stay on top of changing environments.

- Keep your messages short and simple using plain English to convey information as clearly as possible.

- Use positive language where possible and avoid telling people what not to do, as it may increase the chance of them ignoring the sign. Where you can, give reasons for what you are asking them to do.

- Choose your signs carefully and don't place too many in the same areas, as they can quickly become overwhelming and easily missed.

- Follow good design practice with large fonts that are easy to read and high colour contrasts for people who are visually impaired. Be consistent and use the same design styles on signs across the site.

- Create accessible versions of signs, which can include those made with tactile materials or Braille. Consider adding QR codes that allow visitors to access audio descriptions of the information.

- Identify the different languages spoken in your local community and consider signs that include information in different languages.

Where to put signs

Signs are good for improving accessibility, but only if they are in the right place and regularly maintained. For example, make sure they are positioned where everyone can see them and at a height appropriate for people who use a wheelchair. Keep the area around the signs clear so visitors can get close enough to read the information.

You can also choose to install signs in key areas that are specifically aimed at people with accessibility needs. Use signage to describe the physical features of an area, the surface and width of a particular trail, or any important safety instructions at different points of a walk.

Further reading

- Accessible Maps, Images and Signage [PDF]

This document describes the types of services offered by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). It also includes different options available for improving the accessibility of your signs and information.

- Dos and don'ts on designing for accessibility

The dos and don'ts of designing for accessibility are general guidelines, best design practices for making services accessible in government.

- Advice and guidance from Sensory Trust

Covers standards and legislation, technical issues like path widths and surfaces, and approaches like inclusive interpretation, nature-based activities and dementia-friendly walks.

- By All Reasonable Means

A guide from Sensory Trust that features advice and standards to help owners and managers improve access to countryside and public greenspace. Page 40 refers to the 'on-site experience' and making accessible information.

- How to write in plain English

A short guide from the Plain English Campaign that is full of practical advice to help you write in clear language.

4.5 Parking and public transport

Parking at your site is likely one of the first things people interact with and a hugely important part of the visitor experience. It's not just first impressions, a good accessible parking experience gives people the confidence that the rest of the site will also be safe and suitable.

Of course, good public transport links also help make your site more accessible to everyone. You can't always have an immediate influence on public transport, but you can promote the services that are available and campaign to improve access for more people.

Recommended reading

- Why the parking area is the first indicator of your sites' accessibility

This blog post from Direct Access features a range of tips on accessible parking and lots of good information on why you should maintain your accessible parking area.

- 14 Features of Inclusive Cycle Parking

Wheels for Wellbeing's guides provide a brief overview of best-practice standards for accessible and inclusive cycling.

"Maintaining accessible parking areas should be seen not as a necessity and tick-box exercise, but an opportunity to show disabled people that accessibility is a genuine consideration in the delivery of site's services, which has many benefits in its own right."

- Direct Access

Changes you can make now

- Update your Know Before You Go page to include information about accessible parking spaces. Include details including how many there are, the surface of your parking area and how far it is from the entrance or nearest building.

- Identify ways that you can improve the surface of your parking area to make it easier for people to walk or use a wheelchair. Avoid deep gravel and any materials that are hard to navigate.

- Install clear signage that explains when the car park opens and closes each day. It will help people plan their visit and make them feel safer.

- Provide dedicated bike parking no further way than the accessible parking spaces and as close to the entrance as possible. Make sure the space is secure and consider making it a covered area.

- Host themed days to encourage active travel to the site. For example, if appropriate for your site, a special 'cycle to site' day could include a bike tour to different areas of the space.

- Install good lighting throughout your parking area to make it easier for people to see where they are going, and to improve the overall safety of your site.

- Provide dedicated space where visitors are able to park a mobility scooter. Make it close to the entrance and install signs that show exactly what the space is to be used for.

- Ask a staff member or volunteer to welcome visitors as they arrive. They can offer support to anyone who has accessibility needs and give them a warm welcome to the site.

- Display local bus and train timetables in a prominent position near the entrance and exit of the site. On your website, link to up-to-date timetables so people can plan their journeys.

- Contact the local authority or bus services to see if it is possible to get a bus stop outside or near to your site. Collect feedback from visitors to make your argument more persuasive.

- Promote active travel and encourage people to visit your space by using public transport. Run a campaign to let people know their options and contact local services to see if they want to be involved.

Remove the stress

Getting to a site can be a stressful experience for some people with accessibility needs. Perhaps the best thing you can do to help is provide detailed information so they know what to expect and can be prepared.

For example, you could use your website to share:

- a description of the physical environment at the parking area

- share whether visitors need to pay for parking and how they do it

- if and when a person will be there to welcome them

- what times of day parking may be busy or more difficult.

Basically, whatever you can do to help people understand if the site is going to be suitable for them to visit, the easier it will be for them to make that decision.

Case studies

- Keeping communities active: encouraging active travel through our Health Walks

Think Nature Health Walks helped walking groups in rural Highland make everyday journeys more active.

Further reading

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance [PDF]

Paths for All via Sensory Trust has its Outdoor Accessibility Guidance, which features information and practical tips on car and bike parking on page 112.

- Encouraging active travel

A guide from Paths For All that outlines the help and support available to increase levels of walking, wheeling and cycling.

- Sustrans

Sustrans is a charity that works "for and with communities, helping them come to life by walking, wheeling and cycling to create healthier places and happier lives for everyone".

5. Making changes to your indoor spaces

5.1 Visitor centres, cafes and shops

Green and blue spaces are all about the great outdoors, but your indoor spaces are crucial to the accessibility of your site. Visitor centres provide the information people need in a range of formats, cafes offer food, shelter and comfort, while a good shop can stock products that make the whole experience easier and memorable.

As always, you should gather feedback from visitors and the local community to understand what they really need from these buildings. Your site will have its own opportunities and constraints, so look for ways you can make small improvements quickly alongside a long-term plan.

Recommended reading

- How can we make coffee shops accessible?

Useful blog post by Direct Access that includes some practical steps you can take to make your cafe a more accessible place.

- How to encourage disabled people to cafes and restaurants

The Business Disability Forum offers tips on how to attract disabled customers to your cafe and restaurant.

"Compared to the return you can expect to see when creating an inclusive social environment, the monetary cost of putting accessibility at the forefront of your design is pennies by comparison."

- Direct Access

Changes you can make now

- Update your Know Before You Go page to describe key buildings and what they are used for. Include information on who visitors should expect to be there when they visit, including any support they may be able to get from members of staff.

- Make sure paths that lead to each building are well signposted and wide enough for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Maintain their surfaces and provide ramps wherever possible.

- Provide clear internal signage so that visitors understand what building they are in and where they need to go. Use universal iconography that most people are likely to recognise and understand.

- Avoid dark coloured doormats, which people who are visually impaired can mistake for gaps or holes in the floor, making them feel unsteady.

- Provide enough space for all visitors to move around your shop safely. Avoid displaying so many products that people are not able to access all areas of the shop.

- Use a large font and high colour contrasts for any written information and cafe menus. Avoid handwritten menus or signs that are more difficult to read. Keep things simple with clear language.

- Create Braille or Easy Read versions of your visitor centre information and cafe's menu. You could also offer other languages that you know people typically speak in your local community.

- Clearly state what food and drink you have available and describe how you cater for people with specific dietary requirements. Use symbols and pictures to help people understand key information.

- Make sure that there is an all-gender accessible toilet available either inside or very close to the cafe. Keep the toilet maintained each day and display when it was last cleaned.

- Keep any background music volume low and consider turning it off if there are visitors who may find it uncomfortable. You could even create a designated quiet area in your cafe.

- Provide ergonomic cutlery sets that are more comfortable and safer for some people to use in your cafe. Make it clear that the option is available without a visitor needing to ask.

Use pictures and videos

As with your outdoor spaces, one of the best ways to help people prepare for a visit is to show them exactly what to expect. Take pictures of your visitor centre, cafe and shop and share them on your website, so that people can understand what the spaces are like and if they are suitable for them.

You can also include your indoor buildings in any video tour that you produce for your site. Again, this will help people see what it is like to be in and move around the space. When you publish any images or videos online, follow web accessibility standards, which includes using alternative text and captions.

Use the space for other things

Your indoor buildings can often be used for multiple purposes. For example, you may be able to use your visitor centre for educational sessions or create a dedicated space there for quiet thinking and reflection.

Your cafe could be the ideal place for running social events and regular groups. Think about the layout of your cafe area and how you might be able to adapt it for group meetups. Try running outdoor walks followed by time in the cafe for people to chat and enjoy a sense of community.

Further reading

- How to make your coffee shop more accessible

Euan's guide features a wide range of useful advice on how to make your coffee shop or cafe more accessible.

- What Should I Check at a Venue to Ensure It Is Accessible?

An accessibility checklist from Historic England for anyone who wants to organise and plan an accessible event.

5.2 Toilets

While every green or blue space is different, you should always aim to provide accessible, inclusive toilet facilities. It makes the experience better for everyone, but for people who have accessibility or other specific needs, it can affect whether they are able to visit your site at all.

The good news is there is so much you can do to make your toilets more accessible, from improving the physical space to providing better signage and more options. As a minimum, you should provide an all-gender accessible toilet space that is next to or near any other toilets.

But you may be able to further and invest in specialist equipment or facilities, from something as simple as handrails to a Changing Places Toilet. Think about the needs of all types of visitors, from parents with young children to those with different faiths. There will be things you can do to better meet their needs.

Recommended reading

- Accessible changing and toilet provision

Sport England's guide to accessible and inclusive sports facilities includes detailed information on accessible toilets.

"Accessible and inclusive provision is important for all aspects of leisure facilities, but potentially most crucial for toilets and changing areas. Poor design, management and maintenance can have a negative impact on users' overall experience and could discourage future visits."

- Accessible and inclusive sports facilities, Sport England

Changes you can make now

- Carry out research in your local community and with visitors to learn more about what they need from your toilets. Speak to people with different access needs and who are of different faiths and genders.

- Use your Know Before You Go information to describe the toilets at your site, including how many and where they are, as well as specific information about accessible toilets.

- Create a regular schedule for cleaning, maintaining and making sure toilet facilities are safe throughout the day. Display the schedule to show the last time the toilets were checked.

- Make sure emergency pull cords are down to the floor and test them every day to make sure they are working well.

- Install sinks and soap dispensers at different heights, so that they can be reached easily by more people, including children.

- Explore how you can provide separate male, female and all-gender toilets. You should always provide a separate all-gender toilet that can be used by wheelchair users and anyone who supports them.

- Describe and signpost any nearby toilet facilities if your site is so small or remote that it does not currently have any toilet facilities at all.

- Install baby changing facilities in all toilets so that they can be used by parents and carers of all genders.

- Install clear signs with large clear fonts and consistent, universal icons that show where the toilets are and which ones to use. Place signs in suitable locations throughout the building and around the site.

- Place sinks within reach of the toilet, something that can be important for people managing a stoma or using sustainable menstrual products.

- Research and consider changes that make your site's toilets more accessible to people of different faiths. Those visitors may need specific hygiene facilities you can easily offer.

Changing Places Toilets

Changing Places Toilets include facilities for the thousands of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well other disabilities that severely limit mobility, who cannot use standard accessible toilets.

The Changing Places Consortium is a group of organisations and individuals who work individually to support the rights of people with disabilities and come together as the home of the Changing Places Campaign in the UK.

Consider learning more about Changing Places Toilets and how you may be able to install them at your site. Start by reading the practical guide to Changing Places Toilets.

Case studies

- Real-life stories from people who use Changing Places toilets

A collection of case studies that show the benefits Changing Places toilets can bring to those people who need the extra facilities.

Further reading

- Seeds for Change: Venues and Accessibility.

This simple guide from this social and environmental justice campaigning organisation considers access at venues.

- Muslims in the Workplace: A Good Practice Guide for Employers and Employees

Item 4.16 on page 15 of this good practice guide from The Muslim Council of Britain highlights what is needed to provide a suitable multi-faith prayer or contemplation room at venues.

- Equality Act 2010: guidance

Information and guidance on the Equality Act 2010, including age discrimination and public sector Equality Duty. The Act currently applies to Scotland, England and Wales.

- Approved Documents

The Approved Documents provide guidance on ways to meet the building regulations.

6. Feedback and evaluation

6.1 Feedback from visitors

Throughout this guide, we have frequently referred to the importance of getting, listening to and acting on feedback from visitors. It is the best way for you to learn where things have gone well, but also to understand what needs to happen to continue improving accessibility.

Visitors will want to provide feedback in different ways, so it is a good idea to try different approaches and give them plenty of choice. Make sure they know what you are asking them to do and give them confidence that what they say will lead to real action.

Finally, encourage feedback from a diverse range of people, including those with different accessibility needs. Improving accessibility takes thought and ongoing work, but you can start by asking the right questions and showing good intent.

Recommended reading

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance [PDF]

The Outdoor Accessibility Guidance by Sensory Trust for Paths for All includes useful information on collecting feedback from visitors and both people and organisations in your local community.

- How to write effective questionnaires [PDF]

NHS England has a bitesize guide to writing effective questionnaires that includes advice on how to write good questions.

"Engage existing users who know your site or route well and can give informed feedback. However, involve potential users too otherwise you will only learn from people who have already decided their needs are met to some extent."

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance, Paths for All

Changes you can make now

- Make it easy for people to sign up for emails and newsletters to help them stay in touch after their visit. Give people different ways of receiving information, as some people do not use email and may prefer texts or even materials by post.

- Be proactive and any partners or groups you are working with how their visits are going. That might include social prescribing teams, walking groups or school visits.

- Run focus groups and workshops with people in your local community to ask how they feel the site has changed and what impact they have felt. Do the same with visitors and even people who may visit in the future.

- Create an online survey or questionnaire and share it through your existing communication channels. Make sure the survey itself follows web accessibility guidelines.

- Run individual user research interviews with people to get in depth feedback from specific groups of people. Prepare questions that allow you to learn from and understand their experience of visiting the site.

- Leave a comments box with paper and working pens in a prominent place. The entrance to your site should see lots of people pass through, but your visitor centre or cafe may also work too.

- Be clear about what you plan to do with the feedback people share with you, including any personal information they provide. Make your surveys and sessions anonymous to encourage more people to take part.

- Encourage people to leave reviews online or even on a board that you can display somewhere on site.

- Encourage people to share their photos and get involved with your social media. You can develop individual social campaigns that use feedback to share more about your site and its accessible facilities.

- Offer incentives for people to stay in touch or share their feedback. Prize draws and discounts will help people engage and you can use what you learn to either promote your site to others or improve your warm welcome.

Dealing with complaints

You can't always get things right and at some point, you are likely to get complaints from visitors. First, be approachable, give the person complaining your full attention and be ready to take positive action where possible. Train your staff to stay calm, show empathy and avoid being defensive.

If you can, try and deal with the complaint immediately. For example, if a path is blocked, ask a team member to move the obstruction straight away. If you can't act right away, record the complaint and tell the visitor you will find a solution as soon as possible. Offer to take their details so you can contact them when the problem is solved.

Most importantly, you should use complaints to make your site better, including its accessibility. If you find the same issue coming up again and again, it could be that you need to update your processes or make a more significant change. Remember, complaints are a valid and important way to learn and improve.

Further reading

- Forestry England's 'Making a complaint' page

This example from Forestry England includes information on how to make the complaint, as well as a detailed breakdown of the complaints process.

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6.2 Measuring and evaluating success

If you follow the 'Getting started' section of this guide, you should already have a baseline and a range of things you want to measure. The only way you know if the accessibility changes you have made are working is to carry out a thorough evaluation process using that initial baseline.

Recommended reading

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance [PDF]

The Outdoor Accessibility Guidance by Sensory Trust for Paths for All includes useful information on evaluating your access changes.

"Evaluation can feel like an onerous step after all the hard work of implementing access improvements, but it is important. It will help you identify what worked well, and what could have been done better, and these will be important learnings for future work."

- Outdoor Accessibility Guidance, Paths for All

Changes you can make now

● Measure changes in how people perceive, experience or attend your site to understand whether you're making progress towards your goal of making your site more accessible.

● Collect and monitor data that shows how people use accessible facilities, such as dedicated parking spaces, accessible toilets and any specific outdoor areas.

● Carry out any evaluation using the techniques you identified previously. A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods will give you a well-rounded picture of how things are changing.

● Revisit the range of insights and data that helped you understand your site's previous accessibility levels. Repeat the actions you previously took to review your baseline now things have changed.

● Repeat any audits you took previously using the same principles and methods. You may also want to create new audits or try something different to help you move forwards in the future.

● Use what you learn through evaluation to train your team, improve your processes and make any obvious further improvements. Update your Know Before You Go information if appropriate.

- Share what you find with other people. If you're seeing new trends, observing different visitors or behaviours, telling other people about the actions you took can help them think through their own approaches. That applies even if you're not able to prove a clear link between the things you've done and the changes you're seeing.

- Review the impact any changes you have made have had on the physical environment, areas of conservation or wildlife.

- Work with experts whenever you can and be sure to fulfil contracts that may have evaluation as part of their funding requirements.

Further reading

- How to measure and report on accessibility

While it is not specific to green and blue spaces, this is useful guidance from the Business Disability Forum on measuring accessibility initiatives.

- Guidelines for good practice in self-evaluation

The UK Evaluation society has written this guide to help organisations carry out their own self-evaluation.

- A guide for evaluating public engagement activities [PDF]

The Research Councils UK produced this guide to evaluating public engagement activities.

7. References

This guide is for you to make changes quickly before going on to explore specific subjects in more depth. Every chapter includes links to other resources. They also contain lots more evidence, resources, templates and guides that may be of interest. You can find the full list of links below.

A guide to co-designing social prescribing initiatives with older people | NASP

A guide to management planning

A list of wildlife laws in the UK

Access for All Outdoor Conference

Accessible and inclusive sports facilities

Accessible Maps, Images and Signage

Activity Alliance (Disability Inclusion Sport)

Advice for making planning decisions that affect wildlife

Advice on planning decisions that affect ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees

Age-friendly case study: Supporting older people to shape their environment through walk audits

Barriers and facilitators to accessing greenspace environments as sites for health amongst marginalised groups

"Barriers To Accessing Green Space And What We Are Doing To Change This" (Future Parks Accelerator)

Being Inclusive

Biodiversity plans for healthcare sites (NHS Forest)

Black Girls Hike UK C.I.C

By All Reasonable Means guidance Sensory Trust

Checking the accessibility of an event or venue - Scope

Community Organising Framework

Creating More Accessible Green & Blue Spaces: Understanding the experiences of people with visual impairments that visit green and blue spaces

Design guide for creating a sensory garden

Developing a woodland space for educational access

Do you cater for neurodiversity?

Dogs on nature reserves

Dogs on Reserves Policy [PDF]

Dos and don'ts on designing for accessibility

Enhancing Access to Green & Blue Spaces for People with Visual Impairment

Evidence for EFRA inquiry on urban green spaces

Green social prescribing (NHS England)

Green Care Quality Mark (Social Farms & Gardens)

Green Social Prescribing Toolkit

Green Social Prescribing (National Academy for Social Prescribing)

Green Flag Award guidelines

Greenspace & Us

Greenspace & Us Part 2: A community insights co-production project with teenage girls to understand their needs for more inclusive and accessible greenspace

Guidance Note 8 Bats and Artificial Lighting (Institution of Lighting Professionals)

Guidelines for good practice in self-evaluation

Healthy Place Making

How to lead an accessible sensory walk

How to write in plain English

How to write well

Improving access to green space

Inclusive Heritage Advice Hub

Make Space for Girls Resource Library

Make your website or app accessible and publish an accessibility statement

Making waves: opening up green and blue spaces to people with disabilities

Managing dogs and nature conservation

National design guide (GOV.UK)

National Planning Policy Framework

Natural England: Building partnerships for nature's recovery

Natural Environment (National Academy for Social Prescribing)

Nature Connectedness Research Group (University of Derby)

Our top tips on connecting with nature to improve your mental health

Outdoor Accessibility Guidance - Paths for All | Paths for All

Outdoor Citizens | YHA

Parks and green space (Landscape Institute)

Path project success stories with the help of volunteers

PDFs and other non-HTML documents

Planning practice guidance (GOV.UK)

Posters designed with Nifty Fox depicting viewpoints on safety in parks

Reimagining Hartcliffe Millennium Green

Report finds severe inequalities in access to parks and greenspaces in communities across the UK

Resources & Research - Green Flag Award

Safer Parks for women and girls YouTube promotional video

Safer Parks: Improving Access for Women and Girls

Seeding Change Report: shining a light on the barriers to nature conservation volunteering for young women and non-binary people of colour

SENsory Explorers – accessible nature discovery for families

Sensory trails in the Peak District

Signage Guidance for Outdoor Access

Social Prescribing Link Worker Induction Guide

Stories from the Nextdoor Nature Hub

Stories of community organising

Supporting people with long term health conditions to be physically active

The activities handbook (Alzheimer's Society)

The definitive guides to practical conservation work

The Doggy Dilemma [PDF]

The People and Nature Surveys for England

The What Works Network

The Wildlife Trusts Impact Report 2022–2023

Trees, Planning and Development: A Guide for Delivery – Green Flag Award

Trusted Provider Assessment Check

Videos of the symposium presentations

Volunteering and community participation

Web accessibility standards

Webcams available at The Wildlife Trust reserves

What do Teenage Girls Like and Dislike about Park Play Spaces and Multi-Use Games Areas?

What is an 'accessible PDF'?

What Makes a Park Feel Safe and Unsafe?

What Should I Check at a Venue to Ensure It Is Accessible?

What to expect when you join a Ramblers group walk

Women and Girls' Safety (Parks for London)

Women and Girls Safety in the Public Realm

Women and Girls' Safety in Parks: Lessons from Research and Practice Symposium report

Working in partnership with people and communities: statutory guidance

Working with different groups

8. Acknowledgements

Thank you to players of People's Postcode Lottery for supporting the development of this guide to help everyone, everywhere, enjoy nature.

Thank you to the 30 local Wildlife Trusts who contributed to the development of these resources. We are also grateful to the following organisations, which offered time and expertise to help us with this work.

- Natural England
- RSPB
- Groundwork UK
- Marine Conservation Society
- Sport England
- Activity Alliance
- Scot Link
- National Academy for Social Prescribing
- Ramblers
- Accessible Places UK
- Leeds University
- Smile Foundation
- Ernest Cook Trust
- Heritage England

The Wildlife Trusts are a federation of 47 charities, 46 individual Wildlife Trusts and a central charity, the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. Together we have more than 900,000 members, 39,000 volunteers and 3,600 staff across the UK. We share a vision of nature in recovery, with abundant, diverse wildlife and natural processes creating wilder landscapes where people and nature thrive.

Wildlife Trusts care for – and have restored – some of the most special places for wildlife in the UK. Collectively we manage more than 2,300 nature reserves, operate 123 visitor and education centres and own 29 working farms. We undertake research, we stand up for wildlife and wild places under threat, and we help people access nature.

We work with businesses who are committed to being nature positive and take action to help restore 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030.

The Wildlife Trusts

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