Pennine National Trails Partnership – written evidence (NER0013)

Response to the Select Committee on the NERC Act 2006 on behalf of the Pennine National Trails Partnership

This response primarily relates to the role of Natural England in managing and promoting National Trails as a means of accessing the countryside.

The Issue
1. There are 13 National Trails across the UK, stretching over 2,600 miles providing opportunities for visitors to walk, cycle and horse ride through some of the UK’s finest landscapes. The England Coast Path will be the newest National Trail and when completed in 2020 will be one of the longest coastal walking routes in the world.

2. The trails pass through national parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), world heritage sites, nature reserves and even ten cities attracting over 83 million visits each year. Visitors to the trails spend over £533 million a year, supporting local economies and communities. Teams of dedicated experts look after the trails ensuring all can enjoy them.

3. However, the future of our existing 13 National Trails is currently uncertain. A commitment made by Natural England in 2013 to a three-year funding cycle has not been forthcoming and although Defra has committed funding until 2017-2018, future funding past this date is currently unclear. This means that whilst the trails have managed a 30% cut in budget, and have been able to raise £2.2 million to meet the shortfall, the question over their longer term future means stakeholders and external funders are reluctant to commit further funds.

4. At a local level the lack of certainty of budget means that National Trails are not able to plan or make long-term decisions. This has the potential to impact on local economies as it not only inhibits new investments, it also means that existing businesses dependent on the trails are hesitant to invest, or in some cases, will be at risk of closure.

5. Maintenance of the trails is also under threat. Local highways authorities carry out the maintenance works on the trails along with landowners and volunteers. In a climate where there are funding pressures, local authorities are having to make budget cuts which has the potential to impact on the maintenance of the National Trails.

6. If further cuts are made or decisions on funding continue to come at short notice, the trails face no option but undertake redundancies and potentially let the paths fall into disrepair. This will have a wider impact on the tourism sector as well as welfare and
environmental management. It will further compound the difficulties rural and coastal communities whose economies rely heavily on tourism are facing, creating deprivation and dependency.

7. The trails are national assets, improving the health, wellbeing and prosperity of the UK as well as inspiring people to value our natural environment. Usage of the trails has been increasing and with funding there will be opportunities for growth.

8. Natural England has been very restricted in its role of ‘promoting’ access to the countryside. No allowance is made for promotional activities within the annual maintenance grant that is awarded to each National Trail. Whilst Natural England does have a ‘Promotion Partner’ in the form of Walk Unlimited, it does not fund this relationship but relies on the website and activities to be self financing. Unfortunately it has not been possible for Walk Unlimited to achieve this, and so Trail Partnerships have been required to divert attention from trail maintenance in order to raise funds for promotional work, including the ongoing maintenance of a central website.

What do National Trails require?

9. To ensure the future of the National Trails is safeguarded, The Pennine National Trails Partnership urges the Government to:
   9.1. Request DEFRA upholds the Natural England agreement and commits to a three year funding cycle for trail maintenance
   9.2. Maintain the total investment of £1.69 million each year for the maintenance of the 13 existing National Trails until 2021
   9.3. Provide staged maintenance funding for the England Coast Path as it opens:  
       (2017/18 £0.13 million; 2018/19 £0.89 million; 2019/20 £1.39 million; 2020/21 £1.49 million)
   9.4. Ensure that grant offers are made in good time to allow Partnerships to plan in advance. Preferably, grant offers should be for more than 1 year at a time.
   9.5. Secure funding and political commitment for the completion of trails which have been opened but which are not yet completed on the ground e.g. the Pennine Bridleway.
   9.6. A stronger commitment from Natural England to the promotion of National Trails.

Key Facts

- There are 14 National Trails in England including the new England Coast Path due to be complete in 2020
- The England Coast Path will be the longest walking trail in Europe
- The trails pass through 2,600 miles / 4,160 KM of the finest landscapes
- The National Trials pass through 6 National Parks, 15 AONB, 2 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, 7 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 10 English Cities and 33 National Nature Reserves
- 83 million people visit the trails each year
- Visitor spend is worth £533 million each year to the economy
- Volunteers spend 3,000 working days per year on the trail, which has been valued at £300,000
- The National Trails website has 2.6 million visitors per year which support 4,260 businesses
- Walking and riding on the National Trails could save the NHS £167 million through improved health and well being
- 93% of visitors left calm and relaxed after a trip to one of the National Trails
- Usage of the trails has been rising significantly, for example there has been a 36% increase in visitors to the Norfolk Coast Path
- The National Trails are award winning with the South West Coast Path being awarded Outstanding Contribution to Tourism and the South Downs Way being recognised as one of the top 10 mountain bike routes in the world
- Government spending on National Trails is 3p per person
- £1.6 million Government funding levers in additional funds, doubling spend

**The Trails**

**Cleveland Way**
Spanning 109 miles, this trail starts at Helmsley, North Yorkshire and ends at Filey, North Yorkshire – taking an average of 9 days to complete.

**Cotswold Way**
Spanning 102 miles, this trail starts at Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire and ends at Bath, Somerset – taking an average of 7-10 days to complete.

**Hadrian’s Wall Path**
Spanning 84 miles, this trail starts at Wallsend, Tyne and Wear and ends at Bowness on Solway, Cumbria – taking an average of 6-7 days to complete.

**North Downs Way**
Spanning 153 miles, this trail starts at Farnham, Surrey and ends at Dover, Kent – taking an average of 12 days to complete.

**Offa’s Dyke Path**
Spanning 177 miles, this trail starts at Chepstow, Monmouthshire and ends at Prestatyn, Denbighshire – taking an average of 14 days to complete.

**Pedders Way and**
Spanning 90 miles, this trail starts at Knettishall, Suffolk and ends at Cromer,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Start and End</th>
<th>Time to Complete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk Coast Path</td>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennine Bridleway</td>
<td>205 miles</td>
<td>White Peak, Derbyshire to Howgill Fells, Cumbria</td>
<td>1-14+ days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennine Way</td>
<td>268 miles</td>
<td>Edale, Derbyshire to Kirk Yethholm, Scottish Border</td>
<td>16-19 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Downs Way</td>
<td>100 miles</td>
<td>Winchester, Hampshire to Eastbourne, East Sussex</td>
<td>8-9 days, 2-3 days by bike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West Coast Path</td>
<td>630 miles</td>
<td>Minehead, Somerset to Poole, Dorset</td>
<td>30 days walking, 7-8 weeks leisurely pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thames Path</td>
<td>184 miles</td>
<td>Near Cricklade, Wiltshire to Thames Barrier, Greenwich, London</td>
<td>14 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ridgeway</td>
<td>87 miles</td>
<td>Avebury, Wiltshire to Ashridge Estate, Buckinghamshire</td>
<td>6 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire Wolds Way</td>
<td>79 miles</td>
<td>Hessel, East Riding of Yorkshire to Filey Brigg, North Yorkshire</td>
<td>5-6 days</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*5 September 2017*