

**Natural England Dog Walking Advice - Consultation Draft**  
Report by Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer

**Summary:**

This report provides members with details of advice that Natural England and National Resources Wales have been developing for dog walkers in England and Wales.

**Recommendation:**

That members comment on the draft advice particularly with regard to the following questions:

- (1) Are the right themes included in the guidance?
- (2) Are the correct messages included in the themes?
- (3) Is the approach of focusing on themes that can be developed either separately as individual campaigns or used together as a single advice publication the right one to adopt in disseminating the guidance?

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 Natural England and National Resources Wales have been developing advice for dog walkers in England and Wales. The development follows on from the recent refresh of the Countryside Code and is intended to replace the, now out of print, publication "You and Your Dog in the Countryside". The code has been drafted by Natural England and National Resources Wales under the guidance of a working group made up of key stakeholders from the sector.
- 1.2 Appendix 1 to this report is a draft version of the advice and Appendix 2 a draft of the development guide. The guide outlines the working group's terms of reference and explains the wider objectives of the project.

## **2 Conclusions**

- 2.1 Natural England is now carrying out a targeted consultation open to NAF and Local Access Forums and this is open until the 1st of October 2014.
- 2.2 Members comments are sought on the following specific questions:
  - (1) Are the right themes included in the guidance?
  - (2) Are the correct messages included in the themes?
  - (3) Is the approach of focusing on themes that can be developed either separately as individual campaigns or used together as a single advice publication the right one to adopt in disseminating the guidance?

Background papers: Nil

Author: Adrian Clarke  
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Broads Plan Objectives: TR1

Appendices: Appendix 1 Dog Walking Advice – Consultation Draft  
Appendix 2 Dog Walking Advice – Development Guide

## Tails on the Trail!

### Advice for dog walkers

Your dog loves to get out and play! Half of all visits the people make to the outdoors in the UK are with dogs. By making sure you get out and about your dog is keeping you healthy and helping you enjoy the local area.

Like everything you do in the outdoors the more you know about it, the more you enjoy it. The same can be said for dog walking. To get the most out of your visit to the outdoors with your canine friend, whether close to home or further afield, remember:

- Train your dog well
- Leave no trace of dog poo
- Take stock of farm animals
- Get to know your surroundings
- Keep your dog happy and healthy

### Train your dog well

Dogs are naturally fun loving and adventurous and love running free in big open areas. They don't always know that this can put them in danger or cause problems for others so it's up to you to keep your dog safe and help it get the most out of its walk.

A well trained dog is a happy dog:

- **Good Dog!** Dogs respond best to positive words and training. Practice the key commands with your dog in the comfort of your house or garden so they feel comfortable with them outdoors. Always keep your dog in sight so you know that it is safe and out of trouble.
- **Here boy!** Landowners love to see a dog that is well trained. Your ability to recall your dog is probably the most important skill you can develop. Your dog should always return to you immediately when called, no matter what it has seen or smelled.
- **Heel!** Keeping your dog at heel or close to you when on paths or crossing farmland is another essential skill in the outdoors. Do not let it approach or chase livestock, or cause distress to wildlife, other dogs or people.
- **Lead!** It's always good practice to keep your dog on a lead around farm animals for your own safety and for the welfare of the animals. The more comfortable you are at using the lead, the happier you and your dog will be when you use it.

- **Sit!** Your dog should sit when told to, even when at a distance. Training your dog to do this will help you control it if its inquisitiveness gets the better of it.
- **Stay!** Some people, especially children, and even other dogs, do not like being approached by a dog even if it's a friendly visit. Training your dog not to approach others on impulse will keep them safe and let people see the very best in them.

If you want to let your dog run free, check you are in an area where off-lead exercise is welcomed and there are no farm animals about; remember that a farmer has the right to protect his animals if they are being worried, chased or attacked by dogs. You may also need to consider the time of year as dogs should be on a lead from March to the end of July in some areas to avoid disturbing nesting birds.

### Leave no trace of dog poo

Dog mess carries diseases and parasites that have been proven to cause serious harm to people and other animals. It can destroy sensitive plants and flowers that you want to enjoy on your walk, and can even get into our food chain.

- **Always pick up your dog's poo wherever you are** – from the highest peaks to the middle of the city as, it is very unpleasant for others if trodden in. Remember to take a supply of poo bags with you!
- **Bag it and Bin it** – you can use **any** litter bin to put dog mess in, including your council bin at home or general waste bins out and about.
- **Don't leave bags full of poo lying around** – even if you intend to pick the bag up on your way back, it is easily forgotten. Take the time to bin it as soon as you bag it or carry it with you until you find a bin.

*“There are many products on the market that will make carrying and disposing of dog poo easier and help you protect your community and the environment.”*

### Take stock of farm animals

Farm animals can behave unpredictably, especially if you get too close or they're with their young. There is an average of one or two deaths per year from a cattle attack, so keep you and your dog safe by taking **STOCK** of the situation before entering a field:

- **Stop, Look and Listen** – be particularly aware of cows with calves, bulls, rams and horses.

- **Take the best route** – keep to paths where possible but give farm animals plenty of space and avoid getting between them and their young. Keep any possible exits in sight.
- **Observe livestock behaviour** – walk calmly and quietly but keep an eye out for animals looking agitated or spooked.
- **Control your dog** – keep it at heel or on a lead, for your own safety and so as not to aggravate any farm animals.
- **Keep calm if threatened** - move calmly and decisively towards the closest exit or boundary that you can climb over. If you are with a dog, take it off the lead and let it go – it will be safer without you.

### Get to know your surroundings

Whether you're doing your usual walk or going somewhere new, you can get more out of your trip by finding out what the area has to offer you and your dog. Get to know familiar places a bit more or find exciting new ones!

- **On the beach** – Beaches are great places to let your dog run free off the lead. There are often great expanses to explore and water to swim in but be aware of local bye-laws or any Dog Control Orders. When there are lots of other people on the beach or in the sea, remember to be considerate of others – for your dog's benefit as well as theirs! Keep an eye out for seabirds as your dog could harm them just by chasing them. This is particularly true when birds are breeding in the spring or when they are weak from lack of food in the winter. Find out about great dog friendly beaches to visit at: [www.nearestbeach.co.uk/dog-friendly/](http://www.nearestbeach.co.uk/dog-friendly/)
- **In the woods** – There are acres of publicly owned woodland in England and Wales – all great places for walking your dog. There are visitor centres where you can grab a coffee before you head out and onsite rangers who can tell you about what is happening in the woods. Some sites even have dog specific activities like agility trails – great for a good workout for both of you. Find out about woodlands in your area: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk>
- **Out in the hills** – The hills are great places to get some vigorous exercise but they are also home to wildlife and are often used for farming so you need to bear a few things in mind out there. For instance, there is a right of open access on lots of the uplands in England and Wales where dogs can run free, however, they should always be kept on a short lead when around livestock and there may be restrictions that ask that they be kept on a short lead between 1 March and 31 July, to help protect ground

nesting birds. Find out more about access land at:  
[www.naturalengland.co.uk](http://www.naturalengland.co.uk)

Wherever you are and wherever you go, remember to be considerate to others – keep your dog under effective control, bag and bin the poo and have a great time!

### Keep your dog happy and healthy

Walking your dog every day keeps it happy and healthy and can do wonders for your health too. Walking for just 30 minutes, five or more times per week, can help you live longer and reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, strokes, arthritis and some cancers.

- **Stay in shape** – Picking up the pace or going a bit further will do wonders for you and your dog – but avoid exercising it for at least an hour before or after meals as this may make it ill.
- **Be seen** - If you are walking near traffic or at night, reflective or flashing dog coats, collars and leads can help drivers see your pet.
- **Stay cool** - Avoid heatstroke by making sure your dog gets plenty of shade and clean, cool water. Never leave your pet in a car with the windows closed.
- **Play it safe** - Sticks can cause horrific injuries to dogs. Instead, play with a tough plastic toy, making sure it's big enough not to be swallowed.
- **Don't lose it** – Even the best trained dog may get lost. Microchips and name badges will help get your dog back home.
- **Be well** – Worm your dog regularly to protect it, other animals and people. If you walk regularly in the countryside remember to apply tick treatment, too.

### Get involved

Dog walkers are often the first people to notice and report problems on a site or on a path. In some areas dog walkers have formed volunteer groups that help spread positive messages about dog walking and are eyes and ears on the ground, helping site managers and the local council deal with problems from fallen trees paths to vandalism. If you visit a site regularly consider getting in touch with the relevant organisation to see if you can be involved.

## Dog Walking Advice

### Development Guide

### Introduction

Following the refresh of the Countryside Code in 2012, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales began discussing developing a project to update its advice for dog walkers and replace the, now out of print, publication “You and your dog in the countryside”. To aid in the development of this project a Dog Advice Working Group (DAWG) was set up. The terms of reference for this group were as follows:

1. *Purpose of the Working Group is to:*
  - *Guide the creation of a dog walking advice for England and Wales to replace the now out of print leaflet “You and Your Dog in the Countryside”*
  
2. *The Working Group will consist of representatives from the following:*
  - *Natural England*
  - *Natural Resources Wales*
  - *Forestry Commission*
  - *Hampshire Country Council*
  - *National Farmers Union*
  - *Countryside Landowners Association*
  - *Kennel Club*
  - *Ramblers*
  - *British Mountaineering Council*
  - *British Horse Society*
  
3. *The Working Group will:*
  - *work together to draft the content of the advice*
  - *gather feedback from key stakeholders and use it to help refine the advice*
  - *ensure that the advice is mindful and supportive of other initiatives already in existence*
  - *look at ways of developing links and partnerships that will help promote responsible dog walking in England and Wales*

When the DAWG group met to discuss the creation of dog walking advice, a basic approach for NE and NRW to follow was set out:

#### ***Focus of Advice***

*It will be clearly aimed at dog owners but complementary to land manager advice, using common language where appropriate. It will be part of good land/site management initiatives and reflect best practice experience.*

*Its aim will be to influence change in behaviour of owners in the ways they manage their dogs. The approach will focus on messages which relate to what dog owners care about (health, safety, enjoyment for themselves and their dog) i.e. turning the messages around. It will be seen as part of good dog ownership culture, a blueprint of how to behave.*

*The key messages will be generic national messages applicable everywhere (the default position) and need not be specifically countryside. It will be a resource which counters misinformation and from which more locally focussed advice can be drawn. It will signpost more detailed information sources.*

### **Channels for distribution**

*The advice will comprise of succinct messaging as well as greater detail, capable of development into various formats eg leaflet (3 fold), credit cards/bookmarks, gatepost signage, apps, social media. Further investigation needed to determine best ways to reach audiences ie majority of dog walkers use regular routes close to home. Commercial sponsorship is an option to investigate, could be useful in distribution terms. Launch will provide opportunities to maximise impact including media and special interest features, membership services channels.*

## **Structure**

The advice developed by the working group is based around 5 key points or themes. They are as follows:

- Train your dog well
- Leave no trace of dog poo
- Take stock of farm animals
- Get to know your surroundings
- Keep your dog happy and healthy

The structure of the advice was developed to focus on themes that can be viewed separately as individual campaigns or together as a single advice publication. It is also designed to make each theme expandable, allowing the text that accompanies them to be adapted, in partnership with relevant stockholders, to target it more effectively at its intended audience.

This document outlines some of the thinking behind the themes in the current draft and how they could be used or extended into other formats. **Any examples given should be taken as illustrations only.** They are based on the discussions of the working group about the perceptions and behaviour that the guidance should address. Use in conjunction with the draft advice document.



## Theme 1: Train your dog well

This theme is based around the owner's responsibility to manage their dog effectively while in the outdoors. From the discussion in the working group, the issue of dog "control" seems to be more linked to bad training and dog management than to the nature of the dog itself? The definition of "control" was also to be very problematic, having negative connotations or being too vague.

The current text tries to turn the issue of dog 'control' around by promoting good training as a way of giving positive actions to dog owners, whilst also emphasising the need to manage dogs effectively in certain situations. The advice uses the basic commands taught as part of dog training to highlight their importance and the owners role as a steward for their dog(s).

This theme can be expanded on to include the type of advice provided by the Kennel Club and Dog Trust on effective training. Here is an example of how a one of the points in the draft could be expanded (using published advice by the Dog Trust – in *italics*):

**Here boy!** Landowners love to see a dog that is well trained. Your ability to recall your dog is probably the most important skill you can develop. Your dog should always return to you immediately when called, no matter what it has seen or smelled.

Help train it to do so:

*Make it easy for yourself and your dog by finding an area that is as quiet as possible. If other dogs are running around it will be very hard for your dog to concentrate. It is absolutely important that your dog gets the command right every time at this point and then you can slowly build up to higher levels of distractions but only as long as your dog keeps getting it right.*

- *Remember to feed your dog 45 minutes to an hour before training on walks.*
- *Keep your dog on the extending lead or long line, so that he cannot get away or out of sight. Let him go to the end of the lead and enjoy sniffing around.*
- *When you are ready, call him to you and wait. Do not pull him to you - he must come to you out of choice.*
- *When he does, give him his reward, praise, then "good dog – off you go!" and let him go off sniffing again.*
- *Repeat this several times during his walk, so that he learns that coming to you will not automatically mean it is the end of his walk.*

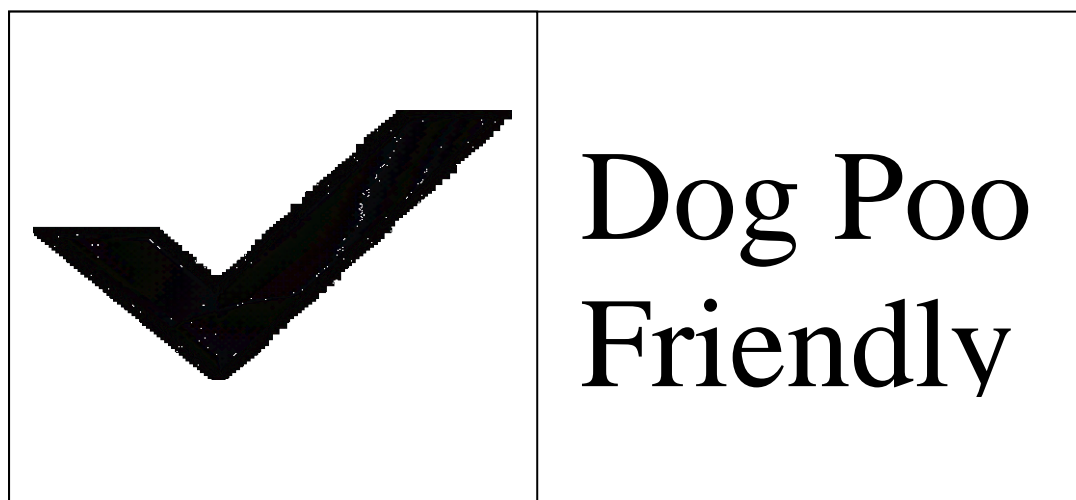
This could be an interactive web guide or downloadable PDF created in partnership with the Kennel Club and Dog Trust – it could also be developed into resources for dog training classes.

## Theme 2: Leave No Trace of Dog Poo

Under this theme, the working group has highlighted three important behaviours that need to be addressed about dog fouling. It recognises that the majority of dog walkers are aware of the issues surrounding dog fouling but may only partly act on it (in the case of leaving bags of dog poo lying around) or may not be totally clear about where and when they need to bag poo. The three areas of behaviour to be targeted are as follows:

- **Everywhere** – dog poo should be picked up wherever you are – the lack of a consistent message about when and where is causing uncertainty amongst dog owners and leading to inaction and the spread of misinformation
- **Every bin** – all council general waste bins can be used to deposit poo bags – this is a key message and one that needs to be aimed at both local authorities and dog walkers
- **Every time** – there are two tandem messages here 1. The behaviour of leaving full bags of poo lying around is not acceptable / unsightly / hazardous (depending on the audience) 2. There are products out there that can make carry poo bags around easier.

Example of theme expansion:



**Blue tick sticker campaign** – to promote the use of any general waste bin for dog poo – stickers can be produced to give out to local authorities to stick on bins that they would like to promote as poo friendly. This intervention could be carried out in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy and the local authorities.

To accompany this general promotion of dog poo carriers to encourage the idea that dog poo should not just be left to be picked up later but carried to the closest bin. Here are some example of user led promotion of dog poo carriers: <http://thedo.gs/2012/07/common-questions/7-stylish-ways-to-deal-with-carrying-dog-poop-77482/5662/>

### Theme 3: Take stock of farm animals

The working group felt that the issue of safety around livestock was a very important one to tackle but was not just an issue for dog walkers. Although there is advice available on how to stay safe around livestock there is no single campaign or succinct memorable message on the issue. The group proposed a theme in the advice that uses STOCK as an acronym to set out 5 simple steps to staying safe. Once the text for the 5 steps in consulted on and agreed, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales will look for partners to help develop it into a cross boarder campaign.

Theme expansion example: The image bellow is for illustration purposes only



**Take STOCK**  
**of farm animals**

**S**top, Look and Listen  
Be particularly aware of cows with calves, bulls, rams and horses

**T**ake the best route  
Keep to paths where possible but give farm animals plenty of space and avoid getting between them and their young, keeping any possible exits in sight.

**O**bserve livestock behaviour  
Walk calmly and quietly but keep an eye out for animals looking agitated or spooked

**C**ontrol your dog  
Keep it at heel or on a lead, for your own safety and so as not to aggravate any farm animals.

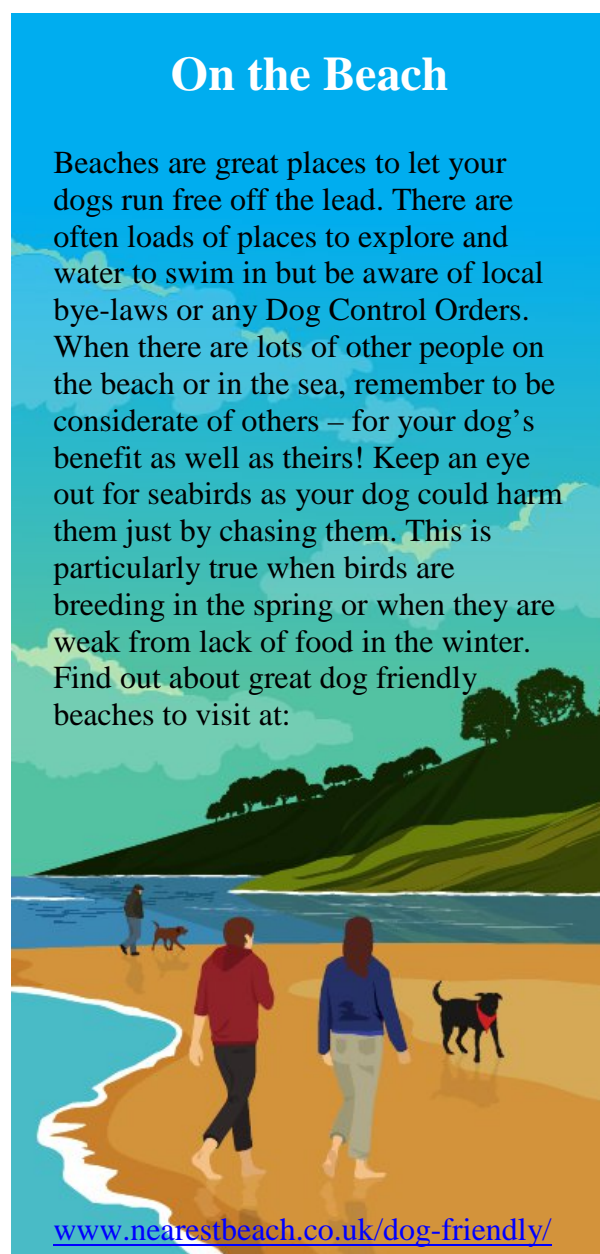
**K**eep calm if threatened  
Move calmly and decisively towards the closest exit or boundary that you can climb over. If you are with a dog, take it off the lead and let it go – it will be safer without you.

## Theme 4: Get to know your surroundings

The group identified the lack of good quality information available for dog walkers to help them find suitable areas where they will be welcome to come and let their dog run off the lead. However, it also recognised that it would take a lot of time and resources to try and create a comprehensive resource that covered the whole of England and Wales.

The focus of this theme was therefore put onto landscape type, as there is more specific information available for these areas. It was felt that there is also very useful information available on the environments as places to take dogs. These can be viewed as shortened versions in the advice document or expanded on into landscape mini guides that will be available on the web. Partnership projects could be initiated with the tourism sector to create these guides or find ways of promoting dog friendly areas.

Theme expansion example: The images bellow are to illustrate the concept only

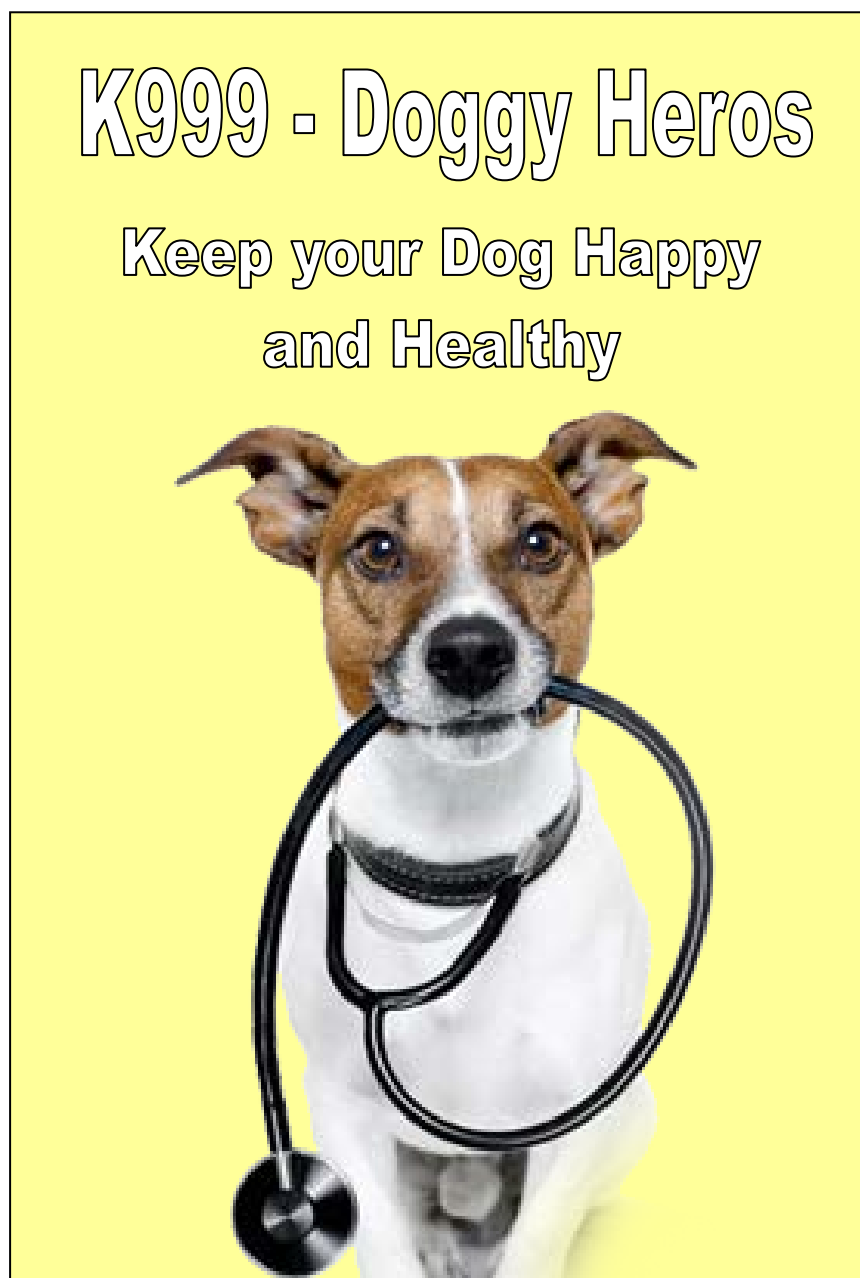


## **Theme 5: Keep your dog happy and healthy**

Promoting dog health was also considered an important part of any national guidance on dog walking. The group recognised that there was already a lot of very good advice available from organisations such as the Kennel Club and the Dogs Trust that could be sign posted through this theme.

To expand on the theme Natural England and Natural Resources Wales would seek to work with partners, such as the Kennel Club and Dog Trust, to develop a set of online “mini-guides” that would expand on the messages found in the general advice publication.

Theme expansion example: The image below is for illustration purposes only:



## **Consultation**

To ensure that all key points are covered and the tone of the advice is correct; Natural England and Natural Resources Wales are consulting on the draft developed by the working group. The consultation will go out to the Local Access Forums and the National Access Forum in Wales and the window for comments will be open from July 2014 until the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2014.

As well as welcoming comments about the current draft of the advice, we would also welcome thoughts on ways of expanding the themes further, including any interest in developing partnership projects for specific issues or at a local level.

## **Nest Steps**

Once the consultation is complete the DAWG group will meet to discuss the comments and agree the changes that need to be made to the text. The text will then be worked on by Natural England and Natural Resources Wales before it goes back to the working group for final sign off.

The general advice leaflet will be published by the end of March 2015 and will be accompanied by a work programme for theme development.