

Invitation to Quote (ITQ)

National Trails UK Website – Discovery Phase

Introduction and Project Overview

National Trails UK (NTUK) is seeking proposals for a discovery phase to inform the development of a new public-facing website. This platform will bring together all 21 National Trails across England, Wales, and Scotland, supporting audience engagement, accessibility, and income generation for the National Trails and NTUK.

Earlier this year, we undertook an initial scoping phase to explore the phases, timelines and prospective budgets for this new website. As per that report, we are looking for quotes to deliver the ‘discovery’ phase of this work. We will then go to tender for the development and build stages.

We have decided to separate these stages of work for the website as we are seeking external funding for the website development and build stages, and we anticipate that work from the discovery phase will inform the applications for that external funding.

About National Trails and National Trails UK (NTUK)

The National Trails comprise 21 long-distance routes across England, Wales, and Scotland, covering over 5,000 miles and managed through partnerships, local authorities, and organisations. A full list is available [here](#). ‘National Trails’ is a marketing name used by the routes in England and Wales; in Scotland they are known as designated long-distance routes (LDRs).

In England and Wales, each National Trail is overseen by its own National Trails Partnership, and they receive funding from central government for annual repair and maintenance to keep the National Trails up to quality standards. This funding also includes a contribution to a National Trail Officer, who manages the repair and maintenance work. You can find out more about this in [The New Deal](#) and [the Welsh quality standards](#).

In Scotland, each local authority/ National Park with a designated LDR passes through manages their own section. The exception to this is the West Highland Way; a new charity, the West Highland Way Trust, has been set up to coordinate fundraising and projects along the whole route.

National Trails UK, (NTUK), is a charity created by the National Trails themselves. We are the independent champion for the 21 designated long-distance routes in England, Wales and Scotland. We exist to strengthen them, advocate on their behalf, and inspire more different people to use them. We do this while building our organisational resilience.

NTUK was created in 2021; Polly joined as CEO and first member of staff in 2023. While the charity has been seed funded by DEFRA, the charity will become financially independent by 2028/29. The team is now 5 people in total, fully remote.

Our Vision: A network of high quality, nature-rich National Trails which are highly valued and used by everyone.

Our Mission: To strengthen the UK's National Trails so they can sustainably deliver more for people and nature, advocate on their behalf, and inspire more people to use them as a gateway to the great outdoors.

Our pillars: Strengthen, advocate, inspire and organisational resilience

Comms strategy

Our strategy is to be a bold, inclusive and solutions focused voice for the National Trails. NTUK has previously created a [Communications strategy](#) but this was more geared around being a B2B charity. We are currently reworking our communications strategy as we transition to a public facing charity. You can find the [current information on NTUK Audiences here](#), alongside our current key messages.

Context

The current marketing and promotion offering for the National Trails is inconsistent from trail to trail and does not offer the high-quality inclusive information to enable people to discover and support the National Trails network.

We want to create a one-stop website covering all National Trails in England, Wales and Scotland for the first time, offering a high standard of consistent information to help visitors discover all that the National Trails offer, make decisions about how they might access the National Trails (depending on their access needs), and how they can support the National Trails. This website should be easy for the National Trails themselves to update (EG with diversion and closure information), as well as easy for potential National Trail visitors to navigate. It should tell a compelling story to potential funders and government audiences about the multi-benefits that come from investing in National Trails, and how they can work with NTUK to realise the full potential of the National Trails network.

The needs of the National Trails.

The National Trails are currently promoted [through a website funded by Natural England](#). This only covers the National Trails in England and Wales. Natural England also manage the National Trails social media accounts on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#). This website is managed by Natural England and delivered under contract. Natural England has indicated that it does not intend to continue operating the website beyond March 2027, and are keen for NTUK to develop a new website to be signposted to from April 2027.

The current website is hard to use for those who manage the National Trails and need to update information about access, as well as hard to use for those looking for information on the National Trails. (Please see [the report from the earlier scoping phase](#) for details of the challenges and shortcomings of the existing national trails website.)

The majority of National Trails do not have the internal capacity to develop and execute marketing and promotions work themselves. A few National Trails have strong individual brands and online presence, particularly the [South West Coast Path](#) who have their own website, social and strong brand. Some have other access information on the pages of partners / host organisations, e.g. South Downs Way on the [South Downs National Park website](#), or the Thames Path on the [Visit Thames](#) website.

In Scotland, the designated long-distance routes are part of the [Scotland's Great Trails group](#).

There are a host of other sites that indirectly promote the National Trails, usually to promote walks / rides / bike routes on the network.

The needs of NTUK

NTUK was originally a B2B charity set up by the National Trails to support them in securing additional funding and advocating for their inclusion in public policy. We are now evolving to become a more public-facing organisation to better deliver on our strategy, (strengthen the National Trails, advocate on their behalf, and inspire more different people to enjoy the National Trails while building our organisational resilience).

Key to securing our medium to long term funding will be income generation with a particular focus on expanding our corporate partnership and membership offer. To be attractive to potential corporate funders we must build an engaged community among the public that we can provide funders access to. We have also identified other potential income-generating areas, all of which will require the development of a strong, diverse and engaged community around the National Trails.

The current [National Trails UK](#) website gives information about the charity, links to resources, news updates and a growing collection of blogs on trails / trails related issues but was not intended as a means of promoting the individual trails and so does not contain detailed information for the public about each trail.

For NTUK to successfully deliver a Public Engagement Programme and build a strong, engaged community, a step change is required. This means developing a new, high-quality website that is clearly focused on audience needs, underpinned by insight, and capable of inspiring and supporting greater use of the National Trails.

Full background documents can be found on this [googledrive](#).

Risks

There are several risks associated with delivering this project, particularly given the scale of change involved and the constraints we are operating under.

First, the timeline is tight, and delivery will be led by a small team with limited capacity. Building a complex website of which the discovery phase is just one part, within these constraints increases the risk of delays, compromised quality, or over-reliance on external support.

The organisational landscape is also complex. While some of the technical content from the current Natural England site could be used on a new site, much of the content, including tone, is not suitable and so we are effectively starting from scratch. So, developing a consistent tone of voice, appropriate style, a clear strategy and plan of how we might develop a reasonably large amount of content and get the relevant approval / input from the National Trails themselves will be vital.

At the same time, we are developing a new public engagement programme, which reflects a broader organisational evolution from a primarily B2B, membership-focused body, to one with a stronger public-facing role. This requires us to build a clearer understanding of our target audiences - their motivations, needs, and how best to reach and grow them - while also developing a new audience strategy and reviewing our communications approach.

Running these interdependent workstreams in parallel increases complexity and creates a risk that key insights may not be available when needed, particularly during the discovery phase. This could lead to misalignment between strategy, content, and delivery, and ultimately impact the effectiveness of the website.

Requirements

NTUK requires a supplier to deliver a comprehensive discovery phase which will give the blueprint for the development and build of a new National Trails website which markets and promotes the National Trails in England, Wales and Scotland to diverse audiences, providing key access information in at least England and Welsh, and also supports diversified income generation for NTUK.

This report should also include information (see below for details) to support our external funding bids, and work alongside our market research and audience segmentation work. NB: we are currently exploring market research and audience segmentation and anticipate that we will have this available to the successful supplier.

This report should also consider the impact of AI on searches, website use and content structure.

This final report should be made available in an accessible and editable format, so that the NTUK team can make small changes in the text if required. Formats could include Canva, AdobePDF, Powerpoint.

Specification

We expect the discovery report to use **stakeholder research, workshops, and audience insights to identify the “minimum viable product’ and recommended ‘phase 2’ with priority functionality build for a National Trails website that answers stakeholders’ needs, including a detailed timeline and proposed budget for development and build, a plan for website structure and a content strategy.**

We anticipate that there will be at least one workshop per stakeholder group, ideally two for the National Trails group and the public audience group. This work would include website user research and personas.

NB: we are currently exploring market research to understand audience segmentation for the public audience.

Our stakeholders include:

- National Trail Partnerships and equivalent, Government Agencies (Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and NatureScot), target public audiences, funders and potential corporate partners.

This work should also **identify the standard access information** which all National Trails should provide to inform visitors of the accessibility of the

National Trails, drawing from the needs and lived experience of people with physical access needs, sensory access needs, multi-generational groups, people from the global majority and neuro-diverse people. This also includes Welsh Language provision. NTUK already has links with a range of community groups and organisations working in this space to co-create this standard. These access standards should also include **any technical requirement specifications for the new website.**

We will require up to three meetings with the NTUK Team and Board to discuss the developing report, its content and possible edits. This will include a presentation to the Board (22nd June).

Deliverables

- Stakeholder research and personas
- Insights on how AI assisted search will impact user behaviour and therefore plans for the website
- Detailed proposal for the design, development and build phase
- Site map and user flow diagrams
- Standard access information guidelines (physical access to trails)
- Technical access requirements recommendation
- Wireframes for key pages
- Interim report for NTUK Board, 22nd June (papers are circulated a week in advance)
- Final discovery report

Content and Style

Work should be inclusive, accessible, and aligned with NTUK's evolving communications strategy, ensuring clarity and engagement across diverse audiences.

Timeline

- Submission deadline: 14 May
- Interviews (if required): 21 May
- Appointment: 22 May
- Project start: Late May
- Interim outputs by 22nd June
- Final deliverables by end of August

Fees and Payment

Budget: up to £15,000 (VAT inclusive)

50% paid on appointment; 50% paid on completion of the final report.

Management of the ITQ and Project

This ITQ is being managed by the CEO with support from the Treasurer and Trustee.

The project will be managed by the CEO, with support from the Fundraising and Development Manager, Senior Comms Officer, and NTUK Board.

Selection Process and Method

Proposals will be assessed on understanding of the brief, clear methodology to achieve the project aims, inclusivity, experience, and ability to deliver within timelines.

Please outline who from your team will complete this work and what their relevant experience is and how the work will be spread across the team.

Please provide a simple budget breakdown showing how spend is broken down between individual team members and costs

Please give a very brief indication of similar projects you have worked on before e.g. discovery phase work, not-for profit/charity projects, projects with landscape/environmental organisations.

We anticipate receiving a document outlining your response to this invitation to quote in NTUK's branding, sent to polly@nationaltrails.uk. You can find the [NTUK Brand book here](#).