

## Public rights of way

The aim of these rules is to keep public rights of way open and accessible because they are important landscape features.

### A. You must not

1. disturb the surface of a public right of way<sup>1</sup> so that it becomes inconvenient to use;
2. wilfully obstruct free passage along a public right of way for example, by locking gates, growing crops, allowing overhanging vegetation, or blocking the route with electric or barbed wire fences.

You will not break these rules if you have lawful authority or excuse. This includes times when you need to disturb the surface of a footpath or bridleway across a field to plough the land or to bring it into agricultural use and it would be inconvenient and difficult to avoid disturbing the surface of the path. In this case there are rules for making good the surface, detailed below.

### B. You must

1. maintain any stile, gate or similar structure across a footpath or bridleway in a condition that makes it safe and reasonably easy to use (this applies where maintenance is your responsibility);
2. make good the surface of a disturbed cross-field footpath or bridleway to not less than the minimum width<sup>2</sup> within 14 days of the first disturbance if you are sowing a crop, or within 24 hours in all other circumstances;
3. indicate the route of a reinstated cross-field footpath or bridleway to members of the public.

These cross compliance rules apply only to visible<sup>3</sup> public rights of way. This includes any rights of way which would be visible were it not for breaches of the Highways Act 1980.

Public rights of way may form part of the 1 metre or 2 metre 'protection zone' margins along hedges and watercourses. If so, the rules of that GAEC standard (GAEC 14) will apply as far as practical.



#### Further advice and guidance

Detailed advice on all aspects of managing public access is in *Managing Public Access – A Guide for Land Managers CA210*, which is available at [www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications).

*Guidance for Cross Compliance in England: Management of Habitats and Landscape Features (rpa176)* is available on our website at [rpa.defra.gov.uk/crosscompliance/farmerguidance](http://rpa.defra.gov.uk/crosscompliance/farmerguidance)

1 'Public right of way' is a term that includes: footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic.  
 2 The minimum width is 1 metre for a footpath and 2 metres for a bridleway.  
 3 'Visible' means visible as a route to a person with normal eyesight walking or riding along it.