

Important information for open access users - FAQs

How do I know where I am allowed to go?

For detailed information about where you can go and what you can do (including local restrictions) please refer to the [Countryside Access](#) website. Access land is shown on the new Ordnance Survey Explorer maps, however, the Explorer maps should be used in conjunction with our website as there may be local restrictions in force (Refer to "How do I know if access land is closed?") Local information may be available at access information points (refer to " Will access information points be shown on the map?").

How do I know when the access land is closed?

Information on local access restrictions is shown on the Countryside Access Website. Access users should also look out for local signs, such as Access Information Points(which are often shown on the website maps and on OS Explorer maps).

Are there lots of signs in the countryside telling me where I can and cannot go?

No one wants to see the countryside littered with signs. We believe it will be useful to have signs at main access points and perhaps extra information on the best routes and any special provisions, with additional information at places like car parks. The national symbol, (shown below) indicates that the land you are about to enter may be open for public access on foot (or by wheelchair) across England and Wales. A 'negative' access symbol may be used to show you when you are leaving an area of access land if there is no obvious boundary.



Will access information points be shown on the map?

You will be able to find local up to date information about access land at access information points. This is likely to include information such as:

- the location of CROW access land and other rights of access
- the Countryside Code
- any local heritage, conservation or public safety information

These access information points are often identified on Ordnance Survey Explorer maps and maps of access land on the Countryside Access website.

The media sometimes use the phrase 'right to roam'. Does this mean I can go where I want?

Under the CROW Act people can walk, responsibly and subject to some common sense restrictions, over areas of open country and registered common land in England and Wales. These areas are included in the access land shown on OS Explorer maps and on the website [Countryside Access](#) website.



The legislation only provides a new right to walk over 'access land'. 'Access land' is land that has been shown by the Countryside Agency on conclusive maps of open country and registered common land, or land that has been voluntarily dedicated for CROW access. It excludes excepted land and section 15 land.

The new access right also brings responsibilities for users. The Countryside Code provides the public with key advice about the new rights and how to enjoy them responsibly. For further details please refer to the Countryside Access website.

What activities are allowed on access land?

The CROW Act 2000 gives people a right to use access land for the purposes of open air recreation. Activities such as running, walking, bird watching and climbing are permitted but the new rights do not extend to other activities such as camping and horse-riding. (Refer to What activities are not included in the new rights? for more information)

Can I ride a horse or a bike across access land?

Horse-riders and cyclists continue to have the legal right to ride along public bridleways that cross access land, but have no general right of access to areas of open country or registered common land – though nothing prevents them continuing to use land they have used in the past.

Landowners can choose to permit additional activities such as horse riding on an informal basis, or can choose to dedicate their land for additional access rights if they want the rights to be allowed permanently (for further information please refer to the [Dedication](#) section).

What activities are not included in the new rights?

The following list summarises key activities that are expressly excluded from the new rights of access. You can find more details on these 'general restrictions' under Schedule 2 to the CROW Act 2000:

- Riding a horse or bicycle
- Driving a vehicle (unless it is an invalid carriage)
- Taking an animal, other than a dog
- Camping
- Organised games
- Hang-gliding or paragliding
- Using a metal detector
- Commercially-run activities on the land
- Swimming in, or using boats or sail boards on, non-tidal rivers, lakes and so on
- Intentionally removing, damaging, or destroying any plant, shrub, tree or root
- Lighting, causing or risking a fire
- Damaging hedges, fences, walls, crops or anything else on the land
- Leaving gates open, that are not propped or fastened open
- Leaving litter
- Intentionally disturbing livestock, wildlife or habitats
- Posting any notices
- Committing any criminal offence

The recreational activities on this list are not always prohibited on access land. There may be other, existing rights or customs to do such things or the landowner may permit such uses. For example, horse riders have the legal right to ride along public bridleways or byways that cross access land and organised sports or commercially run events may be held with the landowner's permission.



Do I have to keep my dog on a lead?

The access rights normally include the right to walk dogs on access land- but between 1 March and 31 July, or at any other time near livestock, dogs are only allowed if they are on a fixed lead of no more than 2 metres long. This is designed to reduce as far as possible any disturbance to livestock or ground-nesting birds during the main breeding and lambing season. There may also be local restrictions or bans on dogs, particularly on grouse moors or enclosed lambing areas.

Restrictions under the CROW Act 2000 do not affect any existing rights or permissions to walk dogs either on or off the lead and they do not apply to other types of access land or public rights of way.

Does the new right mean that I can walk on Ministry of Defence (MOD) land?

Much of the military land mapped as open country or registered common land has been excluded from the new rights, under either military byelaws or local restrictions. However some of it is available for part of the time for managed access - see OS Explorer maps, local signs and online maps on the Countryside Access website.

What is 'excepted land'?

The CROW Act required the Countryside Agency to show all land on the statutory maps that is open country or registered common land. However, Schedule 1 to the CROW Act identifies 13 categories of land that, because of their location or use, are excepted from the right of access. There is no right of access to excepted land regardless of whether or not it is included in the yellow or green wash on the access maps.

The categories of land were selected to help ensure that the right of access is exercised with consideration for other people and that the public are not placed in positions of danger:

- Cultivated land - land ploughed or drilled in the past year for crops or trees
- Buildings and their curtilage (e.g. gardens or courtyards)
- Land within 20 metres of a dwelling
- Parks and gardens
- Public utility structures such as electricity substations or telephone masts
- Working quarries and other mineral workings
- Railways and tramways
- Golf courses, race courses, airports and aerodromes
- Land being developed in one of the ways above
- Land within 20 metres of a building used for housing livestock
- Land in use for temporary livestock pens
- Land habitually used for training racehorses between dawn and midday, and at other times when the land is actually being used for training
- Military land to which Ministry of Defence byelaws apply under section 14 of the Military Lands Act 1892 or section 2 of the Military Lands Act 1900 (e.g. training areas).

Such areas will usually be easy to spot on the ground, although they will not necessarily have hard boundaries. Defra has produced guidance to help people identify and respect excepted land when out walking. Landowners can put up signs to indicate excepted land, as long as the signs are not misleading.



Why have 'excepted land'?

It's a common sense approach to help safeguard privacy and avoid obvious land use conflicts.

How do I recognise excepted land?

'Excepted land' is usually easy to spot on the ground, although it does not necessarily have hard boundaries. Walkers should also look out for local signs warning of the presence of 'excepted land'.

Maps of access land will not normally exclude areas of excepted land as it is difficult and sometimes impossible, to define the boundary accurately for mapping purposes. However, land under military byelaws, racecourses and aerodromes are excluded from the website maps and the OS Explorer maps. Some other categories (e.g. golf courses and quarries) are denoted by symbols on Ordnance Survey maps.

Natural England has no role in deciding what qualifies as excepted land. The Act sets out categories of excepted land but ultimately only the courts can decide, if called upon, whether land is excepted or not. The categories of excepted land are intended to be easily understood and recognisable on the ground by both walkers and land managers. Defra has produced guidance for walkers to help them identify excepted land and would expect land owners/ managers to place signs where there may otherwise be doubt.

How does 'excepted land' affect existing rights of way / access?

It does not. There will be no change to any footpaths, bridleways, byways or any other type of access. You will still be able to use existing access arrangements on 'excepted land'.

Who defines what 'excepted land' is?

Information on this can be found in Defra's [guidance](#).

Can 'excepted' land status change?

Land use changes over time, so some areas will pass into or out of the excepted land categories. For example:

- access land may be built on, leading to withdrawal of the access rights
- cropped land may move out of arable cultivation, and revert to access land