

The Open Access Restrictions System is changing

Background

Since 2004 and the implementation of the public right of access to areas mapped as access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, a system allowing for restricting that access in certain circumstances has been in operation¹.

Natural England manage this system of restrictions casework, and from August 2009 some changes to the processing and recording of information will be taking place.

The changes reflect the way the restrictions system has been used since it began operating. Fewer restrictions have been applied for by land managers which means that a simpler system for processing and recording the information can be maintained at a lower cost, whilst retaining the same level of service from the Open Access Contact Centre. This new system will be known as OASYS.

Things that won't change

The statutory basis of the restrictions system will not change. The access rights, categories of restrictions, rules and responsibilities remain unchanged.

The existing application forms and explanatory notes and Land Managers Guidance Pack will continue to be used.

A dedicated team in the Open Access Contact Centre will continue to provide the first point of contact for landowners, managers, and case officers handling restriction applications.

The OACC service will also continue to

- process applications and notifications and forward these to the appropriate relevant authority
- load information on restrictions onto the online mapping display
- handle general enquiries on access rights and implementation
- be open for business 9am -5pm, Monday – Friday
- retain the current email and phone numbers
openaccess@naturalengland.org.uk, telephone 0845 100 3298

1. The system allows land owners (and others in certain circumstances) to apply for restrictions which are determined by the Relevant Authority for the area (National Park Authorities, the Forestry Commission and Natural England). Relevant Authorities can also restrict or exclude public access direct, on the grounds of fire prevention, public safety, nature conservation or heritage preservation.

Things that will be different

The changes mainly affect the processing of the restrictions casework by the OACC which moves from an externally contracted service to a dedicated team within Natural England.

The main changes will be:

- A new postal address for the OACC - **Open Access Contact Centre, Natural England, Block 3, Government Buildings, Burghill Road, Westbury on Trym, Bristol, BS10 6NJ.**
- A new website address at www.naturalengland.org.uk/openaccess will replace *www.openaccess.gov.uk*.
- New map displays of access land will include listings of the restrictions applicable to the map being viewed. Links will provide further information for each case.
- The Fire Severity Index display will look different, but the process for fire prevention restrictions remains unchanged.
- We are working towards making a simple display of CROW Act Section 15 information available on the website later in the summer, after other system changes are complete. It is hoped to add enactment material to this as soon as is practicable.
- Comments on the open access restriction consultations (which will be found on the new website) can be submitted direct by email to the relevant authority case officer responsible for the case you are interested in.

Further information

Landowners already registered with us are being contacted individually to inform them of the changes and to check that we have up to date contact details. Relevant Authority case officers are being given detailed training on the changes as they affect them. The changes are planned to take place from 10th August, but to keep up to date with progress :

- please check [Open Access latest news](#) on Natural England's website
- or phone the OACC Helpline on 0845 1003298
- or email openaccess@naturalengland.org.uk