

Public rights of way

The aim of these requirements is to keep open and accessible public rights of way because they are important landscape features. They apply to you if you have any visible public rights of way located on your land.

A. You must not

1. disturb the surface of a public right of way¹ so that it becomes inconvenient to pass over it;
2. wilfully obstruct the free passage along a public right of way.

*You will not be in breach of these requirements 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 in order 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 requirements for making good, 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 width² 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.



Further information

- These cross compliance requirements apply only to **visible**³ public rights of way. This includes any rights of way which **would** be visible if the farmer had not breached the Highways Act 1980.
- Public rights of way are regulated by local highway authorities who can advise you about maintenance of stiles and gates, ploughing restrictions and unlawful obstructions.
- Public rights of way may form part of the 1-metre or 2-metre 'protection zone' margins along hedges and watercourses. If so, the requirements of that GAEC standard ([GAEC 14](#)) will apply as far as practical.

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.