

BUILDING RESILIENCE OF THE NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK

ABSTRACT The National Cycle Network (NCN) is a network of signed paths and routes for walking, cycling and exploring outdoors, connecting people and places across the UK. Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, formerly Sustrans, created the NCN in 1995 and acts as its custodian, working with partners to develop and improve it.

Walk Wheel Cycle Trust is responsible for the maintenance of 370 miles of the NCN including 1,000 structures. As with most asset owners we are facing the growing gap between available funding and increasing need for maintenance due to accelerating deterioration of aging assets. This is further exacerbated by the effects of climate change. An analysis of climate risk data suggests that 90% of our estate will be in areas of high-severe climate risk in the 2060-2080 future period.

As such we are having to adapt the NCN to become more resilient to these effects. There is a body of material discussing the resilience of other transport networks, but little focused on active travel infrastructure. Given the role of active travel in facilitating more sustainable journeys to support climate mitigation, it is important that attention is given to the resilience of this infrastructure.

This paper will discuss actions that Walk Wheel Cycle Trust is taking to develop best practice around the adaptation of the NCN to demonstrate and share experiences and insights in this area. This includes approaches to surface water management, slope stability, bridge scour, path cracking, tree management and supporting nature recovery.

At the heart of our approach is a recognition that the National Cycle Network is deeply rooted within local communities which makes resilience even more important. This infrastructure is an important national resource for people across the UK, so our approaches look to maximise the involvement of local communities to build ownership of this vital infrastructure.