THE MANUAL

SYSTEMS THAT GET TRAILS BUILT

PROJECT LEAD

Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland

PROJECT FUNDER

SRAM

STEERING GROUP MEMBERS

BRITISH CYCLING / CYCLING IRELAND
FORESTRY ENGLAND / FORESTRY AND LAND SCOTLAND
NATURAL RESOURCES WALES / OUTSCAPE NORTHERN IRELAND
SCOTTISH CYCLING / BEICIO CYMRU



Contents

03 Foreword

04 The Role of The Manual

05 About the UK Trails Project

06–08 Part 1: Introduction

07 1.1 The Local Checklist
08 1.2 A National Framework

09 Part 2: The Local Checklist – to Enable Trails

12–19 Part 3: Understanding The Checklist

12 3.1 Begin with People and Build Confidence
13 3.2 Understand the Land You Stand On
14 3.3 Define Value in Terms That Matter
15 3.4 Create a Clear Pathway and Reduce Risk
16 3.5 Choose the Appropriate Level of Agreement
17 3.6 Enable Quality Delivery
18 3.7 Start Small. Build Over Time.
19 3.8 Build Better Systems Through Evolution

20–21 Part 4: A National Framework

20 4.1 Creating Widespread Success
21 4.2 Recognising What Is Good

22 Part 5: Conclusion



Image Credit: Brodie Hood.

Foreword

SRAM is proud to have partnered with DMBinS on the UK Trails Project and in the development of The Manual. From the outset, this work has been about enabling communities to play a positive role in creating and maintaining the trails they care about, while building stronger relationships with the organizations that own and manage the land.

The Manual is not intended to present a single solution but instead is a guide that provides communities the knowledge, tools and confidence to understand what is required, start the right conversations, and develop solutions together. This approach reflects SRAM's belief in supporting the people and organizations that make mountain biking possible by helping to create more sustainable and secure trail communities for the future.

Rob Cappucci
Director of Advocacy and Industry Partners

The Role of The Manual

This Manual is intended for everyone involved in the building or maintenance of mountain bike trails, including, *but not limited to*, land managers, cycling organisations, clubs and volunteers.

The ***Local Checklist*** provides practical guidance for delivering trail work on the ground, while the ***National Framework*** describes the agreements and support structures that enable it at a wider level. Together, they offer a shared approach to creating trail networks that are sustainable, secure and suitable for the communities they serve. The Manual complements existing trail building guidance and enables enduring widespread success.

Digital Version

This Manual is a live, online document with resources updated over time. Scan the QR code to access these pages.

View online



About the UK Trails Project

Funded by SRAM and hosted by Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland (DMBinS), the UK Trails Project was established to make mountain bike trails more secure, sustainable and suitable across the UK.

Over three years, a Steering Group comprising representatives from major land managers and cycling organisations from each home nation provided expert input. Their contribution helped shape a deeper understanding of organisational priorities and enabled the policy changes required to develop the pioneering framework presented in this Manual.

This work was underpinned by robust research using methodology developed by Prof. Tom Campbell (Edinburgh Napier University). Through public workshops, stakeholder interviews and online surveys, the project explored where people ride, what trails mean to them and how they engage with them. It also examined mountain biking from the land manager perspective, identifying the operational realities, opportunities and constraints that influence trail provision and management.

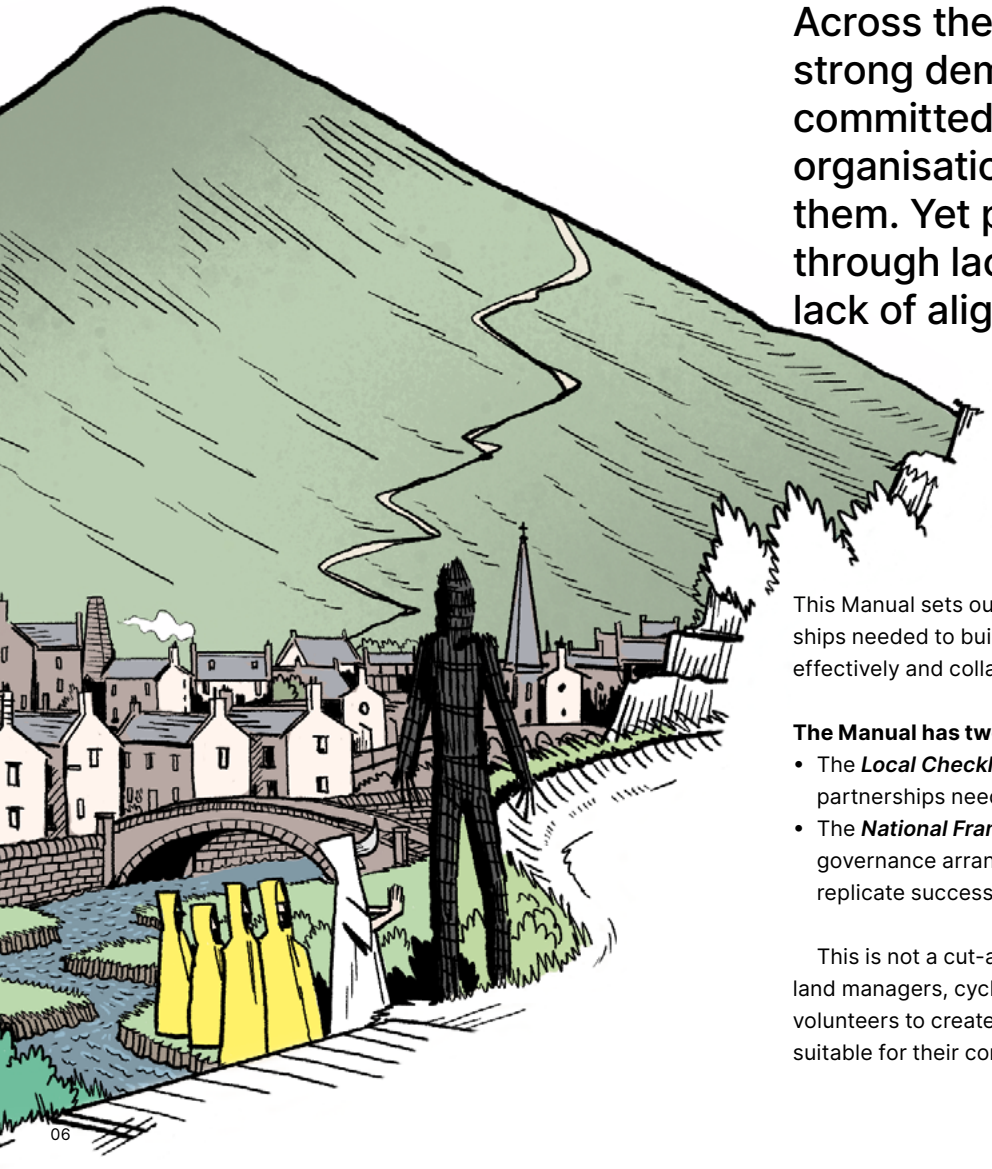
About the Author:
David Evans is the UK Trails Project Manager at Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland (DMBinS). With more than a decade of experience in trail development in the private and community sectors, his work focuses on practical ways for riders, communities and land managers to work together. David works with cycling bodies, public land managers and trail organisations across the UK and Europe, and contributes to IMBA Europe's DIRTT training and Trail Building & Management programmes. His research through the UK Trails Project, including the Your Trail Report, has helped build the evidence base around how UK mountain bike trails are used, valued and managed. The Manual brings this research and practical experience together to help turn good intentions into workable partnerships on the ground.



Image Credit: Pete Scullion.

Introduction

One of the major challenges of mountain biking is developing mutually beneficial relationships within local communities.



Across the UK, the picture is clear: strong demand for trails with committed people and capable organisations wanting to maintain them. Yet progress stalls, not through lack of skill, but through lack of alignment.

This Manual sets out a fresh approach to help create the relationships needed to build and care for mountain bike trails safely, effectively and collaboratively.

The Manual has two parts:

- The ***Local Checklist*** provides a practical guide for building the partnerships needed to get trails built and maintained.
- The ***National Framework*** describes the wider agreements, governance arrangements and support structures need to replicate success.

This is not a cut-and-paste solution. It is adaptable guidance for land managers, cycling organisations, clubs, trail associations and volunteers to create trail networks that are sustainable, secure and suitable for their communities.

1.1
The *Local Checklist*

The key to success and sustainability is getting the right trail in the right place at the right time, being looked after by the right people.



Land management is a complex discipline, with many competing stakeholders, priorities and timelines. Following the Checklist does not guarantee that a proposal will be approved. It is designed to help you develop a credible proposal, understand what may be required and start a constructive conversation with the land manager or owner.

Every organisation operates within different legal constraints, including staff capacity, resources, policies, and appetite for involvement. Sometimes a proposal simply cannot progress. If a land manager says no, respect that decision. Do not undertake unauthorised work or continue to pressure an organisation once a clear decision has been made. Instead, consider whether your group could work with another landowner or land manager, or explore a different site where there may be greater capacity and inclination towards partnership.

The aim of this Manual is to help create opportunities for positive collaboration, not to guarantee a particular outcome. One failed proposal isn't necessarily a failed process. Following The Checklist may lead to early discovery that a particular site or land manager isn't viable, saving everyone considerable time and frustration.

The Checklist helps in:

- Bringing the right people together and creating solid partnership foundations.
- Understanding the land and its constraints.
- Creating clear, usable processes.
- Supporting quality delivery with confidence.

It is designed to be used:

- During early discussions to frame thinking.
- In meetings.
- On site visits.
- When creating proposals.
- When developing partnerships.

The Checklist is clear guideline where some items can be run concurrently. Others will need repeated iteration and evolve with time. Local conditions will define if, how and when things progress

1.2
A *National Framework*

The *National Framework* provides a structure to enable wide-scale success. It allows relationships and resources to be agreed upon at national level, then applied consistently.

The Framework provides:

- Credible relationships at national and local levels.
- Clear responsibilities.
- Clear boundaries.
- Standardised processes and templates.
- Confident and consistent decision-making.
- Empowered communities and community leaders.



The Local Checklist – to Enable Trails

Item	Ask	Do	Avoid
1. Begin with people and build trust.	• Who owns or manages the land? • Who needs to be involved in this conversation? • Is there an existing relationship, or a history to understand? • Who else uses the land, for recreation, work or transport?	• Identify representative organisations early. • Engage with key decision-makers • Establish clear points of contact. • Prioritise building relation-ships before discussing detailed design. • Begin drafting proposals and ideas. • Identify knowledge and experience gaps and build your team.	• Engaging too late. • Assuming support without discussion. • Relying on previous activity as indication of permission.
Notes:			
2. Understand the land you stand on.	• What is the land used for? There can be multiple uses. • What are the legal, environ-mental and operational constraints? • Who are existing users? • Has trail building been tried before?	• Understand access legislation and ownership. • Identify legal, environmental and operational sensitivities and opportunities early. • Align trail proposals with operational realities and timescales. • Start with achievable objectives to demonstrate competence: e.g. Maintaining existing trails before adding new.	• Treating the site as a blank canvas. • Ignoring land management priorities. • Expecting to build new trails if you can't maintain the existing network.
Notes:			
3. Define value in terms that matter.	• Why should this be supported? • How do varied stakeholders benefit? • How will this be explained in policy, economic, social and risk terms?	• Explain wider community benefits. • Demonstrate health and wellbeing value. • Consider economic and tourism impacts. • Ensure environmental benefits are clearly outlined. • Define measurable outcomes.	• Speaking only from a rider perspective. • Assuming value is obvious – why should non-riders care?
Notes:			

Item	Ask	Do	Avoid
4. Create a clear pathway and reduce risk.	• Is there a clear route from idea to approval? • Who makes decisions and how? • How are responsibilities for safety and maintenance defined? • Can we maintain what we have, before adding more?	• Create visible pathways for engagement with wider community. • Establish communication channels between key stakeholders. • Use agreed templates and processes. • Define responsibilities in writing.	• Unclear or inconsistent processes. • Informal work filling the gap.
Notes:			
5. Choose the right level of agreement.	• What level of activity is proposed? • What level of risk does this create (including for land manager and other site users)? • Is the group capable of delivering?	• Collaborate with land managers to match agreements to activity levels. • Start with simple organisational structures. • Define organisational responsibilities clearly.	• Overcomplicating. • Choosing an organisational structure that exceeds capability.
Notes:			
6. Enable quality delivery.	• Who is responsible for delivery? • How will you ensure they acquire and demonstrate skills? • How will support be provided? • How will you ensure sufficient time is devoted to the project? • Where to find guidance, training and support?	• Define individual roles and expectations clearly. • Provide training and guidance for your team. • Ensure you meet all safety and equipment requirements. • Match tasks to competence. • Build systems that support consistency.	• Assuming volunteers can "just get on with it". • Overloading key individuals.
Notes:			

Item	Ask	Do	Avoid
7. Start small. Build over time.	• What is the smallest viable starting point? • What does success look like at this stage? • How does the project expand?	• Begin with manageable projects. • Be realistic about timeframes. • Build trust incrementally. • Scale systems and activity gradually. • Allow partnerships to mature over time.	• Trying to do too much too early. • Losing momentum through overreach.
Notes:			
8. Monitor, learn, adapt.	• How will success be measured for all stakeholders? • How will issues be identified and addressed? • Is there a process for improvement over time?	• Establish consistent feedback. • Monitor trail condition and usage. • Gather stakeholder feedback. • Adapt when required. • Share learning between projects.	• Ignoring problems.
Notes:			
Initial Actions:			

3.1
Begin with People and Build Confidence

Understand:

Trail networks begin with people, not plans. Before any discussion of routes or design, identify who is involved, who holds responsibility, and who is willing to engage. This means understanding land ownership, local users, organisational roles and decision-makers.

Trust must be established early. That requires open conversation, clarity of intent, and a willingness to take responsibility. Trust within your group, with the wider community and land managers, underpins the relationship that the whole system is built around.

Learn by:

Understanding the landscape of UK trails by reading UK Trails Project Report: Its Place, Time, and People. Spending time in the community and speaking with others to discover local connections.

Follow the below QR codes to access example documents that could be used to open conversations and help people understand your initial thinking.

Checking the resource library for example documents that can help frame your initial thinking and open conversations.

3.1.A Home Nations Notes – Helpful Resources

England: **View online**

Northern Ireland: **View online**

Scotland: **View online**

Wales: **View online**

3.2
Understand the Land You Stand On

Understand:

Every site has a history, and every site operates within constraints.

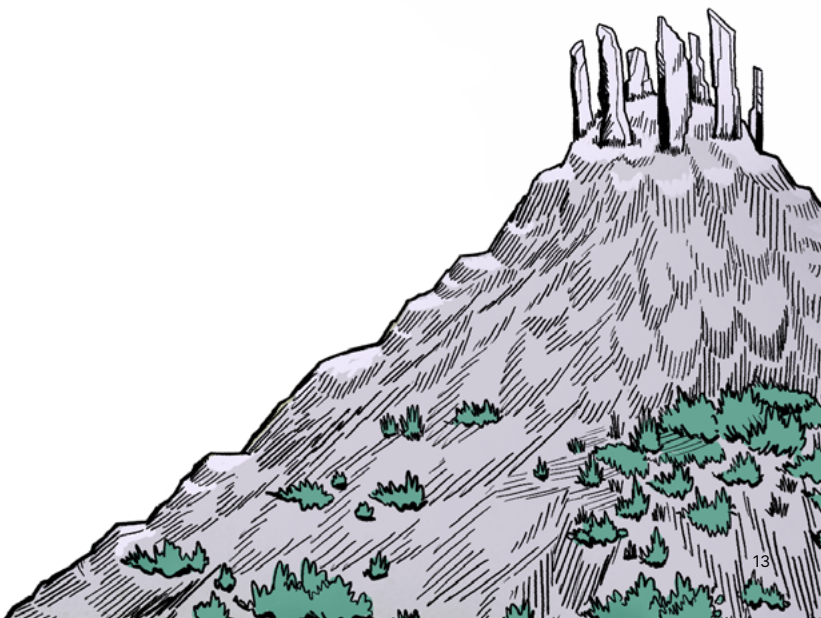
Before proposing change, understand the context: existing relationships, previous attempts, and the pressures facing those managing the land. What appears suitable on the surface may be constrained by long-term land use, environmental legislation and operational priorities running on timescales outlasting a human lifespan.

Land may also have a hidden story. Researching environmental and heritage designations will help ensure nature and history are accounted for in your plans.

Learn by:

Speaking to people within the community and gathering their stories.

Using online mapping systems to discover more information about your proposed site.



3.3
Define Value in Terms That Matter

Understand:

For a trail network to be supported, its value must be clearly understood.

Different stakeholders prioritise different outcomes. For some, this is health and wellbeing. For others, it is economic impact, environmental inclusion, or risk reduction.

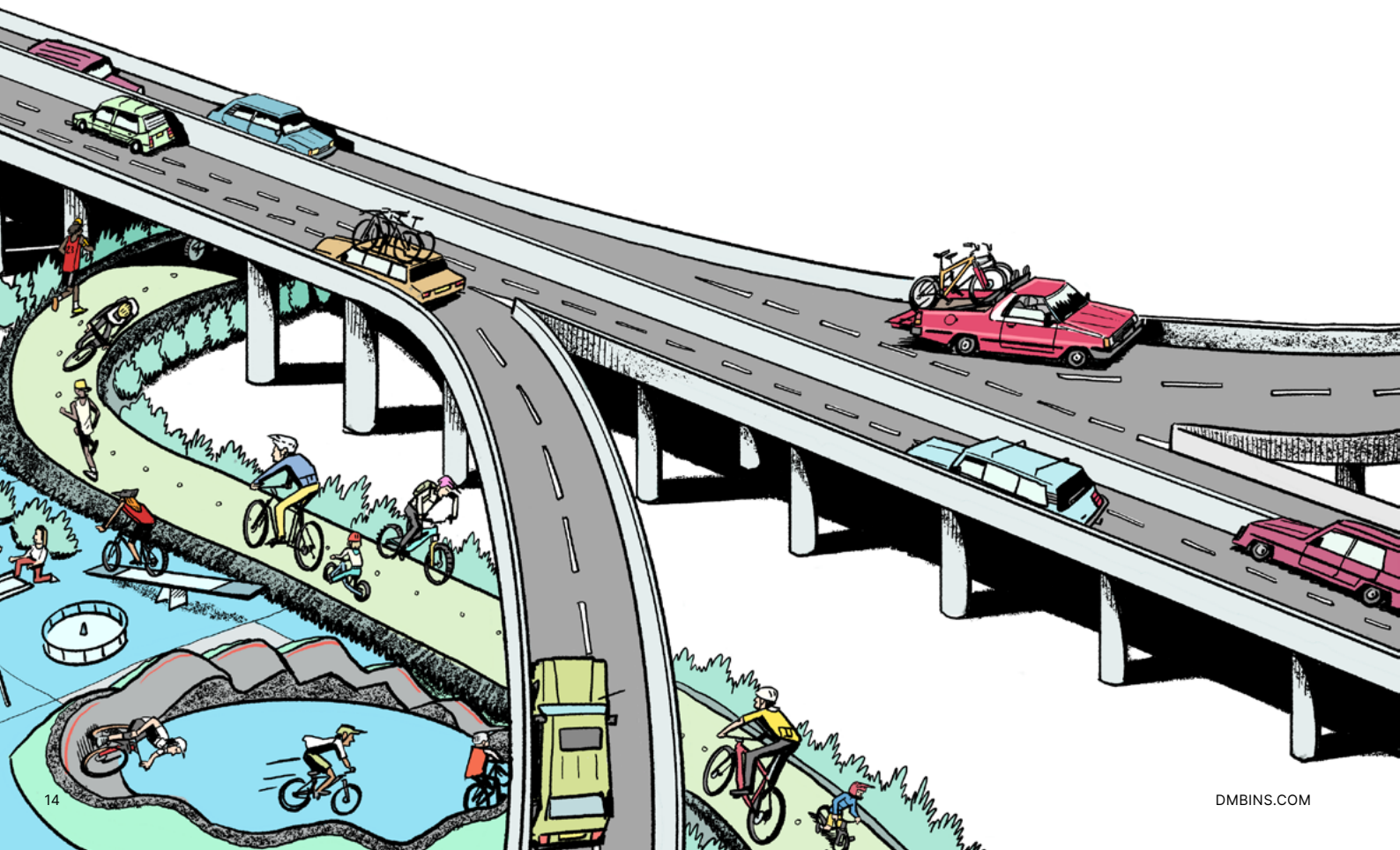
The language used to demonstrate "value" by each stakeholder.

Learn by:

- Translating ambition into outcomes that matter.
- Understanding value in terms which all stakeholders can identify.

Suggested Searches for Learning:

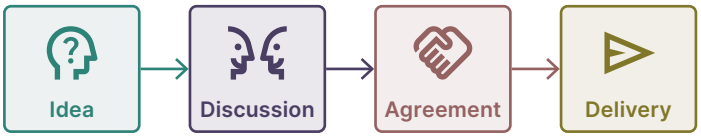
Land Information Service (for your area / home nation)
Outdoor Access Officers (for your area / home nation)
Ordnance Survey Maps (UK wide)
The Land Registry (UK wide)
Forestry England / Forestry and Land Scotland / Natural Resources Wales
Council Rights of Way Office (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)
Department for Infrastructure (NI)
Scottish Outdoor Access Code
Rights of Way UK
Data Map Wales
Magic Map England



3.4
Create a Clear Pathway and Reduce Risk

Understand:

Working on trails is most successful when the project has flow. People disengage when there is no clear route from idea to delivery and uncertainty kills momentum. Following the ***Checklist*** provides a visible pathway:



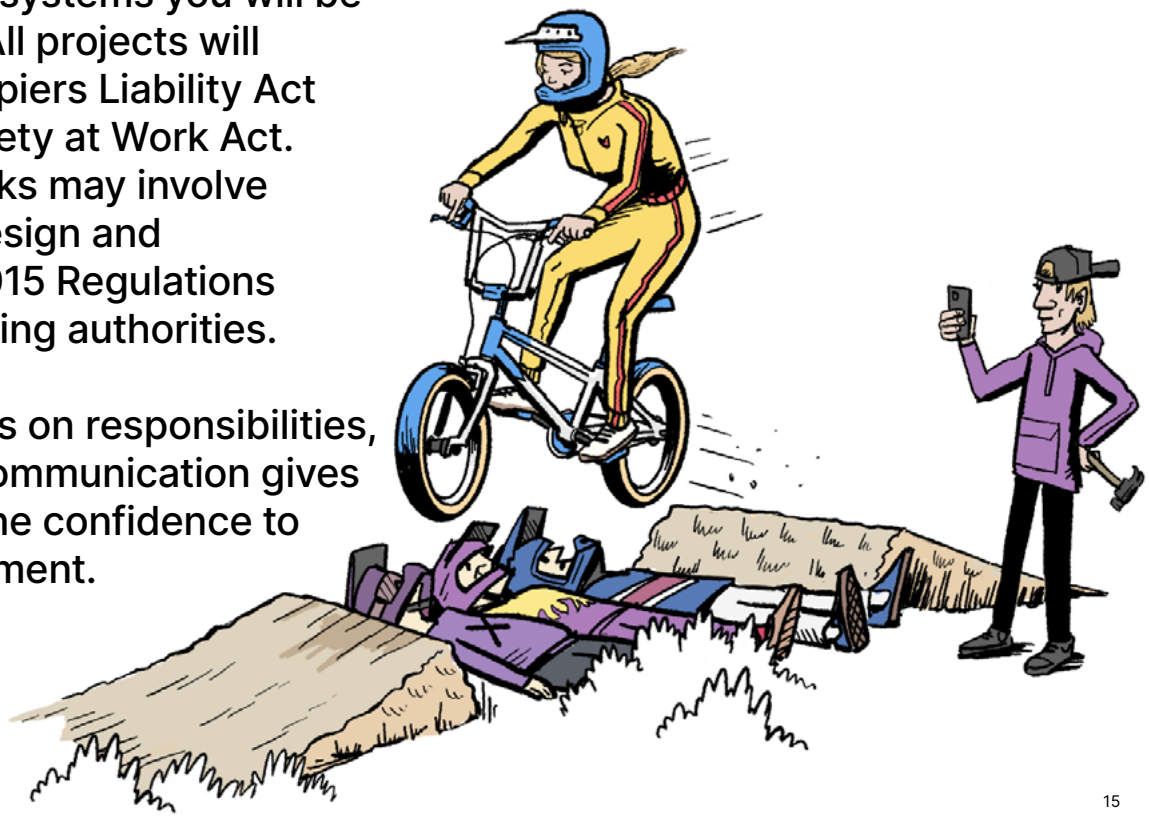
Consider building in a review process for managing change. This will ensure that the project is clearly defined and remains within scope.

Risk must be actively managed. Take time to learn the systems you will be working within. All projects will involve the Occupiers Liability Act and Health & Safety at Work Act. Larger scale works may involve Construction (Design and Management) 2015 Regulations (CDM) and planning authorities.

Clear agreements on responsibilities, standards and communication gives land managers the confidence to support development.

Progress by:

- Establishing legitimate organisations with named points of contact.
- Understanding the laws and systems you are working within.
- Defining steps for application and approval of plans.
- Agreeing a timeline for completion of the application processes.
- Considering what will happen where external factors influence: e.g. non-group trail builders start creating additional features / trails.
- Considering and collaborating with other recreational user groups; enhancing their offer too.



3.5
Choose the Appropriate Level of Agreement

Understand:

Each project requires its own appropriate level of structure.

One of the most common mistakes is applying complex solutions too early. The level of agreement should reflect the scale of activity, its scope, the level of risk, and the capability and number of those involved. Start where you are. Grow as you build trust and capacity.

Progress by:

- Determining if your land manager has existing agreement templates available.
- Reading Trail Management Guidance in the supporting website to understand the sliding scale of potential agreements.
- Deciding which model is best matched to the scale and capacity of your vision.

3.5.A Graphic – sliding scale of Agreement Levels

Scale	Model	Example
Smaller	Memoranda of Understanding to formalise roles and areas of work.	A small club using private land.
	Permits for basic, repeat maintenance.	A smaller club or trail association with fewer trails
	Licences for defined works.	A larger trail association running more complex jobs.
	Sustainable Trails Plans for long-term site management.	An established trail association with multiple sites and long-term vision
	Community Asset Transfer or Land Lease	A commercial venture such as Glenlivet / Bike Park Wales
Larger	Private Land Purchase	Private venture such as Dyfi Bike Park

3.6
Enable Quality Delivery

Understand:

Delivery is where intent is tested. Proper planning and support at the delivery phase are vital to ensure the project meets all stakeholders' expectations. Without this, expectations drift, reducing trust and increasing risk.

Good planning helps ensure long-term support for your project. Clear roles, appropriate support and access to guidance ensure delivery is consistent and stays within remit. Ensure your team understands the legislation it is working under, and its duty of care to riders and other users of the land. Arrange training for several key members to ensure no one person is overloaded.

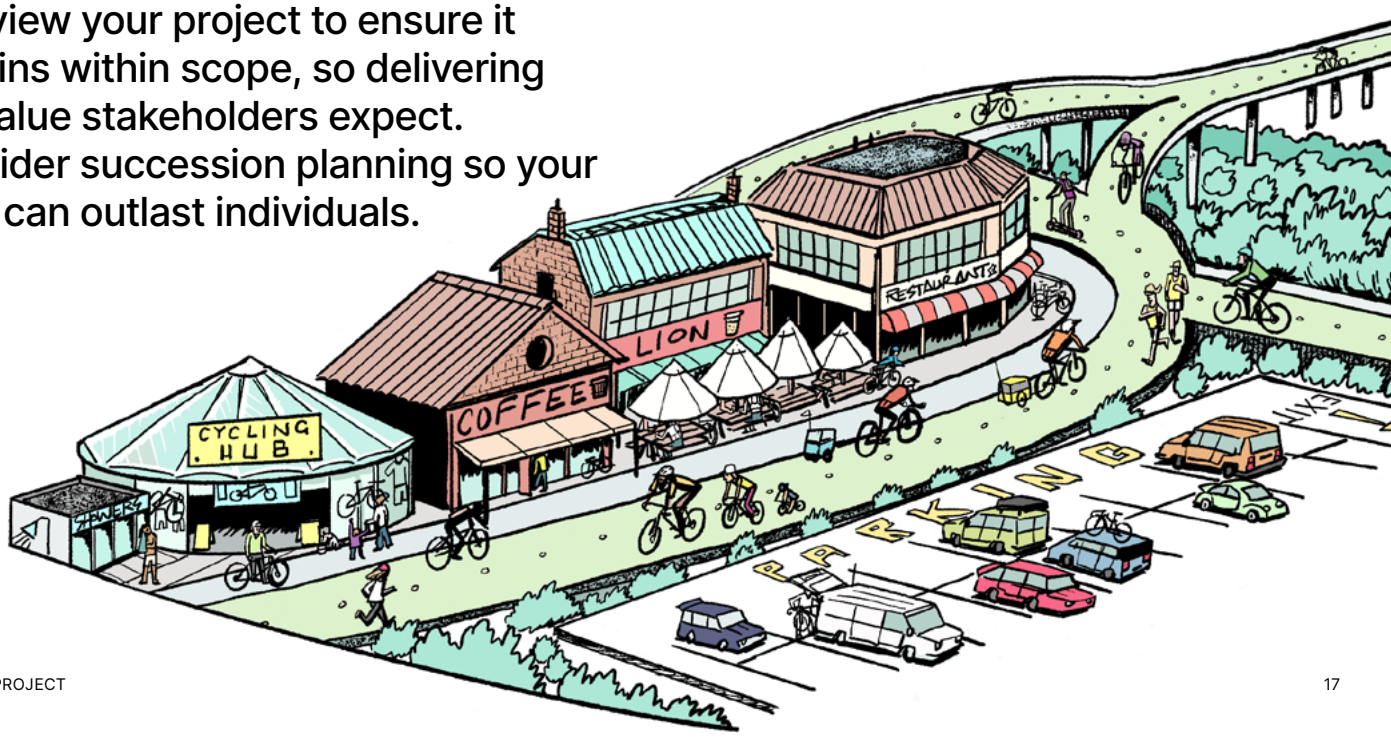
It is important to build in opportunities to review your project to ensure it remains within scope, so delivering the value stakeholders expect. Consider succession planning so your trails can outlast individuals.

Deliver by:

- Ensuring responsibilities are clearly defined.
- Checking templates and guidance are followed.
- Undertaking training where required.
- Requesting mentoring when needed.
- Confirming you satisfy all your insurer's requirements.

Suggested searches for Delivery:

DMBINS Trail Management Guidance
Occupiers Liability Legislation (for your home nation)
Health & Safety at Work Act (UK)
Visitor Safety Group - Managing Safety in the Countryside
Trash Free Trails
Reframing MTB
Construction (Design and Management) 2015 Regulations (CDM)



3.7

Start Small. Build Over Time.

Understand:

Small, well-run projects prove capability and create momentum. Over time, these can grow, but there is no need for a network to expand beyond the desire and capacity of those running it.

Across the UK, the most durable trail networks have been built this way: patiently, consistently, and with a clear understanding of capacity and context. Strong community connection builds a larger volunteer pool and eases succession planning.

Deliver by:

- Building your team to increase capacity and resilience.
- Reflecting on your capability and capacity.
- Refining your vision to match reality.



Suggested searches for Delivery:

DIRTT Volunteer Trail Builder Training
IMBA guide to building sweet singletrack
UK MTB Trail Grading
Trailpot funding
Scottish Trail Fund
Trail Eaffect Podcasts

3.8
Build Better Systems Through Evolution

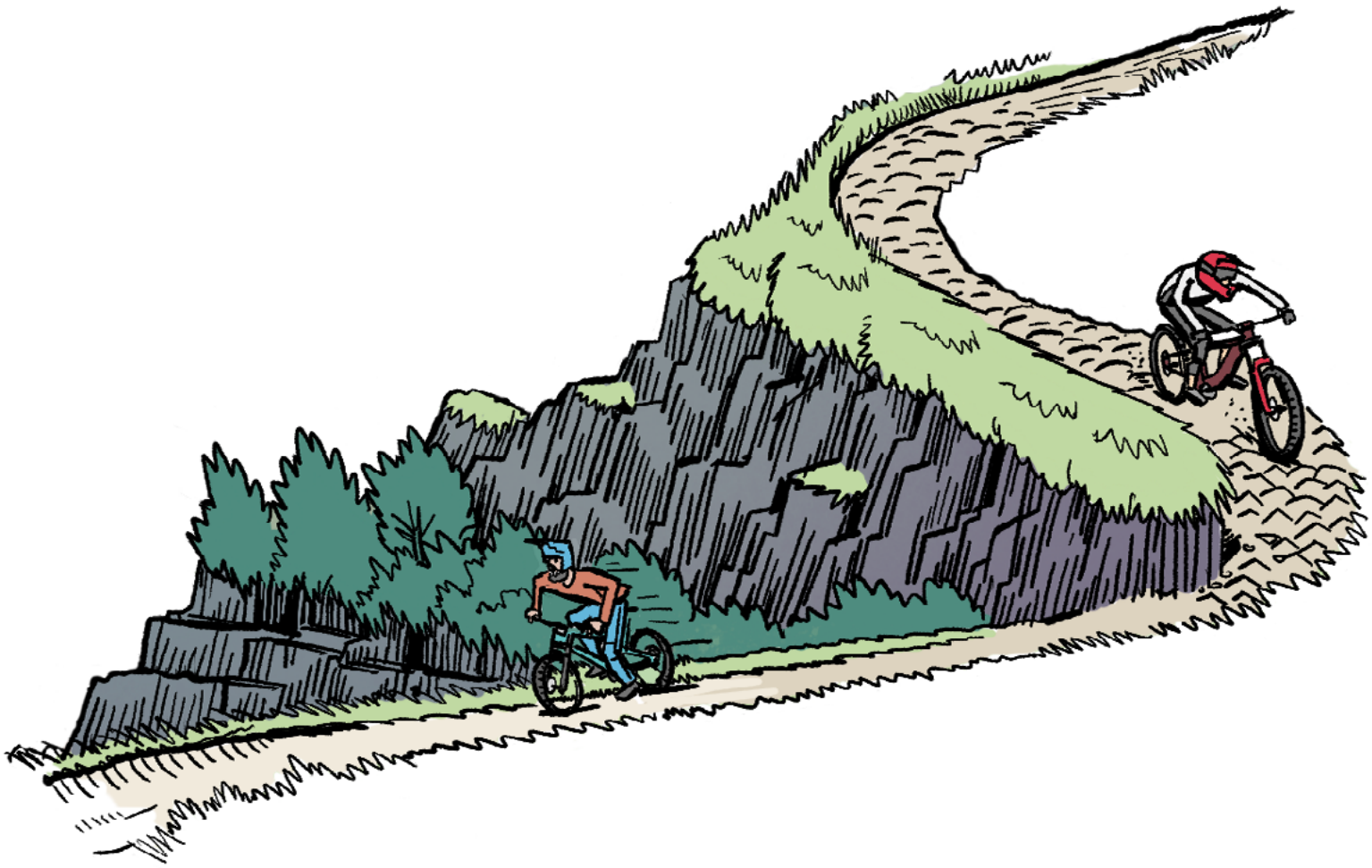
Understand:

Trail networks are alive. They evolve with the land, the community and the way they are used. Successful systems build in the ability to learn from and respond to changes in stakeholders and technology.

Reflect:

To allow a trail network to thrive you must:

- Learn how the use of your trails affects their wear and tear.
- Consider how relationships between stakeholders are functioning.
- Monitor how the sport and community are evolving.
- Look at how the site, team and community relationships can evolve.



4.1
Creating Widespread Success

To achieve repeated success in creating and maintaining trail networks, a Framework of stakeholders at a wider level is required. Frameworks make best use of resources by reducing repetition, capturing lessons learned and refining processes over time

A Framework provides:

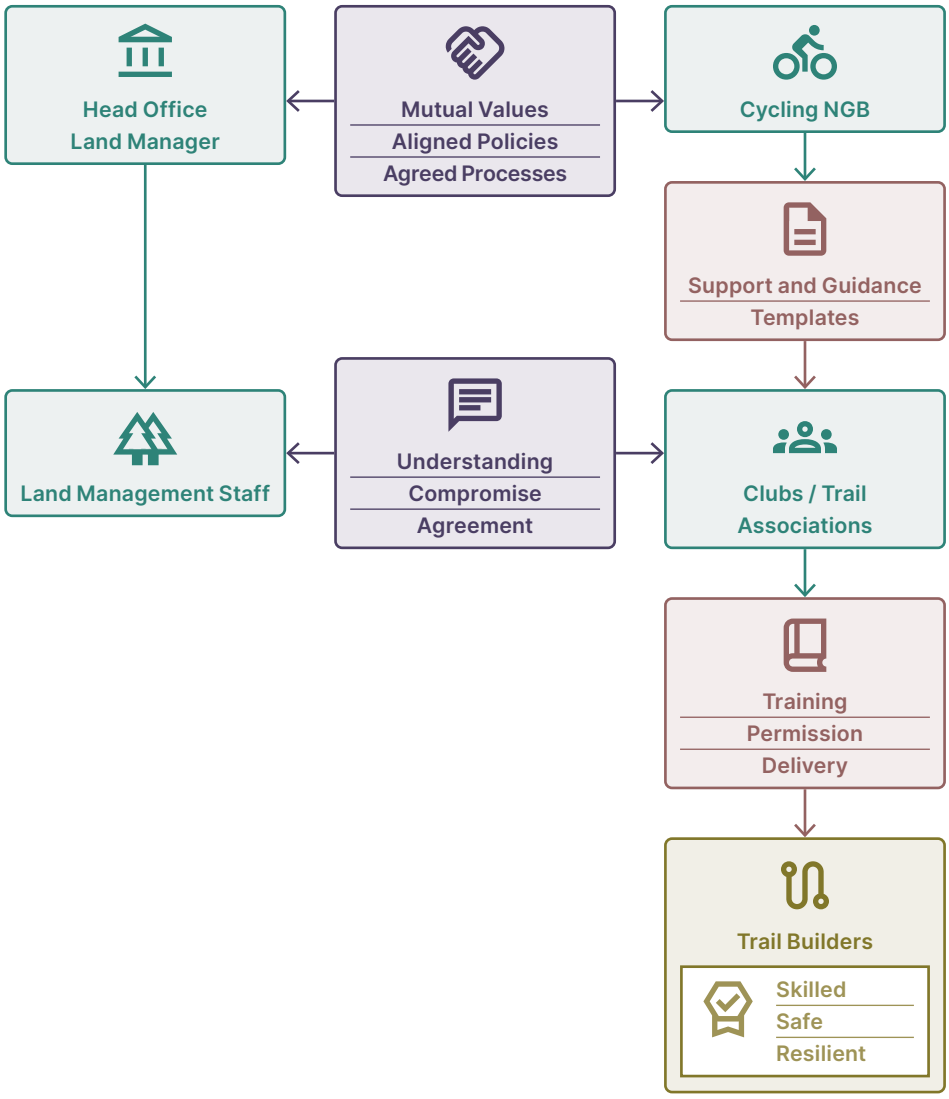
- The reassurance of consistent communication pathways.
- Shared understanding of organisational policy and values.
- A platform to create common processes and guidance.
- A route to high quality delivery.

Depending on the size of the country, frameworks may be at National or Regional level.

Frameworks developed by other respected organisations can be adopted by others, increasing the spread of success.

Find an organisation with similar goals, structure and size to your own (e.g. another sport using the same land manager) and look at how you can copy or adapt what they're doing.

4.1.A Graphic – Stakeholder Relationship Framework



4.2
Recognising What Is Good

In UK, the UK Trails Project has united land managers and the MTB community, to align people, understand places and create the clear process needed for confident delivery. The flexible nature of the framework allows a consistent vision across the wide range of stakeholders within the four home nations.

In this example for England, the ***National Framework*** is created through British Cycling's partnership with Forestry England.

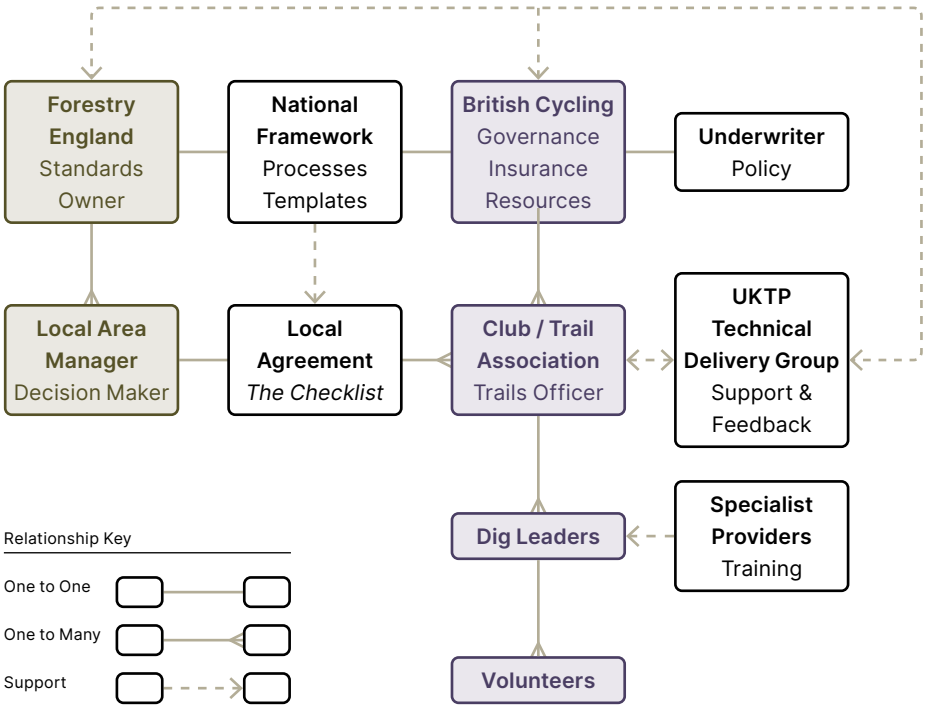
This creates a single, central point to develop relationships and processes for use in land managed by Forestry England. By affiliation to British Cycling, clubs throughout England can gain access to the ***Local Checklist***, containing the processes and support to help enable their project.

This model ensures the land manager retains control of the estate, the cycling body provides governance, agreed templates and insurance, and affiliated clubs deliver work through locally agreed arrangements.

A benefit of developing a framework with a large public sector land managers is the ability to create a robust system which are respected in the sector. These may be copied and scaled for use with smaller organisations.

The Technical Delivery Group provides peer support to clubs using the system and captures feedback to refine both framework and checklist as experience grows.

4.2.A **Example Framework Model showing the Forestry England and British Cycling partnership.**



Although stakeholders vary, a framework applied across common areas of governance can make best use of resource and help consistent delivery. Frameworks developed by respected organisations can be adopted by other land managers, reducing repetition.

Conclusion

Mountain biking possesses passion, skill and ambition.

Across the UK, riders, land managers, volunteers and organisations are doing remarkable work. The challenge is not whether trails should exist. It is where and how they are enabled and managed, to create sustainable and secure networks, suitable for the environment and their communities.



Image Credit: Pete Scullion.

With the ***Local Checklist*** and ***National Framework***, this manual proposes practical answers.

Every nation provides a different model, none of which are perfect. The lesson is to understand the conditions that allow success and adapt them to your local context.

Land managers are open to solutions and volunteers who value their trails are wanting to deliver them. Through pioneering work of the UK Trails Project, we now have National Governing Body support. The opportunity for rider-led trail networks is better resourced than ever before, through the likes of this manual and specific construction guides.

By combining this knowledge with trusted partnerships, we can achieve the goal of putting the right trails in the right places, with the right people ensuring their future.



Image Credit: Pete Scullion.

Research from the UK Trail Project's first phase revealed the key elements to successful trail building and management to be good communication, trusted partnerships and professional relationships between stakeholders.

The Manual provides a flexible approach to creating the right partnerships and understandings to enable sustainable building and maintenance of mountain bike trails across the UK. It contains a checklist to enable delivery at local levels, with a framework template to enable repeated success across a wider area.

'The Manual' is intended for everyone involved in trail building and maintenance, including land managers, cycling organisations, clubs and volunteers.