

# OUTDOOR PANELS

Self-guided

On-site

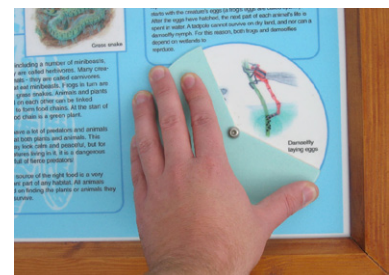
Traditional



**Outdoor interpretive panels are familiar to us all and still the most widely used interpretive medium in the UK.**

They usually take the form of a graphic panel, either printed direct to face or encapsulated, and mounted in a timber or metal freestanding structure (but can be attached to walls, gates etc.) A wide variety of panel materials are used including GRP and Dibond.

- Can be rather static and non-interactive but can have interactive elements built into them - movable parts, tactile elements, plaques for rubbings etc. *(Top right)*
- They are available to visitors at all times and are an important means for absent site managers to communicate with visitors.
- They have the potential to communicate messages to large numbers of visitors but must be engaging to do so.
- Content can be pitched at the audience and different 'levels' of content within the same panel can include different pitching.
- Can be linked to remote content, usually via QR codes or a simple search prompt.
- A number of panels can together form a self-guided trail.
- Can be vulnerable to graffiti and vandalism (no materials are vandal proof); careful siting, design, and even the timing of installation can help. *(Middle right)*
- It is worth considering a flexible system, where graphics can be replaced easily in order to refresh content or respond to vandalism.
- Sculptural frames and structures can engage visitors and add to interpretive messages. *(Bottom right)*
- Always consider visual impact on the landscape - appropriateness of materials, size, the potential for erosion around signs.
- Usually require digging in of posts, so not always suitable for protected sites (e.g. scheduled ancient monuments)
- Sustainability of structure materials, panel materials, the manufacturing processes, inks and recyclability of the panel and structure all need to be considered; speak to suppliers.
- Regular cleaning and maintenance is desirable to extend lifespan. and respond to graffiti, so that panels appear looked after.



## Accessibility

Can be made accessible for disabled visitors - think about location and surfaces around the panel, heights and angles (can people with visual impairments get close to the surface?), font size and text contrast.

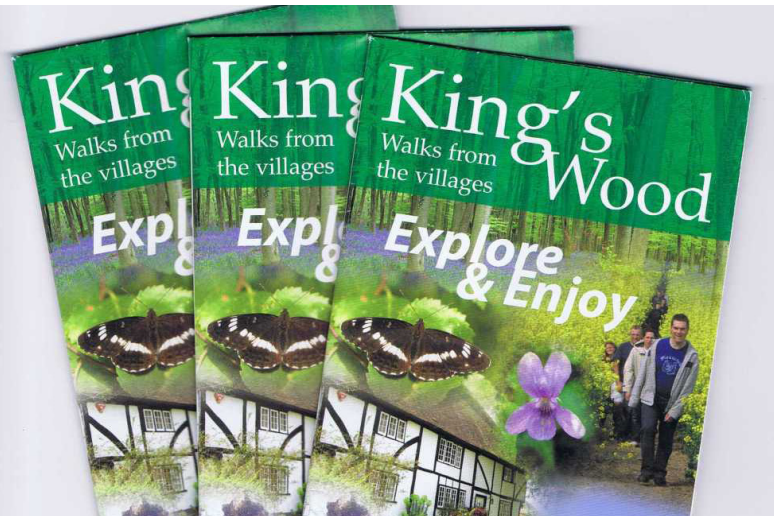


# LEAFLETS & OTHER PUBLICATIONS

## Self-guided

## On- and off-site

## Traditional



**With the rise of mobile technology, printed leaflets and other publications have declined in recent years but still have a place in on-site interpretation.**

They can serve a number of functions - self-guided trail leaflets, general site guides or interpreting specific assets at a site. They often double up as promotional and orientational publications.

- Leaflets are still an excellent solution to providing interpretation at some sites and to some audiences.
- Printing may seem less sustainable than new technology alternatives but the latter aren't necessarily as green as one might think.
- Relying on new technology alone can exclude some visitors.
- Orientation can be easier with a paper map than a phone screen.
- Limited interactivity but can include activities (particularly for families and children) and prompts to interact with the environment.
- They can be available to visitors on-site at all times but this requires dispensers, which can be a target for vandalism or lead to littering.
- They have the potential to communicate messages to large numbers of visitors but must be engaging to be picked up.
- Content can be pitched at the audience and there is plenty of text space for different 'levels' of content.
- QR codes or search prompts can be used to link to remote content.
- For sites where regularly changing content is needed, consider regularly producing new, short publications on small print runs; seasonal publications can also add variety. *(Bottom right)*
- Little or no visual impact on the landscape.
- Can generate income but must be quality to justify charging.
- Sustainability of paper and inks needs to be considered; speak to suppliers and opt for FSC papers and vegetable inks.
- Printing tends to be at quantity so you can end up with boxes of redundant leaflets; putting leaflets online for visitors to self-print (if suitably designed) can help this issue.
- Unless your leaflet is only to be available on site, you will need to think about how and where it will be distributed; this can be time consuming.
- Potential for community engagement - photography, research.



## Accessibility

Can be made accessible for visitors with visual impairments - think about font size and text contrast or providing large print versions. A leaflet with access information will be useful to some disabled users.

# LOW IMPACT STRUCTURES

## Self-guided

## On-site

## Traditional



These are outdoor interpretive structures that are designed to have less of a visual impact than large interpretive panels. They may take the form of lift up signals, small monoliths, 'totem' signs or simple posts.

Content is usually in the form of a small graphic panel. Increasingly they also feature QR codes that link to further, remote content.

- Can have interactivity in the form of a signal arm (*above*) or a lift up flap, or interactive elements embedded into them such as plaques for rubbings (*top right*).
- They are available to visitors at all times.
- They have the potential to communicate messages to large numbers of visitors but content space is limited; insufficient room for different 'levels' of content.
- Can be linked to remote content, usually via QR codes or a simple search prompt.
- Content has to be brief so complex messages may not come across well; however, being concise can also be a strength of this medium.
- Well suited to forming self-guided trails with several linked messages in concise form.
- Can be vulnerable to graffiti and vandalism (no materials are vandal proof); careful siting, design, and even the timing of installation can help.
- It is worth considering a flexible system, where graphics can be replaced easily in order to refresh content or respond to vandalism.
- Sculptural structures can engage visitors and add to interpretive messages (*bottom right*).
- Require digging in, so not always suitable for protected sites (e.g. scheduled ancient monuments)
- Sustainability of structure materials, panel materials, the manufacturing processes, inks and recyclability of the panel and structure all need to be considered; speak to suppliers.
- Regular cleaning and maintenance is desirable to extend lifespan. and respond to graffiti, so that structures appear looked after.



## Accessibility

Can be made accessible for disabled visitors - think about location and surfaces around the posts, heights and visual contrast. Font size will need particular attention due to limited space.



# 3D INTERACTIVES (INDOOR AND OUTDOOR)

## Self-guided

## On-site

## Traditional



**Exhibits that visitors can interact with are a common site in visitor centres and museums, but they can also be used in outdoor settings.**

They are 3D and incorporate a wide range of materials and forms. They are all about getting hands-on and using the senses, incorporating buttons, moving parts, light and sound, tactile elements as well as words and images.

- Usually aimed at families with children and are very good for engaging this audience, but can be pitched at adults.
- It is well known that people learn more from actively doing something rather than passively reading or listening.
- Do not have to be complicated or expensive to be effective; often keeping it simple works best (*Top right*)
- Using interactives encourages social interaction within family and other visitor groups.
- Must be robustly made and easy to maintain and repair; ideally should not require expensive repairs by manufacturer or take up a lot of staff time with repeated repairs; an interactive that is out of order for a long time reflects badly.
- Flexibility can be built in to allow change for repeat audiences.
- Interactives are strong on engagement but make sure your messages don't get lost.
- Have safety in mind at the design stage - think about how the structure could be misused.



### *Specific to outdoor settings...*

- Will not be suitable for sites with a vandalism problem.
- May not be appropriate for some landscapes; think carefully about materials and design to ensure they are appropriate to the surroundings.
- Think about potential erosion and make sure surfaces are hard-wearing - good surfacing will also improve disabled access.



### *Specific to indoor settings...*

- Think about how interactives integrate with the rest of your displays.
- Pay attention to lighting; this can be particularly crucial for people with visual impairments.

## Accessibility

With their multi-sensory features, interactives have great potential for engaging people with sensory and learning impairments. Consider locations and reach heights so as not to exclude anyone.

# OUTDOOR AUDIO UNITS

## Self-guided



## On-site

## New tech

**Audio content players of one sort or another are something we are used to in visitor centres and museums but they can also be an excellent medium for outdoor settings.**

Units are robust, weather-proof and can be powered in a number of ways - solar (left), wind-up (below), battery and mains.

- They are interactive - content can be selected by the visitor; can be triggered by movement.
- Very robust but can be vulnerable to vandalism - not be suitable for sites with abuse issues.
- Digital technology allows flexibility - new recordings can be uploaded and units are easy to reprogram.
- Audio content can be very varied - spoken word, natural sounds, sound effects, music, soundscapes, poetry, drama, oral history and reminiscences.
- Some types of content will be better produced professionally but simpler content can be produced in house (quality digital recorders are very affordable now).
- Offer opportunities for community engagement through oral history and other initiatives.
- Are available to visitors at all times and content can feel more 'personal' and relatable than written text.
- Content can be pitched at the audience and visitors can select different options with different pitching and topics.
- Consider visual impact on the landscape - appropriateness of materials, the potential for erosion around unit.
- Also consider potential noise disturbance (and at busy locations whether visitors will be able to hear the content properly).
- Consider implications of power options when planning; solar - is planned location too shady; battery - how often will staff need to charge and replace them?
- Can be incorporated into panels and benches. *(Bottom right)*
- Units are costly, and while they should have a long lifespan careful consideration should be given re how much use you will get out of them and the potential for damage.



## Accessibility

Have obvious benefits for visitors with visual impairments. Consider locations and reach heights so as not to exclude anyone. A degree of manual dexterity is needed for wind-up units.



# MOBILE CONTENT

Self-guided

Remote

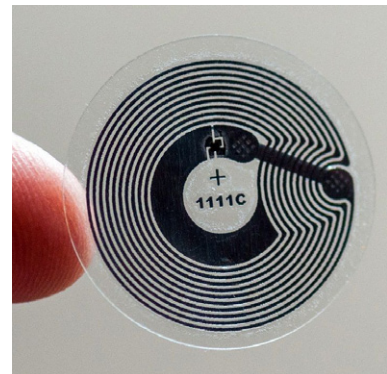
New tech



**Mobile content is digital content that exists somewhere on the Internet and is accessed by visitors on-site, using a mobile device, via a 'digital gateway'.**

Increased smartphone ownership has led to a big rise in this kind of provision. Content is diverse and can include audio, video and mapping, as well as well as images and text.

- The most common digital gateway is a QR code (*above*); near field communication tags (*right*) can also be used, particularly where mobile signal is poor; URLs and search prompts are low tech alternatives (and should be available for anyone without a QR scanner app).
- Accessing remote content on-site can enrich the visitor experience in a way that can be difficult and costly to achieve via other media.
- Brings a very high degree of flexibility - it is possible to make new content available with great frequency; destination of dynamic QR codes can be changed.
- Audio and video content can be extremely varied; having text and audio versions of the same content improves accessibility.
- Some types of content will be better produced professionally but simpler content can be produced in house (quality digital recorders, video cameras and editing software are very affordable now).
- Offers opportunities for community engagement through producing content.
- Is available to visitors at all times; content can be more engaging than static panels but not everyone will want to use the tech.
- Content can be pitched at the audience and visitors can select different options with different pitching and topics.
- Very little visual impact on the landscape.
- Consider potential disturbance from people playing video/audio.
- Enables 'virtual visits' and engagement pre- and post-visit.
- QR codes and NFC tags be incorporated into posts, panels, benches and other structures to make them interactive and give access to location-specific content.
- Arguably a sustainable alternative to leaflets and panels but mobile technology is not without its impacts - energy usage, materials used in phone manufacture.



## Accessibility

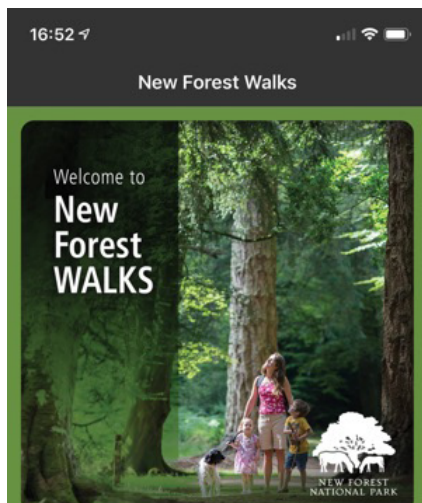
People with sensory impairments use mobile technology to improve access (for example, text reader apps) so use of remote content will probably bring benefits for them. Consider physical access to QR codes.

# SMARTPHONE APPS

Self-guided

Mobile

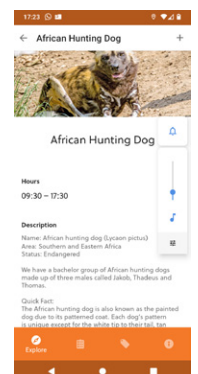
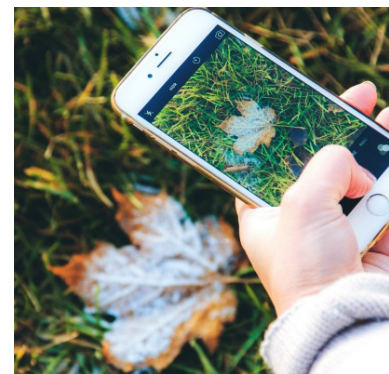
New tech



**The smartphone app has great potential as an interpretive medium that is only beginning to be realised.**

Apps are either native (downloaded to the phone) or web-based (not downloaded and used via the mobile network). Android and iOS are the dominant platforms for native apps.

- Apps are highly interactive and can incorporate a wide variety of content types and technologies, including image and sound recognition, augmented reality, GPS location triggering, games and puzzles, video, and audio, as well as text and images.
- Existing site-based apps tend to be map, text and image based and do not make full use of the range of technologies possible.
- There are many orientation and species ID apps but their content tends to be informative rather than interpretive.
- In-app content can enrich the visitor experience in a way that can be difficult and costly to achieve via other media.
- Visitors can access apps on site via digital gateways such as QR codes, near field communication tags, URLs and search prompts; some users may download a native app before getting to the site.
- App development requires professional production and is costly.
- Apps are flexible and can be updated but this may well require developer time and have cost implications.
- Native apps will be more costly than web apps if versions for different platforms are required; web apps rely on good mobile signal while in use where native apps do not.
- Are available to visitors at all times and content can be more engaging than panels but not everyone will want to use tech.
- Content can be pitched at the audience and visitors can select different options with different pitching and topics.
- Apps can generate income via a paid-for download.
- Consider potential noise disturbance from in-app sounds, video etc.
- QR codes and NFC tags be incorporated into posts, panels, benches and other structures to make them interactive.
- Arguably a sustainable alternative to leaflets and panels but mobile technology is not without its impacts - energy usage, materials used in phone manufacture.



## Accessibility

Apps have great potential for improving access for disabled visitors, for example: including physical access information; providing both audio and visual versions of the same content; image and sound recognition.



# GUIDED WALKS

## Guided

## On-site

## Traditional



**Interpretation as a discipline started with nature guides in the US National Parks in the early 20th century, taking visitors on 'guided hikes'. Guided walks are the oldest form of interpretation but are still a very effective medium.**

They usually consist of a number of stops during which the guide speaks to the group, sometimes with the help of props or visual aids.

- A good walk leader will pitch their content according to the audience in front of them, making this an extremely adaptable medium that can be adjusted to suit any group.
- Their face-to-face nature makes them engaging and personal in a way hard to achieve with self-guided media.
- This is not a medium that can reach a mass audience in a short period and is not available at all times; also weather dependent.
- Can and should be interactive, with participation of visitors through questions, games, mini-activities and discussion.
- The ability of participants to ask questions and discuss topics makes this a very powerful medium for engagement and learning.
- Can generate income although be careful not to exclude hard-to-reach audiences; whether charging or not the programme will need promotion, which is time consuming and can be challenging.
- It's good to change guided walk content over time and refresh the programme with new walks for repeat attendees.
- Guided walks can be led by staff, volunteers or outside suppliers - ensure walk leaders have good knowledge of their topic.
- Quite a bit of staff time will be required to plan and oversee a programme; staff will also probably deliver at least some of the walks themselves; researching and developing walk content is time consuming.
- An excellent form of social contact with benefits for well-being and mental health; consider how you can reach out to socially isolated people; special events can be provided for new audiences.
- Good from the point of view of sustainability but...consider potential impacts on landscape and look at group size and the timing; provide information on travelling via public transport in promotion.
- Can be provided for organised groups and tailored to their interests.



## Accessibility

Guided walks can be accessible for people with a range of disabilities; the best approach is to discuss with the individual how the walk might be adapted to their needs. Include a range of route difficulties and lengths in your programme.



# ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

## Guided

## On-site

## Traditional



**This category encompasses a wide range of small-scale activities for visitors - from children's craft to community archaeology to wildlife photography workshops.**

They are all about participation and get people hands-on with the nature and heritage at sites. They can be bookable for small groups or drop-in. Can be provided for organised groups.

- An engagement programme can include activities appealing to a wide range of audience groups and interests, pitched accordingly.
- Their face-to-face nature makes them engaging and personal in a way hard to achieve with self-guided media.
- This is not a medium that can reach a mass audience in a short period and is not available at all times; also weather dependent.
- Probably the most participatory and hands-on medium; less about communicating specific messages and more about fostering enjoyment of and caring for the environment/heritage.
- Drop-in workshops will reach more people but will not be suitable for all activities; contact with individuals may be less and engagement not as strong; drop-in events may not be worthwhile at quiet sites.
- Bookable events will reach fewer people but the engagement will be more sustained; the need to book may put some people off; no-shows and late cancellations are often an issue with booked events.
- Can generate income although be careful not to exclude hard-to-reach audiences; can be offered to organised groups and clubs.
- It's good to regularly refresh activity programmes with new events for repeat attendees.
- Can be led by staff, volunteers or outside providers - ensure leaders have good knowledge and skills; police checks may be required.
- Quite a bit of staff time will be required to plan and oversee a programme; staff may also deliver some of the activities themselves; planning and promoting even the smallest event is time consuming.
- An excellent form of social contact with benefits for well-being and mental health; consider how you can reach out to socially isolated people; special events can be provided for new audiences.
- Good from the point of view of sustainability but...consider potential impacts on landscape and look at group size, timing and location of activities; provide information on public transport in promotion.



## Accessibility

Activities can be accessible for people with a range of disabilities; the best approach is to discuss with the individual how the event can be adapted to meet their needs. Activities can be provided specifically for disabled groups.



# FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

## Guided

## On-site

## Traditional



Fairs and festivals are medium to large-scale open events, usually held annually, over one day. They can encompass a wide range of features, including exhibitions, performances and stalls, and often incorporate other media like hands-on activities, walks, talks, graphic displays.

Attendees come and go and circulate freely and may spend the whole day on site.

- An event of this type can include features appealing to a wide range of audience groups and interests, pitched accordingly.
- There may be limited opportunities for face-to-face engagement with attendees, so make sure the event as a whole gets across the message you want visitors to take away with them.
- Can reach a mass audience in a short period but is time-limited and weather dependent.
- Can incorporate strongly participatory elements.
- Great setting for the use of 'living interpretation', theatre and music.
- Can generate income although be careful not to exclude hard-to-reach audiences.
- Inviting local organised groups and clubs to be part of the event is a good way to engage with the community.
- Festivals may take a few years to establish and get footfall; keep the event fresh with new features each year for repeat attendees.
- Your event will probably grow over time but make sure your aims and messages don't get diluted; decide what the theme of the event should be and stick to it - don't be tempted to include new features that may be popular but don't really fit in.
- A lot of staff time needed to plan and promote a festival; planning should start well in advance; as well as attractions, spend time planning facilities - refreshments, toilets, parking, first aid.
- Running events on this scale requires a team of people on the day, which can be made up of volunteers as well as staff; make sure everyone is well briefed and have back-up if the events gets busy.
- Great for social interaction and engendering a feeling of community; consider how you can reach out to new audiences.
- Consider potential impacts on landscape and look at timing and location of the event; provide information on travelling via public transport for attendees.



## Accessibility

Festivals can be accessible for people with a range of disabilities. The best approach is to invite local disabled groups to take part in the planning and the event itself. Provide good access information in event promotion.



# OUTDOOR TALKS

Guided

On-site

Traditional



**Talks take place in an outdoor seating area, where a presenter speaks to the group, often with the help of props or visual aids.**

Outdoor talks are less common in the UK than in the US, where they have long been a mainstay of interpretation programmes in National Parks, although outdoor classrooms for school groups are on the rise here.

- A talk takes place in one location so direct experience of the site and topics being interpreted will be limited; however, most visitors will probably explore the site as well during their visit.
- A good talk presenter will pitch their content according to the audience in front of them, making this an extremely adaptable medium that can be adjusted to suit any group.
- Their face-to-face nature makes them engaging and personal in a way hard to achieve with self-guided media.
- This is not a medium that can reach a mass audience in a short period and is not available at all times; also weather dependent.
- Can and should be interactive, with participation of visitors through questions, games, mini-activities and discussion.
- The ability of participants to ask questions and discuss topics makes this a very powerful medium for engagement and learning.
- Can generate income although be careful not to exclude hard-to-reach audiences.
- It's good to change talk content over time and refresh the programme with new talks for repeat attendees.
- Talks can be given by staff, volunteers or outside suppliers - ensure presenters have good knowledge of their topic.
- Quite a bit of staff time will be required to plan and oversee a programme; staff will also probably deliver at least some of the talks themselves; researching and developing talks is time consuming.
- An excellent form of social contact with benefits for well-being and mental health; consider how you can reach out to socially isolated people; special events can be provided for new audiences.
- Good from the point of view of sustainability and impact on the landscape.
- Location of seating areas needs careful consideration for visitor comfort and to avoid landscape impacts.



## Accessibility

Talks can be made accessible for people with a range of disabilities; seating areas should be close to entrances and car parks; talks can be a great way for people with limited mobility to have an on-site interpretive experience.