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Dear Sir or Madam

### **Consultation response – A healthier future: action and ambition on diet, activity and healthy weight**

Ramblers Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the above government consultation.

Ramblers Scotland is the representative body for walkers in Scotland, is recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport, and we are a member of the Scottish Government's National Walking Strategy delivery forum. We help everyone, across Scotland, enjoy walking and protect the places we love to walk. We are a membership organisation with 54 local walking groups in Scotland, running 3,500 group walks a year which are led and organised by 1,200 volunteers.

For the last six years, Ramblers Scotland has run Medal Routes, a pioneering app- and map-based walking project, which offers 740 short walks at around 300 locations across Scotland. More than 7,800 people have registered on the app to get more active. The project is currently focusing on working within the NHS Grampian and Lothian Health Board areas to encourage NHS staff and local residents to build short walking journeys into their everyday lives.

#### **Introductory comments**

We support the general intention of this strategy and the recognition within the document that a whole nation, multi-faceted approach is required to tackle obesity and its causes. We particularly support the overarching aim to achieve a healthier Scotland, and the equal importance given in this proposed strategy to tackling the food environment, helping people to live healthier, more active lives and the role of leadership and good practice. Our comments here are restricted to the specific questions relating to physical activity and leadership, as we have no expertise in the area of food marketing and diet. However, we are committed to playing our role in helping the government to achieve its aims in supporting more active lifestyles, and are in full agreement with a preventative approach to health care.

#### **Question 10: How can our work to encourage physical activity contribute most effectively to tackling obesity?**

We are pleased to see the statement in para 2.31 that "physical activity is one of the best things we can do to improve our health, whether we are overweight or not." We support all the measures outlined in this section. Evidence shows that health promotion initiatives and preventative measures leading to an increase in physical activity levels play an important role in tackling health inequalities and enabling people to live healthier lives.

However, we would like to make the point that in terms of everyday activities there is a focus in the document on active travel as the main driver for behaviour change, with the Active Nation Commissioner having a leading role in increasing levels of active travel. We fully support the government's aims to support investment in active travel infrastructure and especially walking which [accounts for 96% of active travel journey stages](#).

However, we would also like to take this opportunity to stress that active travel is not the only aspect of an active, healthy lifestyle. There will always be journeys that cannot be undertaken by active modes, and we hope that the current focus on active travel will not result in an under-appreciation of the equal value of outdoor recreation as a way of keeping active and counteracting the impact of our mainly sedentary lifestyles. Many people are unable to walk or cycle to work, but they will instead go out for a walk at lunchtime, or enjoy a walk or other forms of outdoor recreation at weekends. Outdoor recreation has the potential to enable greater uptake in physical activity, being enjoyed in the natural environment which inspires and encourages exploration of woodlands or wilder landscapes, bringing increased benefits to mental health and wellbeing.

These activities also need to be supported by investment in good quality local greenspace, well-maintained paths, more signage and promotion, and also by investment in reducing knowledge barriers, such as by ensuring [Ordnance Survey maps include core paths](#) to help people find places to walk. We believe there is widespread public support for getting more paths established and mapped. More than 1,200 people have pledged support for our core paths campaign, and a survey we commissioned in December 2017 showed that 75% of the general public in Scotland who were surveyed believed that they would walk more if there were more paths on the ground and on maps. The same survey showed that after pressures of time and the Scottish weather, poorly maintained paths was the biggest barrier stopping people from getting outdoors, and younger people in particular lacked walking partners and the knowledge of where to walk in Scotland.

Therefore, while this additional funding for active travel is very welcome, we believe there is a need to equally support outdoor recreation, which has such potential to inspire people to be more active as they get to explore Scotland's world-class landscapes, wildlife and natural environment. Otherwise, we believe that there is a danger of active travel measures inadvertently having a negative impact on the paths and infrastructure which are needed to support outdoor recreation. We know of cases where funding for paths can only be gained if the paths are used for active travel, with the result that many well used paths are no longer being maintained as they do not fit criteria for active travel use. Conversely, some paths which double up as active travel routes are being resurfaced with tarmac or other hard surfacing materials to meet the requirements of active travel funding. This surface may be useful for commuter cyclists but negatively affects the amenity value of that path for walkers, being hard underfoot, making urban greenspaces less attractive and leading to a creeping 'urbanisation' of the countryside.

Continued investment in national and local educational efforts to ensure a wide understanding of responsible use of access rights is also important. This will ensure that the Scottish population as a whole gains a greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities and people are able to enjoy outdoor recreation more regularly without causing any problems for land managers.

By increasing investment in the separate, but highly complementary, fields of both active travel and outdoor recreation, the Government can go a long way towards achieving its aim of creating a more healthy, wealthy and active Scotland. We have been pleased to welcome the [recent announcement](#) that £6m has been allocated to support rural tourism infrastructure

including projects relating to rural paths, but with overall reductions in public spending, outdoor recreation is in need of much more financial support.

Walking is recognised as being the easiest way of keeping active for most people, and is a useful pathway to other activities once a level of fitness has been reached. There is a range of health walk programmes across Scotland which have been very successful in increasing physical activity levels, particularly for those who are not reaching the recommended levels already, and forming valuable social support networks at the same time. However, we would like to highlight that as intervention initiatives, it is important to move people on from these health walk programmes and embed their ongoing activities into sustainable local initiatives, whether Ramblers groups or other grassroots-led groups. Connections need to be built into the health walk schemes so that they don't run the risk of stopping all activities if funding is lost or reduced.

Finally, we would suggest that there is still a huge potential for Community Sports Hubs to lead the way in providing new and innovative approaches in engaging with their local communities and helping people to be more active. At the very least hubs could simply be used as information sources and as a place for people to meet up and then carry out other activities elsewhere, helping to support social networks. We would also suggest that it may be more inviting for some people if these hubs are renamed with more inclusive term, as the idea of "sports" can be off-putting to less active people and may inadvertently form a barrier to them taking advantage of the activities on offer.

### **Question 11: What do you think about the action we propose for making obesity a priority for everyone?**

We support the proposed actions. We recognise that it is difficult to change behaviour and that unhealthy habits are often embedded as the 'norm'. This needs to be addressed by making healthy habits for diet and physical activity the easiest and most obvious options. Often, that is just a case of making small changes in emphasis, for example by providing information on websites giving directions to all offices/public buildings which start with walking and cycling information, then public transport and finally by private vehicle, and also choosing venues and timings for meetings which enable people to use public transport or active modes.

While improved health is often not an important driver for behaviour change, other factors can be used to deliver that change such as economic advantages (eg, workplaces offering travel expenses for those who walk or cycle for trips related to work as an incentive for people not to drive for short trips) or improving social cohesion (eg, staff days out to do active conservation volunteering work rather than less active pursuits). It's important that schools are encouraged to take pupils for lessons out of doors as much as possible, to make this a normal activity for all children. This means that even if pupils don't get into the natural environment with their families, they are comfortable in the outdoors and this is embedded in the children's routines and habits. In addition, all government offices should ensure there are secure places to leave bicycles and provide shower facilities for staff, to encourage more uptake of active modes of commuting.

It would also be helpful if all government bodies focused on promoting healthy activities, rather than those which are less healthy. As one example, we acknowledge that a majority of tourists will be visiting Scotland by car, but it is noteworthy that a series of recent high

profile promotional tourism initiatives (for example, the North Coast 500, the Cairngorms Snow Roads and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs scenic route artworks) are all based around car travel. We would like to see a wider range of initiatives including alternatives promoting the idea of long distance walking or cycling trips in Scotland's outdoors.

## Question 12: How can we build a whole nation movement?

We believe a key to building more activity into people's everyday lives is by firstly ensuring that each settlement and community, across Scotland, has safe, attractive and good quality walking environments and path networks. These will enable everyone to walk or cycle to school, shops or work and also provide many opportunities for people to enjoy outdoor recreation. These paths should link to neighbouring communities and lead into the surrounding countryside. In built up areas it is crucial to re-allocate road space to create walking and cycling-friendly towns and cities.

It is also important to learn lessons from other towns and cities in the rest of the UK and from a similar context in Europe.

We hope these comments are helpful and would be happy to discuss any of these issues further.

Yours faithfully

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Campaigns & policy manager

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