

14 August 2018

RPID: Strategy and Innovation
Scottish Government
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Dear Sir or Madam

Response to consultation on *Stability and Simplicity: proposals for a rural funding transition period*

Ramblers Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation. We are also signatories to the response submitted by Scottish Environment LINK so our additional comments below are focused specifically on the questions which relate to our interests. We enclose a completed Respondent Information Form.

Ramblers Scotland is the representative body for walkers in Scotland and recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport. 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, who run more than 3,500 volunteer-led walks a year

Consultation Question 24: Given the importance of continuity of support for the forestry sector and that the target for new woodland is to increase to 15,000 hectares by 2025, should the current the Forestry Grant Scheme continue broadly in its current form until 2024 or can you suggest other short-term changes that would better achieve these policy aims?

Forests and woodlands provide an important opportunity for people to enjoy outdoor recreation in a natural environment with all the benefits to health and wellbeing that brings. In addition, Forestry Commission Scotland has estimated the economic contribution of tourism and recreation in forests and woodlands at [£183m per year](#), which is approximately 18% of the entire economic value of forestry to Scotland, and it supports 6,312 FTE jobs. Elements of the Forestry Grant Scheme are related to the support of this recreation through the creation and maintenance of paths and other facilities. We therefore believe it is important that this scheme continues to provide a level of funding for access-related aspects of woodland schemes.

Consultation Question 26: Given the importance of continuity of support for environmental outcomes, should the current Agri-Environment Climate Scheme continue broadly in its current form until 2024 or are there short-term changes that could be introduced to i) simplify and streamline the scheme, ii) improve customer experience and/or iii) enhance the delivery of environment and climate change objectives?

The consultation paper refers to support for outdoor access provision which is delivered through the Improving Public Access element of the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS). Public access is a public good, delivering many desired outcomes to society related to health and

wellbeing, a strong rural economy, greater public understanding of the environment and nature, and connectivity. For most land managers there is little personal incentive to invest in public access on their land, as the benefits will generally accrue to society as a whole, businesses in their community, or even individuals enjoying access – rather than supporting land managers' own objectives. Yet proactive facilitation of access (for example through signage, gates and paths) can make land management operations much easier to plan for and carry out, as farmers will know where the majority of people are likely to be on their land.

Tourists to Scotland uniformly cite the landscape/scenery as their major attraction and many of them want to get out and explore it. Walking tourism contributes [£1.26bn](#) to Scotland's economy and (along with other forms of outdoor recreation) is fundamental to our offer as a visitor destination. According to [VisitScotland's 2016 report](#), 55% of all visitors to Scotland enjoy a short walk during their trip, 43% had a centre-based walking holiday and 39% enjoyed longer walks. All this activity is hugely important for rural economies but needs investment to ensure infrastructure is fit for purpose.

While agricultural support funding has historically only been one strand of public investment in access, it is crucial that continuing and future funding for land managers includes options relating to provision for public access, whether as part of support for wider rural economic development or as a way of helping them to manage their land around any public access taking place. We note that the need for this support was recognized with the 2017 launch of the [Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund](#) with £6m allocated specifically for car parks, paths, etc.

We would hope that the Improving Public Access scheme would continue at the same or an increased level of funding. We would like to suggest that path maintenance is included in any future iteration of this scheme, as the difficulty in getting funding for ongoing costs is a long-standing issue for land managers.

In addition, we have long called for wider margins to be left around fields to enhance biodiversity, provide informal routes for access in lowland areas and act as a buffer for diffuse pollution, thus supporting a wide range of Scottish Government priorities relating to the environment. These wide field margins would form informal path networks at low cost and in a short timescale (see [case study here](#)) yet we are aware that some farmers are not willing to leave field margins at present as they fear it would reduce the area of their productive land and hence reduce their farm payments. We believe this consultation provides an opportunity to reconsider this scheme and adjust it to better suit the needs of farmers and those enjoying outdoor recreation.

We would be happy to discuss these issues further.

Yours faithfully

Helen Todd
Campaigns & policy manager

¶ Convener: → Alison Mitchell → → → → → → → → The Ramblers' Association is a registered charity
President: → Ben Dolphin → → → → → → → → [England & Wales no 1093577; Scotland no]
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