

National Walking Strategy Action Plan

Stakeholder consultation response

2nd April 2015

Introduction

Ramblers Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the stakeholder consultation for the National Walking Strategy Action Plan. Ramblers Scotland is a membership organisation with 6,500 members and 55 walking groups across Scotland all run by volunteers. We are the representative body for walkers in Scotland, whether they are enjoying a short walk in their local parks or Munro bagging in the Highlands, and we are recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport. We were heavily involved in developing the first National Walking Strategy produced by the government in 2003, but never published. We originally called for a new National Walking Strategy in a parliamentary briefing for a debate on obesity in May 2012, and we were delighted that this was taken up by the government and has now come to fruition. While we continue to feel that the absence of specific targets within the strategy is disappointing, we do nevertheless believe that the National Walking Strategy will form a key policy focus to deliver increased levels of walking across Scotland as part of the legacy benefits following from the Commonwealth Games. The Action Plan will be the driver for this to happen and we are pleased to see such a comprehensive and well-thought out plan. We believe the next stage of the Action Plan would be to firm up concrete actions and timescales with a commitment to “how much, and by when”. We have made comments only on those aspects of the Action Plan which we have additional points to make.

General comments

A key element for the delivery of this Action Plan will be the make up of the Delivery Forum. Given our role in terms of representing walkers’ interests in Scotland for the past 30 years, and across GB for 80 years, we would expect to be members of this forum.

We believe it is important that the Delivery Forum members are not all government departments or agencies, or bodies which are predominantly funded by government. As a membership organisation, we are able to expand the remit of the delivery forum within the recreation and environmental sectors, and take advantage of our membership as well as being able to engage members of the walking community more generally. This will add value to activities and enable the strategy to reach further into different sectors of the population. Likewise, the identified Champions of each item of the delivery plan are predominantly government or government-funded organisations, and it is our belief that a wider range of partners from other sectors would be advantageous in capitalising on the energy behind the strategy to make a real difference in physical activity levels across the whole population. We will make specific comments in sections where we feel we could make a useful contribution to the delivery as Champions as well as Partners.

As a second point, while the Action Plan is comprehensive, our overall impression is that it is too overly focused on the urban environment. We acknowledge that it is very important to enable people to walk more often in the areas where they live, whether for journeys to work, school or to access services, or for leisure activities. However, it is also important to inspire people to be more active by encouraging them to walk further afield and explore the natural beauty which Scotland has to offer as a setting for outdoor recreation. This would enable people to benefit from the increased feelings of well-being associated with taking exercise in the natural environment, whether on coastal walks, in Regional and National Parks, or further afield to enjoy Scotland's wildest landscapes. We will make specific comments where we feel there could be more focus on Actions to improve recreational access and increased well-being in the appropriate sections.

Finally, since the National Walking Strategy is a ten-year plan, it would be helpful to have a more precise indication of the timing of these actions, beyond HP/P. We assume this will be part of the remit of the Delivery Forum, but we would prefer in due course to see estimations of the year or period in which each specific Action is due to be delivered.

Specific comments – Strategic Aims

1. Add Ramblers Scotland as Partners. At a GB level we regularly undertake research relating to walking, and it is likely that Scottish-specific research will be undertaken in the near future.

2. Add Ramblers Scotland as Partners in the Delivery Forum, for the reasons stated above.

3.3 Add Ramblers Scotland as Partners for the launch.

4.3. Add Ramblers Scotland as Partners. We have already produced a number of case studies from amongst our membership to inspire others to take up walking, and plan to produce further case studies in the future.

6. Add Ramblers Scotland as Partners through Delivery Forum membership. Ramblers Scotland was one of the key organisations which worked to deliver the Scottish access legislation which establishes a legal basis upon which people can enjoy public rights to walk across almost all land in Scotland. While the legislation is generally working well, constant attention is needed to ensure its implementation is effective, and to continue to promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. This is particularly important for giving confidence to those walkers who are less experienced to go further afield on their trips. It is very easy for obstructions, such as locked gates or unwelcoming signs, to intimidate such walkers and a negative experience would mean they are less likely to venture out again. It is part of our core work to uphold the access legislation and therefore we should have a key role here. Other related legislation is also relevant to our remit if it affects the walking experience.

Strategic Aim 1

8. Add an additional Action after 8.1 to **Increase the number of people walking for recreation and well-being.**

The Scottish Recreation Survey and Scottish Household Survey indicate that around 46% of the population does indeed enjoy the outdoors for recreation (and we know that walking is the main activity undertaken), but this proportion has not greatly changed over the past seven years. Given that this is a national indicator within the Scottish National Performance Framework, we

would expect to see it included here rather than simply covering (in Action 8.2) an increase in the number of people attending Health Walks. We propose that Ramblers Scotland is a Champion for this Action, given that we have a number of existing national promotions to encourage outdoor recreation, such as the Festival of Winter Walks, Get Outdoors Weekend and Medal Routes, as well as a national network of walking groups, all of which will play a part in encouraging greater uptake of outdoor recreation, and in particular walking.

8.4. We are happy to be designated Partners in this Action, given that we have a number of Medal Routes already established in Community Sports Hubs.

8.5. Ramblers Scotland is happy to be a Partner in this regard, and it is possible that we may be able to take on a more considerable role in the near future. We are currently in the process of building upon our existing member training framework which we hope will be expanded over the coming years to include a wider range of topics and to be available to non-members too.

9. In general, in relation to Health and Social Care, we think this section could build on the existing Scottish plans and policies to increase physical activity, so specific mention of supporting the AHP directors' pledge, the Scottish Academy Physical Activity Position Statements, the Going for Gold Initiative, Healthy and active Lives (JIT), and the work of the NHS and physical activity delivery group to ensure what we suggest is a) aligned and b) evidence based. Our President, Dr Andrew Murray, will communicate directly, and more fully on this.

We would like to suggest a new Action in this section, to **Support health walk progression targets for exercise referral - health walks**. The Ramblers delivers health walks in England and Wales which have been shown to be clinically and cost effective, and are an increasingly established part of NHS England. In Scotland, while we do not run health walks, we have nevertheless already piloted a number of progression schemes with our groups in association with their local health walk providers. We believe this is a crucial area that we would be keen to work further on with other key stakeholders like Paths for All.

9.2. We would like to suggest that our TAKE30 and Medal Routes projects are considered as examples of the schemes targeted at GP referral, as these initiatives are particularly useful for those people who are not likely to join health walk schemes, but prefer to increase their physical activity levels as individuals. We are therefore happy to be Partners in this Action.

9.5. As an additional new action, we would like to see: **Establish walking routes from hospitals in Scotland**. We are in the process of achieving Medal Routes in hospital and health settings and working with Scotland's largest two health boards (GGCHB, and NHS Lothian) having collaborated with the boards on this. The costs for this are modest, and we note it has been championed by the Scottish Academy document. If this is successful, walking routes could be established from all GP surgeries, and potentially from every Community Sports Hub. We suggest that we could play a Champion role in this Action given that, through our funding from NHS Health Scotland, we have targets to establish Medal Routes around health care settings.

10. We would like to be listed as Partners in this Action given our membership of the Active Travel Alliance. We believe our particular strength is to highlight the need for rural active travel provision, and the promotion of core paths across Scotland as the framework for developing more routes to be used for active travel as well as for other purposes.

11. We would like to suggest a further Action in this section: **To encourage more workplaces to walk outside work**. The focus in Section 11 is very much on walking to work or walking

more during the working day, which is clearly important. However, we believe there is a real opportunity in some workplaces to encourage a culture of recreation outwith the working week, for example by setting up walking groups which are based within centres of employment rather than local communities. This is an area of work which Ramblers Scotland could champion, if resourced.

12. We are happy to be Champions within this area of work, although currently our only involvement with youth groups is through our Medal Routes project which has a target to include children and young people in developing 25% of the 120 Medal Route hubs which are to be established over the next two years.

Strategic Aim 2

Further to our general comments above, we believe the Actions in this section do not fully take account of the aim to achieve better quality natural spaces. The overall focus appears to prioritise urban settings, and therefore we give suggestions below as to how to re-balance this section to take account of the natural settings which can play a huge role in inspiring people to take up walking.

13. We believe there should be an extra Action around promoting access to wild and natural spaces, helping people to value the landscape and special qualities of these areas. Scotland has a growing network of long distance routes which could be promoted, as well as destinations such as National Nature Reserves, and National and Regional Parks which all have good path provision. There is a wealth of information to be promoted further on routes, such as the Walkhighlands website, Ramblers Routes database, Medal Routes, local authority leaflets, etc. We would be happy to act as Champions for this Action.

14. We would like to suggest that Ramblers Scotland is a Partner in this section.

15. We would like to suggest that Ramblers Scotland is a Partner in this section. We were one of the organisations which advocated the inclusion of a national walking and cycling network within NPF3, and have historically been the organisation which championed the establishment of long distance routes across the whole of GB. We were members of the Scotland's Great Trails project steering group.

15. We would suggest an amendment to the wording of the Key Action to state that 'Good quality walking environments are prioritised, **protected** and supported by planning and development ...'. It is important that these walking environments are protected from inappropriate developments.

16.1. It is not clear from the wording of the Action whether the overall aim is to increase the number of paths or to increase the number of high quality, maintained paths. We would like to see an overall commitment to expand Scotland's path network with new paths, not simply to upgrade existing paths (although this is also important to encourage greater use of these paths). We would like to be Partners in this action given that one of our charitable objectives is to develop path networks.

16.4. We would like to be Partners in this Action given our experience in promoting recreation in Scotland.

17. We would like to be Partners in this Action. We have been involved in discussions relating to SRDP funding for access provision over many years, and are in the process of commissioning

research with our English and Welsh colleagues to investigate the best ways of influencing the next round of European agricultural funding with regard to payments for access provision.

Strategic Aim 3

19.4. We would like to be listed as Champions in this section. As a governing body of sport we are currently funded to deliver training programmes to our members which are relevant to walkers across Scotland, and this is an area of work we will be developing further over future years.

20. We would like to be listed as Partners in this section. While much of the survey work will be coordinated by local authorities, the voluntary sector, and specifically membership organisations such as Ramblers Scotland, are important partners in this type of work since it is often volunteers who will be carrying out aspects of this work.

We hope you will find this submission useful and would be happy to discuss any of these matters further in due course.

Ramblers Scotland is the representative body for walkers in Scotland and recognised by **sportscotland** as a Scottish Governing Body of Sport. We have around 6,500 members in Scotland and 108,000 across Great Britain, and 55 local walking groups in Scotland run entirely by volunteers. We campaign to promote walking for health and pleasure, to safeguard and facilitate public access to land, and to protect the natural beauty of the countryside.

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