

24<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Clerk to the Pentland Hills Regional Park Boundary Bill Committee  
Committee Office, Room T3.40  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh EH99 1SP  
[PentlandParkBill.committee@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:PentlandParkBill.committee@scottish.parliament.uk)

Dear Sir or Madam

### **Written evidence on the Pentland Hills Regional Park Boundary Bill**

Ramblers Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on this bill as it is being considered by the committee. We are the representative body for walkers in Scotland and recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport. Our charitable aims are to promote walking, secure and facilitate access to land, and to protect the countryside. We have around 6,500 members in Scotland and 56 local walking groups, all run by volunteers, including a number based around the Pentland Hills. We previously responded to the consultation on the proposed bill and we have further comments to make in relation to the committee's questions as follows:

#### **1. What would be the benefits and disadvantages for you as a consequence of the boundary being extended?**

There would be no particular benefits or disadvantages for Ramblers Scotland, but we believe it would overall be in the public interest to extend the boundary. The Pentland Hills are an important part of the landscape setting for Edinburgh and the surrounding area, and the potential of these hills for recreation should be realised while also conserving their landscape features for future generations. Regional park designation across the whole geographic area of the Pentland Hills would enable the existing aims of the Pentland Hills Regional Park to be realised across a more integrated area, with the management of the whole area placed on a statutory basis, with publicly agreed aims. This would bring benefits in terms of improved landscape-scale management of the land and improved opportunities for education on the part of the public to understand local land management practices. It would also assist integrated visitor and recreation management to be set within the framework of a clear identity and boundary for the regional park. While the extended area is always likely to offer more peaceful and less visited opportunities for recreation than those parts of the park which are closest to centres of population, in the long term there are likely to be more economic opportunities flowing to businesses in this section of the park if it becomes more widely visited which will offset any investment required by the two new local authority areas in the short term.

#### **2. Where will the funding, required by local authorities, to support the extension of the boundary be found?**

There is potential to create a Pentland Hills Regional Park Trust which could be used in the same way as other

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countryside trusts (eg, Fife Coast & Countryside Trust) to seek external funding for path improvements and other visitor infrastructure. We are confident that a range of funding sources can be utilised by the Regional Park to upgrade routes, improve promotion and signage and manage access around any sensitive areas, and a wide variety of partners will be able to assist in this. For example, the Scottish Rural Development Programme includes schemes for funding public access infrastructure and for woodland grants which will include paths. Given the historic and cultural significance of the cross-Pentland routes, it may be possible to apply to sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, but in any it is very unlikely that the pressure of visitors in the new part of the park will be as high as within the current regional park and therefore the level of funding required will be at a lower level than for the areas close to Edinburgh. In addition, it should be noted that existing core paths and other path networks within those local authority areas which are currently outwith the park are already being promoted, so there is not likely to be an undue extra burden with the extension of the boundary in this regard. We believe that promotion of existing facilities, such as bus services running along the A702, could lead to greater use of public transport, once opportunities for visiting the new areas of the park are publicised, and this could potentially bring greater support for these local services.

**3. Would existing governance arrangements need to change to support the boundary extension; if so, in what way?**

We would support the extension of membership of the Joint Committee to include the two new local authority areas, but we have no firm view on the make up of this committee, although we would advocate there is a body representing recreation and community interests on the committee, such as the Friends of the Pentlands.

**4. What are your views on where the boundary should be located?**

As stated previously in our response to the pre-bill consultation, we believe that the boundary of the park should be drawn on geographical and geological grounds and cover the area which is clearly a part of the Pentland Hills range. The use of landscape character assessments should ensure that an appropriate boundary is established, giving integrity and cohesion to the new regional park as a unit of landscape character, rather than being based on administrative or landownership boundaries.

**5. Are there any equality issues arising from the proposed Bill?**

The legislation could have positive implications for equality in terms of spreading greater investment into the new area of the park which will lead to higher visitor numbers than at present and greater use of the area for outdoor education activities. This could mean economic benefits arising from visitors to the park are spread more widely.

We trust these comments are helpful and would be happy to attend a committee meeting to discuss this further, if required.

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