

Debate, Tuesday 13 December
Motion S5M-01404: Walk This Way at Dunbeth Park, Celebrating 20 years of Paths for All

Summary

Walking has a clear role in improving Scotland's health and wellbeing, as well as supporting our economy and contributing towards improvements in our environment. Support for walking would also help address some health inequalities. The Scottish Government has good policies and strategies already in place, such as the National Walking Strategy. However, we believe that stronger leadership, a change in political priorities and greater investment in walking and other outdoor activities would ensure that the benefits from having a more active population are delivered to all sectors of society. We would welcome the introduction of a Year of Walking to encourage more people to enjoy being more active in Scotland's inspirational outdoors.

Introduction

Ramblers Scotland helps everyone, across Scotland, enjoy walking and protects the places we love to walk. We are the representative body for walkers in Scotland, recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport. We have over 6,500 members in Scotland with 55 local walking groups entirely run by volunteers. Over 1,100 of our members are active volunteers, organising thousands of led walks and social activities for their groups each year.

Ramblers Scotland was one of the founding partners of the Paths for All Partnership and we have had a close relationship with the organisation over the past 20 years. Paths for All has been a funding partner in a number of our projects over the years, most recently contributing to our Medal Routes project between 2011-2016 which created over 700 short, circular walking routes across Scotland of 15, 30 and 60 minutes in length. There are now Medal Routes in every local authority area, and they are all downloadable from the Medal Routes app or the Ramblers Scotland website. The routes help to encourage less active people to meet the recommended physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes of moderate activity each week by exploring their local paths. The project was linked to the delivery of a physical activity legacy from the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

Along with Paths for All and other walking organisations, we are partners on the National Walking Strategy delivery forum. We believe that encouraging people to be more active in the natural environment as part of our daily lives can bring many benefits. These include improvements to our physical and mental health, to our quality of life and our environment, and also to our economy, especially in rural areas. Investment in walking is the best way to bring about these improvements, which can also contribute towards reducing health inequalities. While good policies and strategies are already in place, there is no evidence of a step-change in behaviour which we believe needs greater investment and leadership in order to happen.

The value of walking for physical and mental health

According to the Scottish National Walking Strategy¹, physical inactivity contributes to over 2,500 premature deaths in Scotland each year and costs the NHS in Scotland around £94.1 million annually. It is now recognised that lack of physical activity is a risk factor in a number of diseases from type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart attacks and some common cancers. While good progress is being made in addressing some health issues, having a population which is more physically active could decrease the risk of dying early by 30%. That also includes benefits to our mental health and wellbeing, especially if we are being active in the natural environment, with a 30% reduction in the risk of depression achievable too.

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00452622.pdf>

Walking is free and accessible, and therefore can play an important role in keeping our population healthy and physically active. Regular brisk walking can improve cardiovascular fitness, reduce body weight, and improve mental health as it improves mood, reduces anxiety, aids sleep and boosts self-esteem. Walking in a group provides particular benefits beyond improved health² by boosting social interactions, which can be an important point of contact for people who feel lonely or people suffering from depression. It's likely that walking as part of a group can also be more motivational and encourage people to walk more regularly.

The value of walking for the economy

Walking is the most popular form of outdoor recreation, and contributes an estimated £533m per year to the economy, as compared with field sports at £136m³ or with golf tourism at £220m⁴. Outdoor recreation plays a significant role in supporting the economy, especially in rural areas, with Scottish Natural Heritage estimating expenditure of £2.6 billion in 2012 arising from visits to the outdoors in Scotland. Woodlands have been shown to be of particular value in supporting outdoor recreation and wider public policy objectives relating to health and wellbeing. The Forestry Commission Scotland has put the economic value of forestry and woodlands for recreation and tourism at £183 million GVA per year to the Scottish economy, supporting 6,312 FTE jobs.⁵

Scottish coastal environments are also a significant draw for recreation. The Scottish Marine Recreation and Tourism Survey⁶ estimated that around £2.4 billion expenditure is associated with general marine recreation and tourism including coastal walks. From the coast to the Highlands the benefit to rural economies of outdoor recreation through tourism is substantial. VisitScotland has estimated⁷ that 55% of all visitors undertook a short walk or stroll in 2015, while 39% enjoyed a longer walk or stroll and 43% came for a centre-based walking holiday. According to the Cairngorms Visitor Survey⁸, 44% of visitors had undertaken low-level walking while 14% had been high-level walking. A study⁹ in 2007 estimated that the Fife Coastal Path supported 800-900 FTE jobs in Fife with an annual net expenditure of between £24-29 million.

The above figures show clearly how important and valuable tourism relating to outdoor recreation is for the Scottish economy, and the significant impact it makes. Scotland's stunning landscapes, culture and wildlife, along with our world-class rights of access, provide a clear natural advantage to inspire more people to get outdoors more often. The Scottish Government should recognise the role of outdoor recreation as part of the preventative spend agenda and provide financial support to local authorities and communities to maintain and promote our path networks and keep them free from obstruction. This will enable more people to explore our fantastic natural environment and reap all the benefits for our health and wellbeing.

The value of walking for social justice

Health inequalities are most often described in terms of socio-economic status and linked to poverty and deprivation. Health inequalities are a significant problem in Scotland, and we see the poorest in our society die earlier and have higher rates of disease, including mental illness. Health outcomes such as life expectancy generally improve with socio-economic status.

Low levels of physical activity are often associated with low levels of household income, and adherence to the physical activity guidelines for adults declines steadily as deprivation increases. The table below portrays the inequalities in physical activity and access to the outdoors using data from the 2014 Scottish Health Survey¹⁰ and Scottish Household Survey¹¹.

² <http://bjsm.bmj.com/content/early/2014/12/19/bjsports-2014-094157.short>

³ <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B720765.pdf>

⁴ http://www.visitscotland.org/research_and_statistics/tourism_sectors/outdoor_activities/golf.aspx

⁵ <http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/supporting/forest-industries/economic-contribution-report>

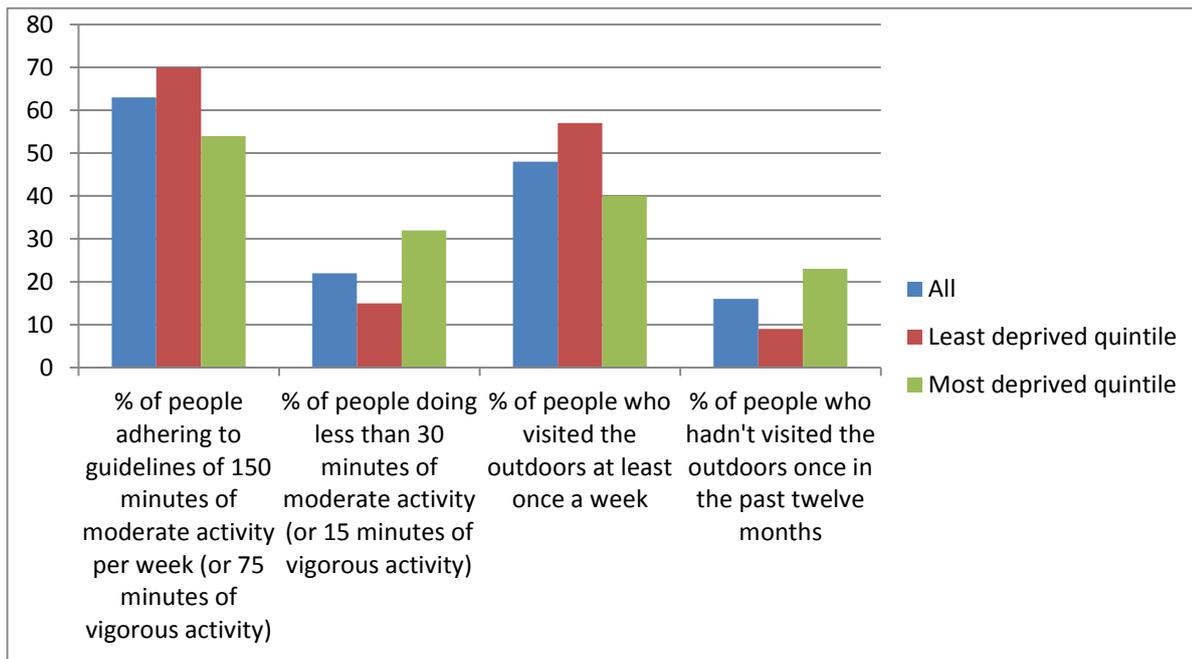
⁶ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/national/RecandTourism>

⁷ [http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/Final%20\(external%20use\)%20Scotland%20Visitor%20Survey%202015%20updated%208%20March%202016.pdf](http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/Final%20(external%20use)%20Scotland%20Visitor%20Survey%202015%20updated%208%20March%202016.pdf)

⁸ <http://cairngorms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/150831CairngormsVisitorSurveyPresentationv1.01.pdf>

⁹ <http://fifecoastandcountrysidetrust.co.uk/userfiles/Fife%20Coastal%20Path%20Study%20-%20Final%20Report%20-%20FV%2018%2005%2009.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/09/2764>



The value of walking for the environment

In Scotland, the network of long distance routes, plus the National Cycle Network and canal towpaths, is now recognised as a national development in the Scottish Government’s National Planning Framework 3. However, despite this favourable policy context, we still are not seeing a great shift in the levels of physical activity, and also in active travel modes, which is required to gain the full benefits for all. Our long distance routes make an important contribution to the outdoor recreation experience in the UK, and are a much valued part of the path network, but it is important that everyday journeys are also encouraged and supported.

In 2015, 22% of all journeys in Scotland were walked and just over 1% were cycled, and yet two-thirds of journeys under 3km were done by car, either as a passenger or driver¹². There is clearly much potential to encourage a modal shift away from vehicle journeys, which would reduce congestion and air pollution as well as improving physical activity levels. It is acknowledged that the Scottish Government’s current level of funding for active travel, at £39m, is high. However, this is still under 2% of the annual transport budget. Spokes¹³ has recently calculated that this funding translates to just £7.25 per person per year on walking and cycling while the government is spending the equivalent of £153 per person per year on motorways and trunk roads.

We would like to see a step change in levels of political leadership and investment to help deliver a culture change across the country where walking is part of everyone’s daily lives, as a way of spending time with friends or just keeping healthy, as a mode of transport or simply for the joy of being outdoors. Everyone should feel they belong in our countryside and green spaces and value our landscapes and wildlife. By properly investing in the places people walk, encouraging walking and improving access to the outdoors we can build a healthier, happier Scotland. We would welcome the introduction of a Year of Walking in Scotland.

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The Ramblers’ Association is a registered charity (England and Wales no 1093577, Scotland no SC039799) and a company limited by guarantee, registered in England (no 4458492).

¹¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/16002/PublicationAnnual>

¹² <http://www.transport.gov.scot/report/j450918-00.htm>

¹³ <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/1611-Spokes-short-pre-b-submission.pdf>