

Ramblers Cymru response to Welsh Government Green Paper on Improving opportunities to access the outdoors for responsible recreation

October 2015

Question 1: What are your views on the principles outlined above? If you would suggest changing them, please explain how and why.

Ramblers Cymru generally supports the principles, but they need to be strengthened. There needs to be more information on how they will be implemented before we are reassured about their impact.

Given the difficult financial environment the country faces, we believe that by working together and taking the right action now, Wales can be better placed to meet the challenges ahead and create a world renowned walking country. The public, private and third sectors all have a part to play in achieving this and appropriate partnerships and collaborations should be integral to the Welsh Government's approach.

The inclusion of a collaborative, partnership-working principle would be helpful in this regard. This is in keeping with Section 5 (2) (d) of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which states that a public body must take account of *"how acting in collaboration with any other person (or how different parts of the body acting together) could assist the body to meet its well-being objectives, or assist another body to meet its objectives"*.

Making better use of the infrastructure already available to deliver improved opportunities, as set out in principle no.3, can be achieved in a number of ways: for example, ensuring the routes are safe for the user; promoting the routes; joined up links that make sense to the user. Strong partnerships will also be key to this.

In relation to principles 4 and 5 – increasing flexibility in the system, and streamlining the regimes – while we are supportive, it is with the important caveat that changes do not disadvantage or discourage people to walk recreationally.

Question 2: Tell us your views on the issues highlighted above, and whether there are other key challenges you believe need to be resolved?

Changes to participation:

Ramblers Cymru is committed to encouraging more people to enjoy the outdoors and to take up recreational walking, especially children, young people and families. To do this successfully people must have the knowledge and skills and confidence to explore and understand the environment around them.

We need to build outdoor skills in our children and young people at an early age, and the national curriculum should ensure young people understand their rights to walk, as well as their responsibilities.

People are often not aware of their options for accessing the countryside and paths in their area. There is a need for improved mapping tools, and better, more accessible online maps which include the many permissive paths funding under agri-environment schemes. We want to see Welsh Government instruct Natural Resources Wales to improve the usability of the Outdoor Wales online mapping tool, and to ensure that it includes and promotes permissive paths.

The green paper highlights the statistic from the Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey 2014 (WORS) that 60% of people would like to visit the outdoors more often, but that one barrier was 'a lack of suitable places to go'. It is not clear where this evidence regarding the barriers comes from, as the WORS report makes no reference to 'lack of suitable places to go'. Instead the overwhelming barriers are lack of time and bad weather (cited by 48% of people). If this assertion of a lack of suitable places is to be used to underpin decisions on changes to the use of the outdoors, Welsh Government must provide the evidence to support this stance.

The WORS report also cites Health issues as an important barrier to visiting the outdoors. Those with a long-term illness or disability were less likely to have visited the outdoors in the previous 4 weeks (71%) than those without (89%). Walking is an excellent first step to becoming more active and should be at the centre of strategies to increase participation in physical activity and improve health and wellbeing.

The Let's Walk Cymru Scheme Ramblers deliver for Welsh Government has an excellent success rate in empowering people to start walking to improve their health. Let's Walk Cymru had 21,000 registered walkers in 130 groups across Wales. It's currently operating at capacity and reducing funding is preventing its expansion.

An evaluation of the health and cost benefits of expanding the Let's Walk Cymru scheme can be demonstrated by using the World Health Organisation/Europe Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT). Taking the figure of 4875 walkers who joined the scheme in 2014/15, and the assumption that most health walks are weekly and aim for 60 minutes the WHO HEAT tool estimates that:

- the number of deaths prevented in 1 year is 2
- the number of lives extended in 1 year is 38
- the cost benefit ratio is 16:1 given the cost of the programme for 2014-15 (£285,000) and the economic value of reduced mortality due to walking

With secure and additional support Let's Walk Cymru could make an even more positive impact on the physical activity levels of people living in Wales by helping them to get out walking.

We want statutory targets for local authorities, Health Boards and GPs to increase the levels of physical activity within their populations by utilising and supporting the growth of the Let's Walk Cymru scheme.

Modern outdoor recreation needs

Ramblers Cymru is concerned that the green paper's references to the historic nature of our paths network are largely negative in tone. Rather than celebrating the network's evolution as a valuable, tangible record of how people have moved around our nation over hundreds of years, the paper suggests that this historic status is a liability.

This is line with the definition of historic environment being use in the Welsh Government's proposed Historic Environment (Wales) Bill: "All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity...". The well-trodden, often visible paths can have a story to tell as well as a recreational value. These tales and paths shouldn't be dismissed because of their age; instead they should be cherished and used and celebrated.

While we recognise there is room for improvement in some cases, such as where a path ends in the middle of field, or passes through potentially hazardous environments, we believe that the legacy the network gives us is worth preserving and utilising.

The current path network has practical roots from times before the dominance of the car: linking communities with each other, routes to transfer goods to market, a way for people to reach their places of work, worship. The 'modern outdoor recreation needs' referred to in the green paper are not at odds with these origins. Indeed, our paths have an equally important role to play in the modern era – now their focus needs to be on both linking communities and opening up opportunities for healthy recreation.

Communities should be linked by usable paths to their neighbouring towns and villages, to their surrounding countryside or coast, and to their parks and local green spaces. We want Local Authorities and Public Service Boards to work with Local Access Forums, Community Councils, and community groups to identify new paths and green spaces which meet community need. This process should be linked to the area's Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Improving existing facilities and creating new ones will allow people to walk more, benefiting their health, wellbeing and appreciation of the history and nature in their surroundings.

This will help these bodies meet their well-being goals under Section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to work to achieve 'A Wales of cohesive communities' and 'a healthier Wales'.

Meeting modern outdoor recreational needs will only be possible if information is available in modern formats, so we want Welsh Government to set a mandatory deadline of September 2017 for all local authorities to publish accurate online maps of their footpath networks.

Costs – time and resources

We agree that the procedures for administering the existing systems need streamlining and we want to see more support for clearing the backlog. This may, in part, be achieved through changes to procedures and we outline what these changes could be in our answer to Question 3.

Based on information from a recent IPROW survey (July 2015) of Local Authorities and National Park Authorities in Wales, at the current rates, it will take 17 years to resolve the existing backlog for modifications to the Definitive map. Some of these cases will relate to paths currently missing from the maps. There is a statutory deadline of 1st January 2026 after which historic paths cannot be added to the Definitive Maps.

With this in mind, we want Welsh Government to use its powers under Section 56 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to set a new cut off date in Wales which allows our historic paths to be fully mapped. We must have a failsafe mechanism in Wales to capture our unrecorded ways. We see this as a key target for Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

Practical difficulties

The Green paper makes a statement about the actual and perceived difficulties of “reducing access in areas where there is no demand but where a management burden exists”. The presumptions underpinning this statement concern us.

Firstly, it does not recognise the level of demand is the result of many factors, including that the paths are often impassable or obstructed, poorly signposted, and not promoted. It cannot be assumed that demand would not exist if the paths were well maintained and people were aware of them. The Wales Outdoor Recreation survey 2014, showed that 34% of people would like to do more walking. We want to see improvements in mapping tools and public information about where people can walk to help meet this latent and future demand.

Secondly, Ramblers Cymru is concerned to see the rights of way referred to as a ‘management burden’. All infrastructure has management consequences whether this be roads or street lighting. The Welsh Government need to avoid creating negative perceptions of the path network, when, despite its challenges, we should be celebrating it for the amazing asset it is. Welsh Government rightly celebrates the Wales Coast Path, its £32 million contribution to the Welsh economy in its first year and its ongoing popularity. Talking of ‘burdens’ does not portray a positive image.

With regard to practical difficulties surrounding competing uses of the outdoors, the Ramblers position on shared use of paths is outlined in our answer to question 8. . In short, while not against the principle, we do not believe there should be a blanket conversion of footpaths into bridleways. Such is the diversity of the path network that there must be a case-by-case consideration of the suitability of each path for shared-use as well as its long term management at higher status.

Any other challenges?

The lack of online maps has been cited by Welsh Government as the reason why maintenance of rights of way is not a condition of farmer's payments under the Common Agricultural policy in Wales. However, farmers in England are under this obligation despite the fact online maps aren't universal there either.

We want the Welsh Government to change its approach to rights of way and CAP to ensure that farmers receiving public money are fulfilling their legal obligations to maintain paths on their land. The public benefits of this funding, worth over £251 million in Wales in 2013-14, should be transparent and made widely available. Rights of way should be included on the maps given to farmers for payment applications.

Additionally, many farmers create paths on their land as part of government-funded agri-environment schemes, but information about where these permissive paths are hard to find. As outlined earlier in our response permissive paths need to be mapped on NRW's online tool.

Question 3: What changes, if any, do you think need to be made to improve and simplify the procedures for recording, creating, diverting or closing public rights of way?

Ramblers Cymru support the simplifying of procedures, but not simplifying of the network itself, nor weakening of people's rights to challenge changes they feel are adverse. We want to see increased benefits from any changes to procedures – delivered in the form of freeing up more time and resources for tackling the significant backlogs and delays currently hampering the network. The public must retain the right to challenge changes to the path network where the tests in the legislation (which serve to provide a balance between public and landowner interests) have not been met.

We are fully supportive of the digitisation of definitive maps and statements. We want Welsh government to set a mandatory deadline of September 2017 for all local authorities to publish accurate online maps of their footpath networks.

We support the proposal for applications relating to rights of way to be made electronically. It will allow for standardisation of forms, a consistency of approach and a reduction in costs. We also support the suggestion that Local authorities (not applicants) should be required to notify landowners about Definitive Map Modification Order applications once they have passed the basic evidential test. This was as a recommendation of the Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) on Unrecorded Rights of Way in England. The Ramblers opposed applicants having to do this back when the 1981 Act was going through Parliament.

In relation to dealing with objections, Welsh Government should consider the provisions in England's Deregulation Act 2015 which will allow authorities to dismiss irrelevant objections

(this should cut down the number of objections which have to go to Welsh Ministers). This is certainly deregulatory and should be a good thing in the context of Modification Orders where irrelevant objections are obvious.

Question 4: What changes, if any, do you think need to be made to improve and simplify the provisions available to local authorities for making improvements on the ground?

To improve provisions available to local authorities for making improvements on the ground.

We would strongly object to the introduction of any measures which would weaken the duties on local authorities in relation to maintaining rights of way and removing obstructions from them.

In terms of making improvement on the ground, we want to see a new duty on authorities to work with volunteers to undertake practical path maintenance. While they should never be used to replace the work of paid staff, across Wales, paths are regularly surveyed, maintained, improved and reopened by groups of volunteers. There are 24 Ramblers volunteer path teams around Wales who make a vital contribution to keeping the network open. However, there is no consistency in the approaches of local authorities when working with volunteers. This often hampers their efforts. Working effectively with volunteers can make a local authority's budgets go much further for much better results.

We want to see Welsh Government support the development and adoption of an all-Wales framework for path maintenance which provides a consistent approach to the training and involvement of volunteers by local authorities. We want this framework to be linked to the skills agenda and offer training opportunities for young people, as well as credit towards the Welsh Baccalaureate. Volunteers should be seen as an additional, valued resource and not a replacement for paid staff.

To make further improvements on the ground we suggest following the measures for stock control set out in the Deregulation Act. The SWG addressed this issue because the fact that section 147 of the Highways Act 1980 does not presently apply to routes over which carriageway rights exist was perceived as one of the reasons that landowners are fearful of definitive map modification orders to add higher rights routes to the definitive map.

Ramblers Cymru fully supports this SWG proposal, and recommends that if there is to be primary legislation to amend section 147 then the opportunity should be taken to review it more thoroughly to provide that:

- Authorisation for a stile or gate can be revoked if the land use for which authorisation was granted subsequently changes;
- when application is made to an authority for the erection of a stile or gate then that authority should be obliged to consult with the path user organisations (those who are prescribed to be notified of path orders) before making a decision on the matter;

- the authority should also be required to hold a public register of all authorisations which are made under section 147 (preferably available on-line).
- the position regarding the installation of cattle grids and the need for a bypass route of appropriate status is clarified.

We would also support the extension of Community Council's powers, to include improvements to footpaths, such as installing gates or tackling obstructions.

Question 5: What non-legislative changes would you like to see in the meantime that you believe would help to improve the rights of way network in Wales and reduce the burden on local authorities?

As outlined in our answer to question 4, the development of an all-Wales volunteer framework would help local authorities to manage their networks and improve the condition of paths. This framework should be a co-production between statutory, private and third sectors, although not a means by which to replace paid staff. This approach will only be beneficial if the local authority Rights of Way team are fully funded.

Some authorities have recently taken very positive steps towards greater involvement of volunteers. We would recommend Welsh government explore the model being rolled out in Powys, where volunteer team leaders are being trained to oversee the work of path maintenance teams across the county, in close liaison with local authority teams. The sharing of best-practice like this would help dispel some of the myths in local authorities around the perceived barriers to working with volunteers.

Research undertaken by Ramblers Cymru (Report on Local Authority RoWIP Implementation: 2010) showed that the most successful authorities in terms of their footpath usability worked co-operatively both with their neighbouring authorities and with volunteers. Monmouthshire and Newport's working relationships are a good example of the benefits of this approach. This further reinforces our call for partnership and co-operation as a principle underpinning the approach to outdoor access.

Ramblers Cymru believes one area potentially very helpful to improving the network would be allowing volunteers to undertake more way marking on paths. Inadequate way marking creates problems for users and landowners, so this would be a helpful way to avoid potential conflict and increase peoples use and enjoyment of paths.

Question 6: How should the number, role, membership, and purpose of Local access forums be redefined?

We believe there is significant scope for strengthening Local Access Forums (LAFs) by increasing their responsibilities and raising their profile in communities. At present there is too much inconsistency in the operation of LAFs: some authorities work well with them, others have failed to appoint members for several years. There is a need to share best

practice amongst authorities and to explore peer support in helping under performing LAFs to function more effectively.

There are a number of specific changes we would want to see to the LAFs. We want to see a better balance of interests achieved through a structure which prescribes for the relevant organisations to have a guaranteed place on each LAF. Ramblers would be one such organisation, fielding our volunteers to provide their local knowledge and expertise. Allowing named deputies to these allocated places would also help ensure representation. Co-option is a useful option and should be maintained in any new arrangements.

We want to see LAFs take on a monitoring role for in relation to the commitments in the local Rights of Way Improvement plans. At present, the authorities are not regularly held to account for delivering on their stated priorities and plans.

The role of the LAF Chair is vital and this appointment should be based on skills and experience, not through election by members at the first meeting. A key role of the Chair should be to establish and maintain links with the Council Chief Executive, its relevant cabinet members. The Council Cabinet also needs to play a stronger role in considering papers and reports from the LAF.

To allow the LAF the time to establish itself and function effectively, we believe the term of appointment should be extended to 4 years, and that a rolling system of appointments should be considered so that membership can evolve with a third of places replaced, or renewed at one time. This would stop all continuity and knowledge from being lost at the same time.

At present, we do not believe that the link between LAFs and the National Access Forum is evident. This disconnect must be fixed, with a clear working relationship established that enables the National Access Forum to really understand what is happening at the local level. We would like to see the National Access Forum itself made a statutory body with a clear purpose and role in influencing the outdoor access agenda.

Question 7: How should the rights and responsibilities surrounding dogs in The countryside be harmonised to provide greater certainty over what is acceptable and what is not, in a way that makes communicating messages about responsible dog ownership and handling more straightforward?

Walking with a dog is an important motivator for many people accessing the countryside. The Wales outdoor recreation survey shows that in 2014, 39% of outdoor visits were taken with a dog.

We fully recognise that dogs can cause problems on farmland, which is why we were part of a UK-wide working group which developed the recently launched Dog Walking code. Natural Resources Wales were also part of the development of the Code and formally launched in July 2015. This simple 10-point Code should be adopted by Welsh

Government, and form the basis of education and awareness raising work to promote responsible dog ownership.

Question 8: How could current legislation be changed to make it easier to allow for a wider range of activities on existing and new paths?

Great care must be taken when considering allowing a wider range of activities on new and existing paths. We recognise that both walkers and cyclists can often benefit from infrastructure enhancements and that there are public benefits to promoting cycling generally. However, we could not support a blanket approach to the upgrading of rights on all paths. We believe a blanket reclassification to allow higher rights would result in fewer people accessing the countryside.

Such a change would increase conflict and we believe worsen the overall user experience. It would also develop a mind-set among users, and potential users, that the network is one for adventure sports rather than recreational enjoyment, reducing levels of active participation. This would hinder efforts to reach those people who would most benefit from outdoor exercise, such as those for whom walking is their best option for health or wellbeing reasons.

As well as the safety and appropriateness of certain routes for shared use, there are resource implications as there would be a financial cost for physically upgrading, updating signage and undertaking ongoing maintenance and active management on these paths. Such a reclassification could also result in a large number of enquiries, accident reports and complaints to highway authorities, national park authorities and the police so increasing the burdens and costs associated with the public rights of way network.

As such a blanket reclassification is counter to Welsh Government's stated aims of the Access and Outdoor Recreation Green Paper to "reduce administrative burden on the local authorities care for paths or the land owners and managers who sometimes need to reconcile farming and forestry needs with the demands of public access" and should not be considered.

However, that is not to say that a large number of current rights of way with on foot access are not also suitable for other users and many also be able to accommodate hoof and cycle users as well.

To accommodate such users and so increase the numbers using the network, requires instead a case by case, path by path approach. Ramblers would be willing to work in collaboration with relevant partners to explore how a streamlined process to achieve this could be developed and implemented as part of ongoing dialogue around the green paper. The Local Access Forums, and consultation with users, should be integral to the consideration of any changes to rights on paths.

The ongoing maintenance of shared use paths is a vital consideration and this must be thought through and planned for in the longer term.

Any movement towards the broadening of the range of activities would make the adoption of our suggested all-Wales framework for the use of volunteers even more vital. All the interest groups involved in outdoor recreation would have a part to play in policing and maintaining the routes they use.

Question 9: How could legislation better strike a balance between the various demands of motorised users, landowners and the natural environment?

Paths which don't have sealed surfaces can be damaged motor vehicles, making them difficult to use and costly for local authorities to repair. Use of these paths in motor vehicles can also spoil the quiet enjoyment of the countryside by walkers, horse riders, pedal cyclists and horse drawn carriage drivers.

Laws exist to protect these unique routes but they are inadequately enforced. We believe there should be:

- Proper enforcement of the current law which prohibits the driving of motor vehicles on footpaths, bridleways and restricted byways (with use of criminal proceedings and confiscation of vehicles where appropriate).
- Timely use of traffic regulation orders (TROs) to prohibit the use of recreational motor vehicles on BOATs and other unsealed roads, particularly within National Parks and AONBs, and on National Trails, to protect paths from damage, and in the interests of walkers and other non-motorised users.

Without consistent and comprehensive application use of these measures, the most cost-effective protection of these routes inevitably lies with new blanket legislation to permanently prevent the use of motor vehicles on unsealed routes.

Question 10: How should the need for new or improved access opportunities be identified, planned, and provided?

Extending the definition of access land to include other areas

Ramblers Cymru are calling on Welsh Government to inspire the nation by introducing a 'freedom to explore with the knowledge to protect' and giving the people of Wales and visitors access to all of our countryside and coastline, underpinned by a strong network of rights of way, and a strong code of conduct.

However, if the CRoW Act is to remain the basis for open access in Wales, additions and improvements are required so that open access provision keeps pace with demand. A new approach to identifying land is needed based on wider landscape character rather than vegetation and land use. While the Act opened up, for the first time, many of the finest areas of the Welsh countryside for quiet enjoyment, and its introduction has been a great success, not all wild areas which might have been opened up were.

This is mostly due to the very complicated and technical exercise undertaken to produce maps. Judgements were made to include or exclude areas based on fertilising and fencing rather than land use. The definitions used to map land types such as downland were based on vegetation. This meant that adjoining areas of countryside which looked the same to the average person were treated differently on the basis of a slightly different species composition, resulting in maps which sometimes make little sense to the public.

Even before moving to a fully landscape based approach to the designation of access land an intermediate step would be to alter the description of open country within the Countryside and Rights of Way Act to open up areas closer to communities and bring wider public benefit.

An expanded definition should include coastal land, including sea-cliffs and land adjacent to the foreshore, all woodlands and semi-rough grazing land as these land types provide good recreational walking and are popular with day visitors as well as those undertaking shorter every day walking.

Further additions to open country could also be made via greater use of the powers under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and incentives to dedicate land could be provided where additional access land would join existing access, green spaces and other recreational assets together to form green links to communities and expand recreational networks. Such areas could be identified within expanded rights of way improvement plans and prioritised via Local Access Forums.

Following Natural England's dedication of all Natural Nature Reserves in England and the dedication of freehold land within the Public Forest Estate all public land including that owned by local authorities, national bodies and Welsh Government should also be dedicated under section 16 to bring lasting benefit from land held in the public trust to the nation of Wales.

Any new approach must be easy for walkers to understand and be broad enough to encompass most open, uncultivated places. In so doing to it will increase the economic, social and health benefits that recreational access to green spaces provides.

Undertaking a review of opportunities within their areas for access and outdoor recreation to confirm a prioritised network

Rights of Way Improvement Plans already exist to fulfil this suggested review function and Ramblers Cymru want to see secure Welsh Government and local authority funding for these plans. We believe they are a vital part of the way local authorities can deliver real improvements to their networks, including, where appropriate, changes to the network which benefit communities, and the addition of higher rights. We believe they would be improved by being a more dynamic rolling 5-year action plan, reviewed and monitored by Local Access Forums. We would also like National Park authorities to have responsibilities for ROWIPs in their areas.

We have very serious concerns about the suggestion of prioritisation of public rights of way. The duty under section 130 of the Highways Act 1980 is absolute and is “to prevent as far as possible, the stopping up or obstruction of the highways for which they are the highway authority”. A prioritisation scheme is not an excuse for inaction, and a policy which says that some paths will be maintained and other not may well be unlawful.

In keeping with the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, the long term needs of communities for outdoor access and recreational routes must be central to decision-making processes. As mentioned in our answer to question 2, communities should be involved in identifying links and green corridors in their areas which work for them.

The lack of usage of some paths at present may be reflective of awareness and path condition, and does not mean paths could not become popular if maintained and promoted. While we accept that in some case there are grounds for amendment or rationalisation of paths, our there should not be a blanket approach to demoting some rights of way to a lower status.

Question 11: What are your views on the benefits and challenges of creating a right of responsible recreation to all land in Wales?

Ramblers Cymru wants to see Wales implement a true ‘Freedom to explore, with the knowledge to protect’.

We want the Welsh Government to be ambitious and develop a model of outdoor access which learns from the successful experiences of Scotland under their Land Reform Act. Hand in hand with this freedom should be the understanding and awareness of everyone’s responsibilities to the environment and to each other. This would be achieved through a strong statutory code of conduct, and a comprehensive programme of education and awareness-raising, from schools through to the general public and landowners.

We understand that there will be strong resistance amongst some interest groups in Wales to a change of this magnitude, however, we feel that this is a great opportunity to revolutionise how the people of Wales use our country’s great outdoors.

Adopting a more open model would relieve Wales of many of the problems associated with the conflicts over outdoor resources, and the lack of knowledge about people’s rights and responsibilities. It would give people more clarity, in contrast with access under the CROW Act which is not widely understood. The need for intricate maps and complex 10-yearly reviews would also be avoided.

The positive experiences of Scotland since the Land Reform Act should counteract many of the negative scenarios envisaged by opponents of increased access. Key findings from a 10-year review of the Scottish experience found that problems encountered by walkers were on a downward trend, and the general public were increasingly confident when walking

outdoors. It also found the changes to have been largely accepted by landowners and users.

Excluding the highlands, the population density and topography of Scotland is not drastically different to Wales as some suggest. The central belt and borders of Scotland are very much like Wales in terms of topography, and are adjacent to the major cities and the main areas of population. This is similar to the concentrated populations of coastal south Wales and the valleys bordering Powys and Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire; and the more densely populated Wrexham, Flintshire and Denbighshire areas bordering more rural Gwynedd, Powys and Conwy.

Unlike Scotland, Wales has an existing rights of way network and we are not advocating its abolition. Instead we want to see our rights of way underpin the more open arrangements, and continue to provide the backbone of a system of access which maximises the benefits outdoor access can bring. Our promoted routes, national trails, and other established paths should remain a key part of Wales's infrastructure, bringing all the benefits they do for tourism and recreation.

We do not believe that the existence of the network and a right of responsible access to all land are an either/or choice – instead they should be seen as mutually supportive. With the economic value of walking in Wales being estimated as £632 million per year in direct spending (Economic value of walking and hill walking in Wales; 2011), and the health benefits regularly demonstrated in research, Wales should grasp this opportunity to open up the outdoors for more people to enjoy.

Question 13: What approach do you advocate to improve opportunities for responsible access for recreation on the coast and in the marine environment?

In 2012, Wales was the first country in the world to open a continuous path around its entire coastline. The Wales Coast Path has been of huge benefit to communities and tourist businesses across Wales bringing an estimated £32 million to the Welsh economy in its first year alone. It is an iconic asset which has a big part to play in getting more people out enjoying the outdoors. However, there are still too many sections of WCP which are too far away from the coast.

We want to see a long-term strategic plan for the ongoing maintenance, improvement and promotion of the path across Wales and to visitors. This should include Welsh Government using their powers on coastal access to bring the path closer to the coast.

Question 14: What would be the advantages and disadvantages of a comprehensive statutory code of conduct for outdoor recreation in Wales?



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Ramblers Cymru are committed to helping people understand that with their rights of access comes the responsibilities, and we would fully support the creation of a new statutory code of conduct for outdoor recreation in Wales. We believe it would be overwhelmingly advantageous.

The experience of Scotland in this regard, is very relevant, with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, alongside their Land Reform Act, providing a highly regarded and widely celebrated framework for public recreation.

A comprehensive statutory code for Wales, agreed by all members of the National Access Forum and passed by the National Assembly would be the ideal approach. This would provide a common understanding from all sides, and clear basis on which to educate and give confidence to people about their responsibilities in the outdoors.

The code would need to be as unambiguous as possible and give clear guidance from both perspectives – for land managers and recreational users. It would act as a good basis for focused messages around specific aspects of behaviour; for example, camping guidance, dog walking or signage.

One of the key disadvantages of the Scottish Code is its lack of statutory status, with any disputes reaching court hinging not on the contents of the code, but on interpretation of the definitions on the face of the Land Reform Act. For this reason, creating a code which is enforceable in law, where failure to comply is an offence, would be preferable for Wales.