

## ROCP 47, Ramblers Cymru

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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

### **Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee**

Adolygiad o flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd | Review of the Committee's priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan Y Cerddwyr | Evidence from Ramblers Cymru

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## Your views

### **1. What are your views on the Committee's three strategic priorities: Climate Change; Sustainable Communities; and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment?**

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No response.

### **2. To what extent are the Committee's three strategic priorities still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?**

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No response.

### **3. What are your view on the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work for Years 3 to 5 of the Sixth Senedd (set out in its report, Priorities for the Sixth Senedd?)**

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No response.

### **4. To what extent are the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?**

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They are still relevant, we wish to suggest additional elements under the following two priorities-

We would encourage the committee to include the following areas in their consideration of Priority 2: Sustainable Communities:

- Whether Welsh Government is providing appropriate and coherent support for the recreational and leisure walking network in Wales, given its important to the nation's health and visitor economy
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- Whether modal shift for recreational journeys is being given sufficient consideration, and the opportunity for TFW/bus reforms to support better access to leisure walking opportunities
- If the learnings and successes from Welsh Government's ENRAW-funded community and environment focused initiatives, such as the Paths to Wellbeing project, are being embedded into, and facilitated through, future support programmes across the public sector.

We also would encourage the committee to include the following areas in their consideration of Priority 3: Protecting and Enhancing the Natural Environment:

- How the failure of Welsh Government to progress their Access Reform agenda (especially the improvement of public information, and technical reforms to Rights of way laws) will affect people's access to nature, and the delivery of public access duties by local authorities and NRW
- How NRW's forthcoming recreation strategy may help the people of Wales better engage, understand and take protective action for the natural environment and access.
- If the National Forest is taking the necessary action to fulfil the First Minister's stated ambition that: "you could walk continuously from one part of Wales to the other, almost, never leaving the national forest"
- How the Sustainable Farming scheme will deliver on improved access as a public good, if access obligations are not made part of national minimum standards.

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**5. Are there any other matters related to the Committee's priorities/work programme/ways of working that you would like to comment on?**

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No response.

**6. Other information**

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Context relevant to our asks for consideration under each priority:

Ramblers Cymru are the guardians of the path network in Wales. We want to see a nation where walking is at the heart of every community, where high quality networks, paths and routes connect people to each other and to local heritage and nature. Good quality green infrastructure and accessible green spaces are part of the solution for tackling poor physical and mental health and can engage people in tackling the nature and climate emergencies. Our walking infrastructure is also crucial to our economic wellbeing, attracting visitors and holidaymakers to all corners of Wales.

We believe good public access and walking infrastructure is especially pertinent in

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the following Programme for Government areas:

- Expand arrangements to create or significantly enhance green spaces.
- Create a National Forest to extend from the North of Wales to the South.
- Work with Transport for Wales and local authorities to strengthen the promotion of walking and cycling.
- Empower communities to have a greater stake in local regeneration.
- Introduce an all-Wales framework to roll out social prescribing to tackle isolation.

During the fifth Senedd, the CCERA committee's recommendation in 2021 that "Future Wales should recognise the public rights of way network and access to common land as national assets" was accepted by government. We hoped this would be the catalyst to engender a new approach to long-term, secure funding for paths and green spaces.

However, the Access Improvement Grant from Welsh Government to Local Authorities and National Park Authorities, remains at low levels - just £2m this year. While welcome, this equates to just 64p per person in Wales, which is not reflective of the health, wellbeing and economic benefits investment in quality access can bring. Our recent analysis of tourism day visits estimates that £962m was spent by visitors on walking trips in Wales, and £425m by overnight walkers, much of this in rural areas.

Therefore, we had also hoped that the Wales' new agricultural support schemes would from the outset look to deliver the public access benefits. Regrettably, cross-compliance with access obligations was not a requirement of the basic payments scheme in Wales, leading to significant problems across the path network for which local authorities lacked both the resources and contractual levers to tackle. For example in Powys, this has led to just 37.6% of paths being assessed as open and easy to use. Even through the Glastir programme, where the maintenance of existing paths and access was part of scheme conditions, just 66% of paths were assessed as 'easy to use'.

Our recent ENRAW funded Paths to Wellbeing project has had great successes in reconnecting people in 18 communities across Wales to their local paths, making their paths and green spaces more accessible and enhancing surrounding nature. The community-led, collaborative approach has engendered a new sense of community ownership and pride in local surroundings. Its positive impact on participants wellbeing and its legacy of practical improvements, has demonstrated both an appetite for engagement with the outdoors and the benefits this engagement has.

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