

## Written response on behalf of Cycling UK - Executive Summary:

- Access to the countryside, and cycling in particular, is beneficial to society through:
  - Physical and mental health and wellbeing
  - Promoting active lifestyles
  - Reducing car use
  - Connecting people with the natural environment
- The biggest barriers to cycling in the countryside are:
  - Road traffic
  - Lack of off-road access on rights of way
- Agricultural funding could help improve off-road access and enhance the rights of way network, particularly for horse riders, cyclists and disabled users.
- Particular opportunities exist for improved access on or relating to:
  - Disused railway lines, National Trails and other promoted routes;
  - The urban fringe;
  - Gaps in the network (e.g. due to road crossings, missing bridges or inconsistent rights);
  - Maintaining all of the above.
- Agricultural subsidies should:
  - Financially incentivise farmers and landowners to create new routes for public access;
  - Reimburse farmers and landowners for capital works that are required to create new routes across their land;
  - Offer farmers and landowners an annual payment to help better maintain the rights of way across their land.
- Grants for access improvements should therefore have three tiers:
  - A formula-based revenue grant for maintaining existing access and rights of way;
  - An administratively simple grant for minor capital works;
  - A scheme that would be suitable for larger scale creation and improvement projects, potentially involving multiple landowners or significant projects such as National Trails.
- Access funding should be prioritised to support the delivery of local authorities' statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs) and integrate, where appropriate, with their Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plans (LCWIPs).
- There is a huge opportunity to integrate improved access with environmental improvements in order to enhance peoples connection to, and enjoyment of, the natural environment.

# Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit

## DEFRA consultation

### Written response on behalf of Cycling UK

#### **Introduction:**

1. Cycling UK was founded in 1878 and has 68,000 members and supporters. Cycling UK's central mission is to make cycling a safe, accessible, enjoyable and 'normal' activity for people of all ages and abilities. It was previously known as CTC or the Cyclists' Touring Club. Our interests cover cycling both as a form of day-to-day transport and as a leisure activity, which can deliver health, economic, environmental, safety and quality of life benefits both for individuals and society. We represent the interests of current and would-be cyclists on public policy matters. We have responded below to those questions which we believe fall within our area of experience and the interests of our members.

#### **Consultation Questions:**

2. In section 5 of the consultation, DEFRA sets out its proposal for new agricultural policy to be underpinned by the principle of paying public money for the provision of public goods. The section then goes on to ask:

Which of the environmental outcomes listed below do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) Improved soil health
- b) Improved water quality
- c) Better air quality
- d) Increased biodiversity
- e) Climate change mitigation
- f) Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

Of the other options listed below, which do you consider to be the most important public goods that government should support? Please rank your top three options by order of importance:

- a) World-class animal welfare
- b) High animal health standards
- c) Protection of crops, tree, plant and bee health
- d) Improved productivity and competitiveness
- e) Preserving rural resilience and traditional farming and landscapes in the uplands
- f) Public access to the countryside

Are there any other public goods which you think the government should support?

3. As a cycling charity, it would fall outside our charitable remit to provide 'top 3' rankings of these two lists in the manner requested. However we can provide the following observations on them.
4. As regards the first list, we would note that cycling as a form of day-to-day travel contributes to mitigating climate change and improving air quality – see our briefings on air quality and climate change respectively (both accessible from [www.cyclinguk.org/briefings](http://www.cyclinguk.org/briefings)). Increasing and improving off-road cycling opportunities in the countryside would also contribute significantly to part of f. (i.e. engagement with the natural environment), while the rest of f. and d. (i.e. enhanced beauty and heritage and increased biodiversity) are hugely important to the enjoyment of the environment which we seek to foster by promoting cycling access.
  - 1.
5. In relation to the second list, Cycling UK's primary focus in this response is on f. (i.e. public access to the countryside). However increasing and improving the opportunities for cycle (and indeed pedestrian and equestrian) access to the countryside would also contribute to d) (i.e. improving productivity and competitiveness, by enhancing the rural and tourist economy), and our proposals seek to ensure it also contributes strongly to e. (i.e. preserving rural resilience and traditional farming and landscapes in the uplands), while the other items – particularly c. (protection of crops, tree, plant and bee health) are important contributors to people's enjoyment of the countryside.

### **The value of off-road cycle access for recreation and travel :**

6. Cycling UK believes that recreational access to the countryside is inherently beneficial to society. There is good evidence that provision for countryside access through cycling, walking and horse riding gives a high return on investment, both through improved health and wellbeing of the community and direct benefits to rural tourism. The relevant evidence is summarised, with references, in Cycling UK's briefings on Cycling and Health and on cycling and the economy (both accessible from [www.cyclinguk.org/briefings](http://www.cyclinguk.org/briefings)).
7. Projects undertaken in the past have shown that improved facilities increase not only the number but also the diversity of those able to enjoy the benefits of outdoor

access, particularly for people with disabilities and those living in urban areas. However the Government still wants many more people to walk and cycle to improve health, reduce congestion and benefit the economy. A radical new approach is essential and supporting increased access through agri-funding could be part of the answer.

8. We welcome the potential for agri-funding to deliver a variety of wider benefits, such as improvements in nature conservation, biodiversity and the sustainability of rural land uses. We believe this can be done in a way which enhances people's enjoyment and understanding of the natural environment.
9. Indeed, there is genuine synergy between investing in a high-quality natural environment and enabling people to access it, Allowing people to see and enjoy wonderful landscapes, plants and wildlife – whether on foot, cycle or horseback –will increase public support for, and engagement in, action by farmers and others to maintain and enhance the quality of the natural environment. Research documented in Cycling UK's Rides of Way report (see [www.bit.ly/cyclinguk-ridesofway](http://www.bit.ly/cyclinguk-ridesofway)) shows that enjoyment of nature is already one of the key motivations for cycling off-road.
10. Additionally, improved facilities for cycling and multi-user routes on the urban fringe carry real potential to encourage people away from car-based journeys, whether for day-to-day journeys (e.g. to get to school or work, to go shopping or visit friends) or for recreation.

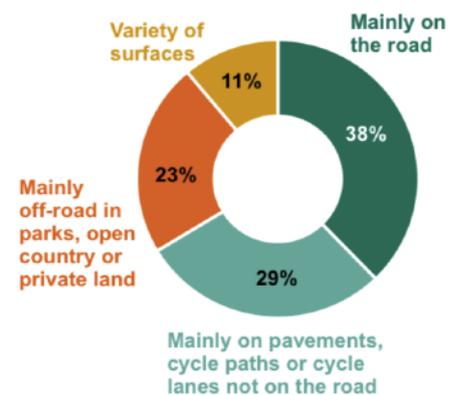
### Barriers to cycling participation:

11. At the moment the existing rights of way network is difficult to access without using busy roads. Improving this would encourage more people out into the countryside, and benefit rural communities through more people visiting country pubs and visitor attractions.
12. In rural areas, much of the existing physical infrastructure that could be available for cycling and walking is not being utilised because of:
  - (a) Legal constraints as to where people may walk and ride; and
  - (b) Lack of investment in creating and maintaining a connected network of paths so that they are fit and safe for walking and cycling.
13. Only about 22% of the rights of way network is legally accessible to cyclists. Many routes which are physically safe and suitable for shared use are not legally accessible – and vice versa – due to a system which classifies routes based on historic use rather than by suitability.



14. This is compounded by inconsistent recording which means that routes often stop at parish boundaries or force riders onto busy roads rather than continuing along the most suitable route. The bridleway and byway network is fractured and inconsistent and too many rights of way are in a poor state of repair that makes them unsuitable and unattractive for a lot of users.
15. Additionally, all too often the rights of way network is difficult to access from the urban fringe and residential areas. Safe infrastructure for cycling and walking stops at the edge of town rather than connecting with the rights of way system beyond which would allow people to walk and ride from home in order to enjoy the countryside rather than getting into the car and driving there.
16. Finally, depressingly, only two of our fifteen flagship promoted National Trails are open and promoted for horse riders and cyclists. Improvements in this, and the routes that connect National Trails to where people live, have the potential to encourage more people out into rural areas to enjoy them properly.

Main cycling location in the last 12 months, England 2015 (NTS0315)



### Opportunities for improving off-road access:

17. Improvements in the rights of way network would be a huge benefit to countryside users and would encourage participation and healthy lifestyles, along with a better engagement with nature. All these things mean that funding in this area would be supporting the delivery of a significant public good.
18. Organisations like the Forestry Commission have made welcome resource commitments in recent years towards improving countryside access facilities, however many of its sites are not close to where people live. Cycling UK's Rides of Way report, based on survey of over 11,000 existing off-road cyclists, showed that as many as 90% of people using these type of facilities drove there, whereas 66% of people riding on rights of way rode from their front door. However many of those who drove would readily cycle from their front door if better links were available, enabling them to do so.
19. This huge disparity suggests that, if we want people to build healthier lifestyles and exercise more regularly, we need to help them do it on their doorstep. This also has a very clear impact on people with disabilities and others from disadvantaged groups, many of whom may not have access to a car, These are often the people whose health and well-being would benefit most from increased access to the countryside, potentially yielding significant financial savings in the process to the NHS or other public services.

20. We note also that routes which are accessible for horse riders and cyclists are, by their nature, often also more accessible for disabled users than footpaths. Issues such as surface, width, gradient and the use of gates rather than stiles all combine to widen the value of such routes to a wider demographic.
21. A better network of accessible multi-user routes, well signed and well maintained, which offer direct connections between the urban fringe and wider countryside would encourage more people to participate in countryside recreation and become more active. As such, the primary access improvements that we believe that agri-funding could help to support are:

**Filling in missing links in the existing rights of way network**

Such as where two sections of bridleway were disconnected, or only connected by a length of footpath, or where a bridge is missing, this would open up many more connected routes and encourage people to go further.

**Allowing users to avoid dangerous roads**

For example where a footpath or bridleway met a busy road, forcing users onto that road for a distance before connecting with a different right of way. Providing safe alternative routes would reduce road casualties and make cycling and walking more attractive to users

**Facilitating access to the PRow network from the urban fringe**

Often existing rights of way do not connect directly with residential areas, or a right of way does not connect directly to existing urban walking and cycling routes. Creating new routes that improved this would benefit huge numbers of people and facilitate access close to home rather than people driving to honeypot locations. This is a key area where there is a need for better integration between local authorities' statutory Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs) and their Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plans (LCWIPs). Better links are needed between urban walking and cycling networks (where uses such as journeys to school and to work will predominate) with rural off-road networks (whose users would be more recreational - without forgetting that rural rights of way can also be important for 'utility' walking and cycling journeys too). Hence the criteria for allocating agri-funding to deliver access improvements should be guided by RoWIPs, and particularly their integration with LCWIPs.

**Offering wider holistic benefits such as rural tourism opportunities, disused rail lines, National Trails and other promoted routes.**

Over a thousand miles of disused railway routes still physically exist, but without any rights of access for the public. These routes would be ideal to develop into multi-user routes to encourage countryside access on foot, bike and horse. Often these routes have the potential to connect together rural villages and local attractions to create promoted routes, while on a wider scale they may have potential to provide traffic-free connections to National Trails.

**Integration with environmental schemes to improve people's connection with the natural environment**

We believe that improved countryside access can work hand in hand with environmental improvements such as hedgerow creation and pond creation alongside or near access routes. Doing so would make the countryside an even more enjoyable place to visit and enhance people's opportunities to see and interact with nature. There is further potential to expand the

scope of linked environmental projects to a landscape scale by utilising National Trails as a focus for improvement.

## **How should the new policy based on supporting public goods be coordinated and delivered?**

22. Cycling UK believes that access based funding should fulfil the following goals

- **Offer farmers and landowners an annual payment to help better maintain existing rights of way and access across their land**
- **Financially incentivise farmers and landowners to increase public access**
- **Reimburse farmers and landowners for capital works that are required to create new routes across their land**

23. We would note that access agreements under previous schemes such as environmental/countryside stewardship often resulted in little practical improvement for users, or only benefitted a single user group. With little incentive to strive for better or to continue to revise the arrangements in order to make them work better or provide additional benefit. And no inbuilt opportunity to review or vary the agreement if it is subsequently found not to be working as well as expected.

24. We would also make note of the funding structure within the various iterations of the Woodland Grant Scheme, part of which included capital funding to support expanding the area of woodland with public access. Key points within this being:

- Priority areas, taking into account areas of high population, deprivation indices and current lack of public access provision.
- Capital funding for access infrastructure improvements, such as path creation, gates and signage.
- A structure of standardised costs for infrastructure allowing administrative simplicity in the calculation of grants.

25. Finally, we would draw clear attention to the extensive lessons learned and conclusions on the efficacy of the Paths for Communities (P4C) trial scheme run by Natural England and DEFRA using RDPE funding, a programme which successfully delivered 76 kilometres of new PRow and a further 106km of improved access opportunities.

26. Therefore, after reflection on the efficacy of previous schemes, we feel that there are distinct lessons to be learned towards the creation of a replacement agri-environmental funding model, and recommend that it should offer:

- A. Formula-based revenue funding to support the maintenance of existing rights of way and access. This would comprise:
1. An annual payment per metre for rights of way **maintenance** (with a higher rate paid for bridleways and restricted byways).
  2. An annual payment for land dedicated for **open access**, either on agricultural or other types of land (including forestry) with differential rates for those offering higher rights of access (cycling and horse riding) and areas of particularly high public value such as on the urban fringe.
- B. Direct financial **incentives**\* for the creation of new permanent rights of way.

This should be supported by provision to reimburse **capital costs** for access improvements or the creation of new access rights at standardised rates. These should be arranged in two tiers:

1. A grant for minor capital works (we suggest values of between £2,000 up to £5,000) that should be administratively simple and authorised at a local level, in order to promote simple improvements as efficiently as possible.
2. A higher capital grant scheme that would require further planning and oversight, that would be suitable for larger scale creation and improvement projects, including landscape scale projects that involved multiple landowners.

27. All the above should be subject to the following conditionality:

- **Cross compliance** between access and other areas of agri-funding, in order to ensure that statutory obligations are fulfilled.
- The introduction of a **fixed penalty notice** system in order to deal with minor infringements and rights of way obstructions, such as blocked gates or failure to reinstate cross-field paths after ploughing
- A clear presumption in favour of access for **non-motorised users** (walkers, cyclists and horse riders) on any new access rights created. We take particular note of the conclusions of the P4C trial that bridleway creation offered the best value for money use of public funding as routes were open to a wider variety of users and were generally more accessible for disabled users.
- Supplementary payments where new access rights **integrate with wider aims** such as:
  - National Trails and disused rail lines

- Rights of Way improvement Plans (ROWIP)
- Urban fringe traffic-free links
- Environmentally sensitive farming and wildlife conservation

28. We further suggest that the payment scheme ought to offer a 'multiplier' creating higher rates of payment in order to reward priority routes.

For example, a route in a low priority area may receive a grant and payment totalling only a proportion of capital costs for a proposed new route:

Capital costs (at standardised rates) = £30,000  
 Low priority area: 50% capital costs reimbursement  
 Supplement for creation of new footpath rights: 15%  
**Total payment: 65% of capital costs = £19,500**

(Although external/match funding could be used to supplement this in order to make the project financially viable). Whereas a route on the urban fringe that linked to a National Trail may receive well in excess of 100% of capital costs:

Capital Costs (at standardised rates) = £30,000  
 High priority area: 100% capital costs reimbursement  
 Supplement for creation of new bridleway rights: 20%  
 Supplement for integration with priority route (National Trail): 20%  
 Supplement for integration with wildlife conservation corridor: 10%  
**Total payment: 150% of capital costs = £45,000**

Under such a model there would be a clear incentive for landowners to develop the highest priority routes with the widest benefit for the public, and to integrate access with wider improvements in order to maximise the total public good delivered.

29. We would comment that cross compliance is a complex area, the recent decision of the High Court in *R (on the application of Stoddy Estate Ltd) v Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*, may well limit the efficacy of cross compliance in its current form. This is one of the reasons we have suggested an administratively simple fixed penalty scheme for rights of way enforcement in the future.

## Conclusions:

30. The Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy states that:

”The Government wants walking and cycling to be a normal part of everyday life, and the natural choices for shorter journeys such as going to school, college or work, travelling to the station, and for simple enjoyment. As part of our aim to build a society that works for all, we want more people to have access to safe, attractive routes for cycling and walking by 2040.”

31. In the context of rural travel and recreation it is hard to see how the Government can achieve its 2020 target to "double activity measured as the estimated total number of cycle stages made" or achieve the central purpose of its active travel strategy without radical change. The facts are clear, the biggest limiting factor for the take-up of cycling is fear of traffic. Approximately one-third of all cycling in the countryside is already off-road, most of this utilising the 22% of the public rights of way system that cyclists and horse riders have access to.
32. Whilst changes in participation are a relevant factor, we suggest that one needs to look at access and rights of way in the wider context of social change. The PRow network has a complex origin, having evolved in an ad hoc way to fulfil both local and national needs. Some routes were deliberately planned as pack horse or drove roads, many evolved as paths between villages and places of work and through long use developed public rights. However, patterns of movement change, never more so than in the 20th Century with the growth of the motor car and an increasingly urban society. Even by the 1960's it was accepted by government that the primary use of this network was recreational - as such, it is clear that the importance and use of footpaths and other rights of way has reflected and moved with time and societal change. It is therefore vital that as changes in patterns of recreational use are witnessed the PRow network evolves to better suit them.
33. A simple, cost effective way to increase cycling and walking in the countryside would be to improve existing rights of way and open more high quality, well surfaced and usable multi-user routes. This alone would mean that agri-funding was delivering a huge public good, when combined with the opportunity to improve the connections people with nature and farming, the case for funding improvements in public access to the countryside is compelling.

#### **Further reading:**

Cycling UK briefing on the health and wellbeing benefits of cycling:

<https://www.cyclinguk.org/campaigning/views-and-briefings/health-and-cycling>

Results of a Cycling UK survey of over 11,000 off-road cyclists :

<https://www.cyclinguk.org/press-release/2017-02-15/first-road-cycling-report-gives-unique-insight-uk-scene>

Paths for Communities (P4C) end of scheme report:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/371881/p4c-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/371881/p4c-final-report.pdf)