

Consultation on improving opportunities to access the outdoors for responsible recreation – Questions

Please return this form by post or email to reach the Welsh Government no later than 2 October 2015

Consultation Response Form

Your name:

Organisation (if applicable):

email / telephone number:

Your address:

Question 1: What are your views on the principles outlined above [section 2]? If you would suggest changing them, please explain how and why.

Comments

I believe the principles to be relatively sound, and fully support encouraging responsible access and usage of our countryside and rivers, and in particular - encouraging local people out of their normal urban environments.
I think i would like to see point 8 expanded to 'define' the understanding so that there is no grey that can lead to conflict.

Question 2: Tell us your views on the issues highlighted above [section 4], and whether there are other key challenges you believe need to be resolved?

Comments

I think the key challenges that need to be resolved are to erode the unnecessary conflict between some user groups created by the lack of present clarity on outdated laws. Access and navigation in green areas and rivers has largely remained unchanged in many hundreds of years, and it wasn't clear then. In this time, populations have exploded as has leisure time to spend exploring. The access we have is not enough

and it isnt even clear. This is incredibly limiting to almost all outdoor sports. Many of these participants are often trespassing under the current law with some seeking to criminalise them - with no notable harm being caused. Should our green spaces on this tiny isle be preserved for the few? Or should they be shared by all equally - providing that working land is able to continue without irresponsible hinderance. I think a key challenge is overcoming the aggressive outdated self interested views of the few to benefit the wider public in Wales.

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?

Comments

Personally, i would like to see Wales use the highly successful Scottish model - reforming the land for the benefit of all - thus increasing green space use and decreasing over use at specific points. If the majority of non residential green areas were to be viewed as public rights of way, there would be less resistance to diverting or suspending access to small areas when completely necessary (such as for safety or genuine environmental protection)

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?

Comments

I think local authorities should better study usage of green spaces within their areas to enable them to support those uses and any needs that arise by for example - predicting pathway surfacing based on user numbers - which would aid with financial planning and prevent unnecessary spending based on pressure from user groups or personal motivations.

Here in Llangollen, recently a number of fences were erected at the horseshoe weir. Whilst this is of no disadvantage to walkers, the many other users such as river users have been disadvantaged by this spend as their route is now more obstructed.

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?

Comments
I would like to see 'test' areas where the public and in particular local people are encouraged to explore without the risk of threatening behaviour from landowners or other user groups. These trials could explore whether a style such as that in Scotland would have any notable negative effect on the Welsh landscape, or if this temporary 'opening' of our land and rivers would show the possibility of conflict free usage by owners and public of differing user groups.

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

Comments
I think that if LAF's are to continue, they should so with a very public face. At present it seems these are groups that are able to manage their own agendas with little input or monitoring from the users and landowners of the areas they are intended to represent. The fact many whom respond to this survey will struggle in answer to this question demonstrates my point. I think that if they do not already, they need to have a clear and balanced structure to represent all stakeholders including the environment.

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?

Comments

A black and white pamphlet detailing one simple list of guidelines for all green space nationally should cover it with no confusion. A little like the access leaflets they use in Scotland.

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?

Comments

Land reform as per Scotland. This has led to an increase in usage by all user groups with reduced conflict. Win Win.

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

Comments

Clearly designated areas and defined code of conduct with genuine and truthful reasoning where users are not permitted to carry out whatever be restricted in that area - such as no camping within 500m of a residence etc.

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

Comments

In the short term, i simply think by public request followed by investigation as to needs by that group/environment. In the longer term, ongoing study of people movements and activities to establish trends and likely demands.

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

Comments

The benefits are incalculable. The people of Wales and Visitors to Wales would be presented with an astronomical increase in conflict free activity opportunity that is already available elsewhere in the UK. The challenges as i see will mainly be with the strong lobbying groups such as the countryside alliance and angling trust who see our green space and rivers as the preserve of their private body members - for a fee. Responsible recreation access to all land in Wales would cause great financial harm to these organisations - but importantly would actually benefit the majority of those people they represent.

To further support my first paragraph, i will be travelling up to the Highlands of Scotland in a fortnight to spend a week conflict free mountain biking, kayaking and climbing. This is not something anyone has ever said about Wales.

Question 12: What approach do you advocate to improve opportunities for responsible access for recreation on inland waters?

Comments

As a Welsh kayaker of over 20 years, i have always accessed our inland rivers via legal - more often than not - publicly owned land. As per the 'Welsh Rivers Guidebook' and guides written on 'ukriversguidebook' online, access is not a huge issue, and access points are very well documented. I have never had conflict at any of these points. Navigation is a separate issue, and is the one that seems to cause conflict with a small minority of fishermen/clubs. The approach i would advocate to improve opportunities is to encourage landowners to open up other access points (possibly with a launching fee such as at symonds yat), and to clarify that until the law is defined - waterway navigation is not a crime. This should stop the very much one sided conflict from the minority of fishermen and the angling trust.

Kayakers, Canoeists, Rafters, Swimmers etc. represent a massive number of tourists and locals in Wales and a huge income to the country as well as being almost completely environmentally damage free. Very little erosion, no harm to animals - minimal ecological impact. On the most part, the current 'grey' of the law deters none of these users but it does intimidate new starters and organised clubs from using areas where conflict can occur. Here in llangollen i would reasonably estimate that non angling water users outnumber anglers 100-1. The one being the loudest voice.

Please refer to the Splash funded 'welsh dee partnership' and 'wye usk foundation' for a demonstration on how not to manage responsible access to inland water - Two bodies created by anglers to restrict water usage by non anglers that are almost completely ignored. If local bodies are to be called upon to manage responsible access to inland water, they should equally represent all user groups and be managed by an independent.

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

Comments

Much the same as the rest of wales, i would like to see a full land reform such as that in scotland, which would encourage responsible enjoyment.

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

Comments

the advantages would include limiting conflict between stakeholders as there would be a defined code by which to respect others. It would mean visitors would be clear on what is expected and all would be aware when others are acting irresponsibly and able to act.

a disadvantage would be that its almost impossible to go into any great detail in a single code as some specific areas general codes may not be suitable. For example, simply stating footpaths are to be shared with horses and cycles could cause all sorts of issues on snowdon on a bank holiday weekend. That said, i think the Scottish leaflets pretty much cover it.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here:
