

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

Organisation (if applicable): Coed Cadw(The Woodland Trust)

### Comments

Access is essential to achieving Coed Cadw - the Woodland Trust's aim of inspiring people to enjoy and value woodland. We believe direct contact with woodland and its wildlife is one of the best ways to ignite a spark within people, inspiring them to care for woods in future, and one of our aspiration is that everyone should have a wood in walking distance of their home.

According to the Space for People report, the Woodland Trust's full aspirations under the Woodland Access Standard is to see:

- everyone should have access to a wood of at least 2 ha within 500m of their homes (only 22.8 per cent of people in Wales currently do).

However, even if all existing woodland were opened up to the public, there would still be a need for more woodland to be created if we wanted to meet the access standard for all people.

The Office for National Statistics has recently estimated that the value to our economy of recreational access to woodland is nearly 10 times that of the value of timber outputs. (Environmental accounts, 2015). This is just one example of the multiple benefits that woodlands provide that are not reflected in income received by woodland owners.

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

We call on the Welsh Government to:

- recognise the value of this and other non-market woodland services in the accounts for the public forest estate and the way its forest estate is valued
- provide more support for managed recreational access by private landowners, and provide financial support for voluntary agreements to ensure access to all large areas of private forestry.

In relation to principal 1, section 2, of engaging people and encouraging them to visit and use greenspace, we are strongly supportive of this and woodlands in particular have a great range of health benefits for people, including physical health, mental health and well-being and can also help with social cohesion.

The VisitWoods project, a partnership between the Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission and others was a successful example in terms of making information about woodland access available to people, but we acknowledge that active interventions are also valuable as sometimes there are barriers to access beyond merely lack of information. Examples of good schemes that have been run by others in the past was Cydcoed where the programme focused on getting people in the West Wales and Valleys Region out into woods and more involved in woodlands.

With regard to the principals relating to streamlining and harmonising regimes and improving opportunities for recreation, the Woodland Trust acknowledges that a legal right of access to all woods would create tension with those whose woods form the basis of private businesses. For the present we would support the use of grants to incentivise quality and quantity of woodland access, information and case studies to communicate the true rather than perceived impact of the public on woodland wildlife, and encouraging private owners to work with local schools to offer opportunity for forest-based learning.

In relation to responsible recreation, we would highlight, particularly on sensitive sites, walkers with dogs, horse riders and cyclists can have a detrimental effect on conservation value. Recreational benefits should not override ecological sensitivity. These should be carefully considered.

Newly created woods are robust habitats containing fewer sensitive species than ancient woodland; their potential to deliver woodland access with a minimum of conservation impact should not be under-valued. Specialist recreational activities that exclude public access may in themselves be damaging especially to semi-natural ancient and other important native woodland e.g. 4 x 4 off road driving and paintball games. The Trust believes stronger controls are needed over inappropriate leisure activities in semi-natural ancient woodland.

#### Comments

We acknowledge one of the issues highlighted in section 4, that a legal right of access to all woods would create tension with those whose woods form the basis of private businesses.

The Woodland Trust would prefer to see a form of engagement and incentives that supported a voluntary and inclusive approach in the right places – where there is a need/benefit. The option of making access provision a requirement where large woodland schemes were receiving public funds via grants would be worth considering; this would seem to be a valuable approach.

**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

No Comment.

**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

No Comment

**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

Incentives such as grants, mentioned above under question 4.

**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

No comment

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

Comments

In relation to responsible recreation, we would highlight, particularly on sensitive sites, walkers with dogs amongst other things, mentioned under question 1, can have a detrimental effect on conservation value. Recreational benefits should not override ecological sensitivity. These should be carefully considered.

Newly created woods are robust habitats containing fewer sensitive species than ancient woodland; their potential to deliver woodland access with a minimum of conservation impact should not be undervalued.

The Trust believes stronger controls are needed over inappropriate leisure activities in semi-natural ancient woodland.

**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

No Comment

**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

Newly created woods are robust habitats containing fewer sensitive species than ancient woodland; their potential to deliver woodland access with a minimum of conservation impact should not be undervalued. Specialist recreational activities that exclude public access may in themselves be damaging especially to semi-natural ancient and other important native woodland, for example 4 x 4 off road driving. The Trust believes stronger controls are needed over inappropriate leisure activities in semi-natural ancient woodland.

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

Comments

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

Comments

Coed Cadw maintains that a voluntary approach albeit better incentivised by grants as referred to above. Increasing public access via a legislative route is very much an emotive issue for landowners.

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

Comments

No Comment

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

Comments

No Comment

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

Comments

Code of conduct - welcome - damage to ancient woodlands from 4x4 etc is an issue and guidance and codes would have value.

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

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: