

Tuesday 12th January 2021

CCERA Scrutiny of Draft Budget 2021/22

1. The Covid 19 pandemic has led to many more people appreciating their access to the landscapes and nature of Wales. Lockdown brought a renewed appreciation of the outdoors and when limited to local exercise, many people explored their own communities on foot: bringing them closer to nature and connected through the paths that criss-cross our communities and countryside.
2. After an absence of several years, and following sustained pressure from outdoor organisations like Ramblers Cymru, in September 2020 Welsh Government provided a funding boost of £1.76m to support local Rights of Way improvement. Deputy Minister, Hannah Blythyn said at the time *“access to local green spaces proved just as important during lockdown and this funding demonstrates that we greatly value our local footpaths and other rights of way”*.
3. This was a very welcome development, as years of pressure on Local authority budgets have resulted in downward trend in allocations to Rights of Way and countryside departments. Our data shows that an average of only 79p per person is invested by Highway Authorities in maintaining and improving our 33,000km footpaths in Wales. The extra funding direct from Welsh Government to these departments is crucial and needed to improve access for all.
4. We hoped the draft budget would build on the September 2020 announcement and include a strong commitment to placing access to the outdoors at the heart of the green recovery. Improving our paths and green spaces will help build a healthier more active nation. However, the 2021/22 draft budget, indicates no change in allocation from 2020/21 for *Landscape and Outdoor Recreation* under either the Resource or Capital budgets.
5. The budget narrative does not indicate that any provision has been made to boost Highway Authority resources for rights of way and access. Active Travel receives significant and growing investment, as it has over recent years, but there is no mention of the equally important footpaths and bridleways. Rights of way uniquely link us to our local heritage, to nature and contributes so much to our daily lives, health and wellbeing, and the visitor economy. Ramblers Cymru are calling for fair funding for the delivery of Rights of Way Improvements, equivalent to at least 10% of that made available for Active Travel infrastructure.
6. In the section “Investing in physical and mental health”, only local sporting

facilities and events are covered; the plans for the National Forest do not refer to recreational access.

7. The CCERA committee's recent recommendation that "**Future Wales should recognise the public rights of way network and access to common land as national assets**" is very welcome and will hopefully be accepted by government. This can then be the catalyst to engender a new approach to long-term, secure funding for paths and green spaces.
8. Ramblers Cymru urge the CCERA committee to question the Cabinet Secretary about the government's approach to improving access and rights of way, and whether provision has been made to support Highway Authorities to deliver ongoing improvements.

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