
TITLE: Brexit and Access

Author: Mark Weston, Vice-Chair SGO Strategy Board

A Discussion Paper

The United Kingdom's departure from the EU presents an opportunity to model funding schemes for agriculture, which ensure that public money enhances land, whilst achieving maximum public benefit and promoting public wellbeing.

In a letter from the Minister to Richard Benyon MP, Michael Gove states, *'I am looking forward to working with industry and the public to develop new proposals that support agricultural industry as we leave the EU. Future funding for rights of way will also be discussed as part of the EU exit negotiations.'* So now is a timely moment for the Board to consider this matter.

One element of public benefit could be giving financial support to land owners who provide and or improve public access, whether paths or open access land. Such assets support local economies, and improve people's health, wellbeing and safety. Public access can help to connect those who use paths and those who own and manage the land, and presents an opportunity for people who access the land to better understand where their food comes from.

Any new funding scheme should include financial support for landowners who provide additional access or improvements to existing access.

Payments should be available for the provision of new access, either along defined paths or as open access to land, or both. It should be well publicised. It should be targeted and selective, with bids from landowners assessed against criteria, such as public demand, achievement of the objectives of the rights of way improvement plan, linking up existing routes, or improvement of safety (for example, enabling walkers and riders to avoid using roads, especially those which are busy, or have limited visibility).

Encouragement should be given for creating bridleways or restricted byways so that maximum public benefit is provided. The provision of circular off-road routes is of particular benefit for equestrians as they limit the amount of riding on roads. In the case of access land, there could be an increased number of access points, or additional access points provided across boundaries within the access area, and the provision of higher rights access on access land.

New access could either be permanent or permissive with funding reflecting the choice made.

Landowners are often in an ideal position to provide and carry out the tasks set out below, and could be funded for these, thereby enhancing access. For example, these could include:

- improvement in path widths,
- regularly mowing a headland path and preventing encroachment by vegetation,

- mowing and marking a path across grass leys,
- mowing, regrading and rolling green lanes,
- improving the accessibility of gates and stiles,
- additional or improved waymarking and signposting,
- providing higher rights (the difference in subsidy between footpaths and bridleways or restricted byways should be substantial to encourage upgrades where it is appropriate for all users).

Enhancements of existing access would be optional extras which land owners could elect to adopt. Standard annual payments would be paid per length of path adopted.

To receive grants, landowners that have existing rights of way on their land should ensure that all legislation is complied with, keeping paths clear of obstruction, reinstating them after ploughing etc.

Attached to this report are reports from Northumberland JLAF, Mid and West Berks Local Access Forum, British Canoeing and Canoe Wales, Countryside Matter Campaign.

Appendices

Appendix 1A- Northumberland JLAF

Appendix 2A- Mid and West Berks Local Access Forum

Appendix 3A- British Canoeing and Canoe Wales

Appendix 4A- Countryside Matter Campaign

Recommendations

The Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board are asked to discuss this paper and make recommendations for a submission to Defra and Natural England.

Dated 30/11/17