



Canoe Wales
Canw Cymru

 **BRITISH**
CANOEING



Unlocking Potential

A Vision For Canoeing, Countryside Access & Post-Brexit Rural Policy

Since the EU Referendum a year ago the issue of the public policies which support our rural economy have been under much discussion. While the farming community has understandably been concerned about changes to vital revenue streams, there are also increasing calls to restructure subsidies to support countryside access and support the natural environment.

What new ideas have been suggested so far?

Conservation organisations have been particularly quick to examine the potential opportunities for subsidies to be reinvigorated, especially to encourage greater protection for the natural environment in our heavily managed countryside. The National Trust led the way with an initial seven point plan for post-Brexit subsidies. The Trust then partnered with WWF, RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts to produce a new five point plan.

Within the outdoor recreation community there have been calls to re-prioritise public money to help improve and protect public access. The Open Spaces Society and the Ramblers have suggested proposals to use subsidies to increase enforcement of current protections for Rights of Way and also to create new incentives to expand access.

It's great to see the new ideas coming from these organisations - but slightly disappointing that there is, so far, such little crossover between conservation and public access. Past initiatives, such as the coalition that prevented the sale of our forests, demonstrate that government is more likely to listen to a positive, inclusive approach to change.

We support efforts to reinforce subsidies to help improve both access to and conservation of our countryside.

Engaging the farming community

Farmers are concerned about what could be the biggest change to their industry in decades. In some areas subsidies provide a lifeline to farmers, leading to a variety of policy proposals from organisations representing our farmed environment. These range from calls to increase and re-target subsidies to calls for environmental protections to be reduced in response to threatened funding cuts.

We believe the protections for our environment and sustainable access should be strengthened, not cut. However, we must work with farmers to understand their concerns, and ensure the rural policy system of subsidies post-Brexit ensures such protections are a benefit to farmers and not simply a drain on their resources.

We will seek to develop our links with the farming community, to work towards policies which strengthen all stakeholders in our fragile rural economy.

What do we want to see?

We believe post-Brexit rural policy should recognise the need for public money to bring improved public benefits.

Despite the clear evidence for a General Public Right of Navigation (PRN) canoeists currently find their rights disputed on over 95% of our rivers. They also have limited access to most open water locations outside of the Lake District. We don't believe this is acceptable. In Northern Ireland and Scotland canoeists enjoy dispute-free access to most rivers and lakes, which we believe would work UK wide. Action is needed from Government to either confirm the existing General PRN or establish new legislation such as the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. We support the current proposals being put forward by the Welsh Government's consultation, "Taking Forward Wales' Sustainable Management of Natural Resources". However, we believe rural policy can be also be tweaked to play a role in helping improve access for paddlers. This would help move beyond disputes on our rivers, supporting increased partnership work between conservation bodies, farmers and sporting organisations to support rural economies.



We call for the following actions to promote canoeing:

- Where rivers flow through land in receipt of public subsidies canoeists should enjoy their right to paddle along them without obstruction or challenge.
- The creation of new subsidies to incentivise farmers and other land owners to improve access to rivers, lakes or other waters. This could include: creating and maintaining portage or access facilities, providing car parking, maintaining the navigability of rivers (though this is rarely an issue for canoeists)
- Using public subsidy and grants to help ensure improved access supports new revenue for land-owners, especially where it can support traditional farming, conservation or communities. Examples could be grants to support the creation of camping, cafes or bunk houses.

We also recommend the following actions to build a new coalition to secure the future for our countryside:

- Increased partnership working between recreational and sporting bodies which use the natural environment.
- Improving the links between rural stakeholders, building on the potential for bringing benefits to all groups rather than acting in isolation.



- Matching our desire for improved access (especially the recognition of access rights) with a pragmatic approach to our responsibilities. Working with farmers, conservationists and other water users is essential to help us all build a strong, vibrant, sustainable approach to countryside management for all to enjoy.

What are we doing to work towards these aims?

We are committed to significantly developing their engagement with government and other stakeholders. We will create more awareness of the access issues paddlers face and the many efforts the paddling community have made to, unsuccessfully, work for change at a local level. Our vision for post-Brexit public policy is just one way we can present a positive, inclusive, cooperative vision for increasing access to our rivers and lakes.



To do this effectively we are:

- Engaging with Government and statutory bodies across the UK in cooperation with our partners in the sports and recreation community.
- Building upon our links with other outdoor, recreational and sporting organisations, especially through our membership of Sport & Recreation, to ensure an effective and stronger voice rather than working in isolation.
- Continuing to build our links with conservation, farming and countryside organisations to develop solutions that work for all.
- Working with the paddling community themselves to help them raise awareness of these issues at a local, regional and national level.

For more information on our policies and activities regarding access and environmental issues, or to find out how you can get involved, please contact us at access@britishcanoeing.org.uk or environment-officer@canoe.wales

