

EFRA Committee: Rural tourism in England inquiry

Written submission submitted by the Sport and Recreation Alliance

August 2016

Sport and Recreation Alliance

1. The Sport and Recreation Alliance is the umbrella body for governing and representative bodies of sport and recreation in the UK. We represent 320 members covering a wide range of activities from football, rugby and cricket to rambling, mind games and dance.
2. Many of our members support people to be active in the natural environment across urban and rural areas. This submission focuses on the value outdoor recreation has to rural tourism and what needs to happen to ensure the potential benefits of outdoor recreation are fulfilled.

The value of the outdoors

3. Our *Reconomics* report (2014¹) defines outdoor recreation as 'any physical activity taking place in the natural environment'. It also sets out the economic impact of outdoor recreation. The natural environment is a prized national asset, the considerable value of which can only be fully realised when individuals have the chance to experience it first-hand. Outdoor recreation is the UK's favourite pastime – 3 in 4 adults regularly get outdoors – and in 2012/13 42.4 million adults in England visited the natural environment. This generated a total visitor spend was £27 billion.
4. Evidence shows that 37% of all overnight trips taken by Brits in 2012 involved outdoor recreation – equating to a figure of £10 billion. Furthermore, walking tourism is estimated to generate up to £2.76 billion for the English economy in 2003 and boating tourism contributed £3.7 billion to the UK in 2012-13.
5. We know that rural areas are key to the visitor economy as prized landscapes bring people from far and wide. The more rural an area is, the more likely it is to rely on income from tourism. Visitors to these communities value being able to access all the countryside has to offer; if outdoor recreation is the heart of these local economies, then paths, woodland, coastline and waterways are its arteries.
6. Sport England commissioned the Outdoor Industries Association (OIA) to research the outdoor market and participation. *Getting active outdoors* (2015²) highlights a latent demand given that 18.2 million people are currently not active outdoors but want to be within the next 12 months. Successfully engaging these people could contribute to a boost in rural tourism.

¹ Sport and Recreation Alliance and Liverpool John Moores University (2014) *Reconomics: The Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation*. Available via: <http://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/sites/sportandrecreation.org.uk/files/web/Reconomics%20FINAL.pdf>

² Sport England (2015) *Getting Active Outdoors*. Available via: Add footnote: <https://www.sportengland.org/media/3275/outdoors-participation-report-v2-lr-spreads.pdf>

7. VisitEngland (2015³) valued the annual average total domestic spend (holidays and day visits 2012-14) of activities, these include:
 - long walks, hikes or rambles as £5,208 million
 - cycling or mountain biking as £1,228 million
 - watersports – including sailing, canoeing, kayaking, windsurfing – as £654 million
8. Research published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra, 2013⁴) estimated that there are 884,000 sea anglers in England. In 2012, sea angling supported £2.1 billion of total spending, a total of over 23,600 jobs, and almost £980 million of GVA. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of sea anglers visit the coast to participate.
9. Research published in 2014⁵ found that the estimated annual expenditure on travelling to shoots across the UK is £200 million. Shooters spent around £246 million locally on food and accommodation and 54% of shooting providers said their activity led to local overnight stays. The estimated number of visitor nights generated annually by shooting providers was 4.13 million.
10. Major sporting events can also boost the rural economy. For example, independent research found that the Tour De Yorkshire 2016 generated nearly £60 million with more than two million spectators lining the route. Accommodation spend was up 28% year on year and non-accommodation items such as food and drink, souvenirs and transport was up by 12%.⁶

Access to all

11. In 2015, the Sport and Recreation Alliance, in partnership with the OIA, worked with our members and key stakeholders to bring together the top themes of what should be included in a national outdoor recreation strategy. We are now pleased that outdoor recreation has been embedded within the Government's sport strategy but believe that some of the key themes identified through that work should be considered when thinking about rural tourism.
12. Making the outdoors accessible is key to getting local communities and visitors to engage with it. We are pleased that Government continues with its commitment to complete the England Coast Path by 2020. In *Reconomics*, we highlighted that the South West Coastal Path is widely recognised as an important driver of tourism in the region. The route costs £500,000 a year to maintain but is estimated to generate £436 million for the regional economy every year and supports 9,771 jobs. We also welcome Government's introduction of a cycling and walking strategy, plus the inclusion of walking and cycling in its sport strategy.

³ Visit England (2015) *The value of activities for tourism*. Available via: https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/England-documents/summary_of_activities_template_v2_0.pdf

⁴ Defra (2013) *Sea Angling 2012 – A survey of recreational sea angling and economic value in England*. Available via: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140108121958/http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/seaaangling/documents/finalreport.pdf>

⁵ PACEC (2014) *The value of shooting: The economic, environmental and social contribution of shooting sports to the UK*. Available via: <http://basc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/07/The-Value-of-Shooting2014.pdf>

⁶ Statistics on the Tour De Yorkshire taken from: Add footnote: <http://letour.yorkshire.com/2016/tour-de-yorkshire-boosts-economy-by-%C2%A360-million>

13. However, more can be done to make the outdoors accessible. For example, Government should provide frameworks so that local areas consult with the local community and design new outdoor spaces that are inclusive, green and provide a suitable play space for children and families.
14. Government also needs to support an accessible rights of way system that enables people to take part in a range of activities in rural areas. One such activity is walking. The Ramblers and other stakeholders have been working with the Government to make sure that the process for registering paths on the definitive map is as easy as possible so that historic paths can be recorded before the 2026 cut-off date otherwise they will be lost forever. The Ramblers 'Don't Lose Your Way' campaign is supporting local volunteers in researching these routes to protect them for the future. Other Ramblers initiatives, including developing practical path work teams, help people to get involved in protecting this vital infrastructure.
15. A local example of how outdoor recreation organisations are working in partnership to improve access is in Norfolk. The Broads Angling Strategy Group worked with the Environment Agency and the Broads Authority to develop a framework to sustain and grow angling. Angling accounts for at least 16% of visitors to the area, over 40% of hire boat activity and contributes in excess of £88 million each year to the local economy. Access is one of the three key strands of the strategy – the others are 'communication and education' and 'environments for fish' – with the aim of improving boat and bank angling access.
16. We would welcome continued government support at national and local level to protect, maintain and increase access for all to the natural environment.

Planning and infrastructure

17. Effective planning is essential to providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities to attract visitors to rural areas. We would encourage Government to strengthen the National Planning Policy Framework to better protect our best and irreplaceable landscapes, including their setting, from major and intrusive development.
18. Specifically, we would encourage Government to update, enhance and promote the Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation as approved by the Water and Sewerage (Conservation, Access and Recreation) (Code of Practice) Order 2000. This would help utility companies and land-owning public bodies work with partners to provide safe, accessible opportunities.
19. Transport routes are essential if we are to get more people active outdoors and help drive rural tourism. Government should invest in sustainable public transport infrastructure that provides people with easy access to outdoor recreation opportunities, especially in rural areas. Within this, local areas will be required to consult with communities to identify and meet local needs.

Marketing

20. People need to know what opportunities are available and how to access them. This includes outdoor recreation activities which can attract individual enthusiasts as well as families. Actions to consider here could include a database of opportunities and a one-stop website to sign-post people to outdoor activities. It would also be good to bring the outdoors to life through stories and case studies in marketing materials.

21. Sheffield is a great example of a city that has set its sights on spearheading an increase in outdoor recreation and attracting more people to both the city and the National Park, which sits within the city's boundaries. The City Council formed The Outdoor City Joint Venture which brought together organisations, including the Alliance, from across the statutory, private and not-for-profit sectors. The Joint Venture has created and is now delivering a strategy to establish Sheffield as 'The Outdoor City'.
22. The Council plans to monitor the impact on tourism over the coming years but to generate tourism it has implemented a new marketing campaign. Central to this is a new, easy-to-use website - <http://theoutdoorcity.co.uk/> - that provides information on how people can run, walk, climb or cycle their way around. It includes tips to getting started, walking and running routes and practical information on parking and amenities which is crucial to attracting families.
23. Government agencies, such as VisitEngland, have a role to play increasing the profile of outdoor recreation to help contribute to rural tourism. For example, the British Association for Shooting and Conservation's (BASC) response to the inquiry calls for more support to raise the profile of shooting. BASC's response also includes case studies including the County Sports South West (CSSW) project.
24. In 2010, the South West Regional Development Agency supported the promotion of local country sports. As a result, the CSSW project was set up. The project was funded through the Rural Development Programme for England and ran from 2010 to 2013 managed by BASC in partnership with West Country Rivers Trust. An evaluation found that CSSW stimulated an investment of £666,632 in the country sports sector with investments made in very small businesses in the rural economy. CSSW increased participation in country sports and supported developments that can appeal to different parts of the tourism/activities market. Evidence also showed that:
 - 48% of respondents participated in country sports in the South West region as day tourism visitors
 - 29% of respondents had stayed overnight in the South West region in order to participate in country sports and visits were spread across the year
 - 35.3% of tourism accommodation providers contacted said additional visitors had been specifically attracted by the opportunity of undertaking country sports

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' role

25. The Government's sport strategy clearly signalled a welcomed commitment to joined-up working across departments to get the nation moving more. Therefore, many departments have a crucial role of play in supporting outdoor recreation and rural tourism but Defra in particular can fulfil a key leadership role.
26. Defra is currently developing its 25-year strategy. We hope that this will align with the aims of the sport strategy and that outdoor recreation will be prioritised within this. This is an opportunity for Defra to protect the infrastructure that provides opportunities for people to get active outdoors, in both rural and urban areas.
27. Defra can also play an important co-ordination role; bringing together key stakeholders and providing clear remits to other agencies including the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. It should also encourage increased partnership working between delivery agencies such as Natural England, Sport England and Public Health England.

28. Government departments and agencies should also work with the sport and recreation sector to develop and implement strategies to deliver a quality outdoor recreation offer that gets more people active in the natural environment. For example, the Environment Agency worked with the Angling Trust and Substance to publish *Fishing for Life – A national strategy for getting people fishing 2013-18*. This strategy recognised the value of angling to rural and coastal communities and committed to developing an angling tourism strategy. The Alliance would welcome the introduction of an angling tourism strategy by 2018 and would be happy to support our members' engagement with its development and implementation. Such a strategy would have to include appropriate resources and investment for delivery.
29. The Government's recently released *Tourism Action Plan*⁷ promotes cross-departmental working, the alignment of funding streams and the coastal path. It also places an emphasis on an effective public transport network to enable people to reach tourist destinations. We hope that implementation of the action plan enables more people to access and enjoy being active outdoors.
30. The Alliance is already engaged with Government colleagues around outdoor recreation and looks forward to continuing to facilitate joined-up working so that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from being active outdoors.

⁷ HM Government (2016) *Tourism Action Plan*. Available via:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/548795/Tourism_-_A_five_point_plan_250816_NEW.pdf