

## Written evidence submitted by the Sport and Recreation Alliance

1. The Sport and Recreation Alliance provides advice, support and guidance to our members who represent the outdoor recreation sector, traditional governing bodies of games and sport, county sports partnerships, water pursuits, and movement and dance exercise. As the voice of the sector, we work with Government, policy makers and the media to make sure grassroots sport and recreation grows and thrives.
2. The Sport and Recreation Alliance would like to offer a short submission in support of the inquiry and comment on the sections of the 25-Year Environment Plan relevant to the sport and recreation sector. The Environmental Audit Committee and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee have launched inquiries which are similar in nature and are linked to Government's future plans for the environment. The Alliance has therefore submitted a response which is applicable to both inquiries, as there are several areas which overlap.
3. The Alliance welcomes the publication of the strategy and Government's commitment to improving the environment over the next 25 years. The natural environment plays a vital role in providing opportunities to be active, with evidence suggesting that health and exercise is one of the most frequently cited motivations for visiting the outdoors.<sup>1</sup> Outdoor recreation also provides a significant economic contribution to our national economy, with around a quarter of visits to the outdoors resulting in an estimated spend of £17 billion between March 2013 and February 2014.<sup>2</sup>
4. Embedding the Plan across Government and stating actions which are targeted on a cross-departmental level must be actively pursued. The Plan's reference to the Government's sport strategy, *Sporting Future*, and to programmes that encourage physical activity in an outdoor setting is welcome. Equally, Government's acknowledgement of the role of outdoor recreation in helping tackle obesity and mental health problems should be acknowledged by the Committee. However, we hope Government puts this positive rhetoric into practice to ensure these actions materialise into outcomes. A successful Plan, in our view, is one which can demonstrate that these ambitions have been met.
5. More generally, we hope the Committee will note Government's focus on health and wellbeing and the proposed '*Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing*' programme, which intends to promote the natural environment as a pathway to good health. However, it is important that Government recognises sport and recreation organisations' contribution to this wider agenda. As part of the development of the programme, we hope Government will engage with the sector along with other stakeholders listed in the Plan, such as youth and environmental partners.
6. As part of the health and wellbeing programme, Government has highlighted 'green prescribing' and outdoor recreation in helping people overcome mental health problems. As Government highlights, 'green infrastructure' is vital for health and wellbeing, which is supported by a commitment to procuring 'green' towns and planting one million urban

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<sup>1</sup>*Monitor of the Natural Environment: The natural survey on people and the natural environment*, Natural England, May 2017

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/614353/mene-headline-report-2015-16.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614353/mene-headline-report-2015-16.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Reonomics Plus: The Economic, Health and Social Value of Outdoor Recreation, February 2017,

<https://sramedia.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/699fec08-3f90-4e00-ac4a-c074b353a38d.pdf>

trees. However, we hope that this 'green infrastructure' vision will result in accessible green spaces, which will help more people lead active and healthy lives. We encourage Government to therefore take a holistic approach when further developing these green infrastructure plans, to ensure that green spaces are open to all.

7. Linked to these proposals is Government's commitment to protecting green infrastructure. Following increased pressures to build more homes, we urge Government to ensure that green spaces are not compromised in future housebuilding proposals. Strengthening existing planning regulations by requiring developers to treat green infrastructure in the same way as the Green Belt, would ensure these spaces are protected for future generations to access and enjoy. Equally, and in any large-scale housing development, Government must require developers to include green space proposals. Green infrastructure is too often viewed as a secondary issue when considered within the context of wider housebuilding which is unacceptable and counter to Government's long-term ambitions for the environment.
8. Beyond this current Parliament, the UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) presents an opportunity to reform existing agricultural policy. We welcome Government's intention to create a new land management system which will act as an alternative to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and aims to reward land managers for the restoration and improvement of natural capital and rural heritage. The consideration of a new system which may provide public money for public goods and the maintenance of natural assets, is positive. At a time when public funding for rights of way is constrained, we urge Government to look creatively at an alternative system for agricultural funding which incentivises everyone to be active outdoors.
9. In conclusion, we welcome Government's environmental strategy and the associated actions, particularly those related to the sport and recreation sector. Government's ambitious agenda and plans for a wide scale health and wellbeing programme is positive, but these proposals must ensure that green infrastructure is accessible and protected as part of any large-scale housing proposals. Equally, we hope that Government's attention will turn to the creation of a sustainable model for agricultural funding – which encourages more people to be active outdoors. Such actions will help produce a robust Plan which will allow more people to benefit from the outdoors and protect the environment for generations to come.