

A national outdoor recreation strategy for England

Summary

October 2015

1. Background

The Sport and Recreation Alliance and Outdoor Industries Association (OIA) were asked by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to consult with the sport and recreation sector on what could be included in a national outdoor recreation strategy for England. This followed positive engagement with Ministers from across Government based on a shared drive to ensure that potential of outdoor recreation is maximised to the benefit of individuals, society and the economy.

This proposal sets out what could be included in a national outdoor recreation strategy. It is based on:

- An online survey with the outdoor recreation sector
- Four prioritisation sessions with experts from the sector
- A review of existing strategies by Sheffield Hallam University

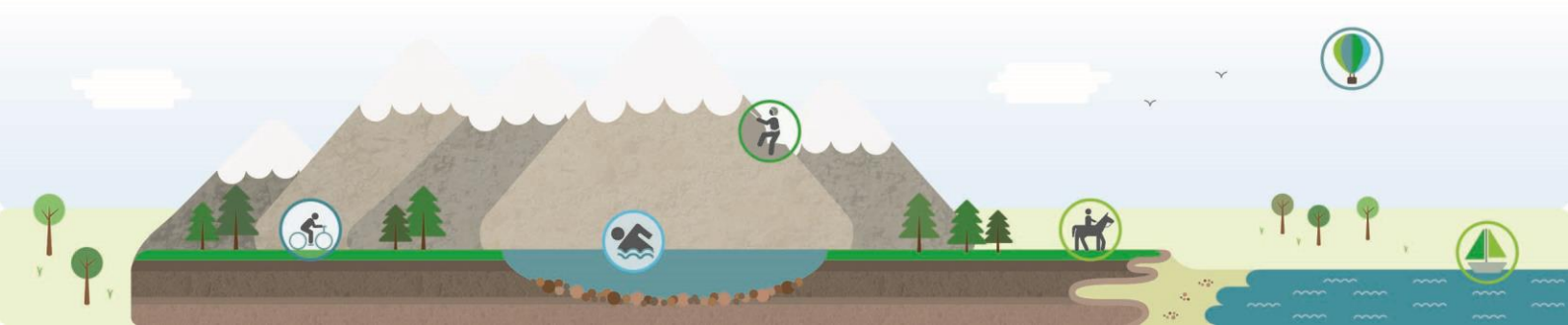
All of this is founded on work that has already gone on with the sector in this area, for example the Alliance's [Reconomics](#) report and Government asks, as set out in the [Landscapes for Everyone](#) shared vision for British Landscapes and [key proposals for Government action](#) drawn up by leading members of the outdoors community. Sport England has also positively contributed to the evidence-base and support for outdoor recreation. This has included commissioning the OIA to deliver a new piece of insight work - [Getting Active Outdoors](#). This research provides a detailed picture of participation in outdoor recreation and highlights that more people want to get active outdoors. We hope that Sport England continues to lend its support to outdoor recreation.

Since we were asked to do this work, the Sports Minister launched a consultation on a new sport strategy. We welcome the reference to outdoor recreation in the consultation document however we think this is an ideal opportunity for Government to recognise the importance of outdoor recreation by including at least a specific outdoor recreation theme. This report continues to be framed around the creation of a new strategy as that was the commission we were given.

2. Key themes and recommendations

Theme 1: Why outdoor recreation is important

This theme would define outdoor recreation, set out a vision for England and demonstrate how outdoor recreation can have a positive impact on the economy, society and individuals.



Theme 2: Leadership and accountability

A national strategy is an opportunity for Government to demonstrate its leadership as well as provide a clear statement of intent and system of accountability for outdoor recreation. To achieve this Government could:

- Create a clear line of responsibility to a named Minister for the outdoors to coordinate activity across all Government departments
- Give responsibility for overseeing progress of a national outdoor recreation strategy to the cross-departmental group on physical activity

Leadership across Government is vital. Many departments are responsible for the recommendations listed below but in terms of national leadership, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has a particular role to play:

- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to prioritise outdoor recreation and protect the infrastructure that provides opportunities for people to get active outdoors
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to offer a 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 partnership working between delivery agencies such as Natural England, Sport England and Public Health England

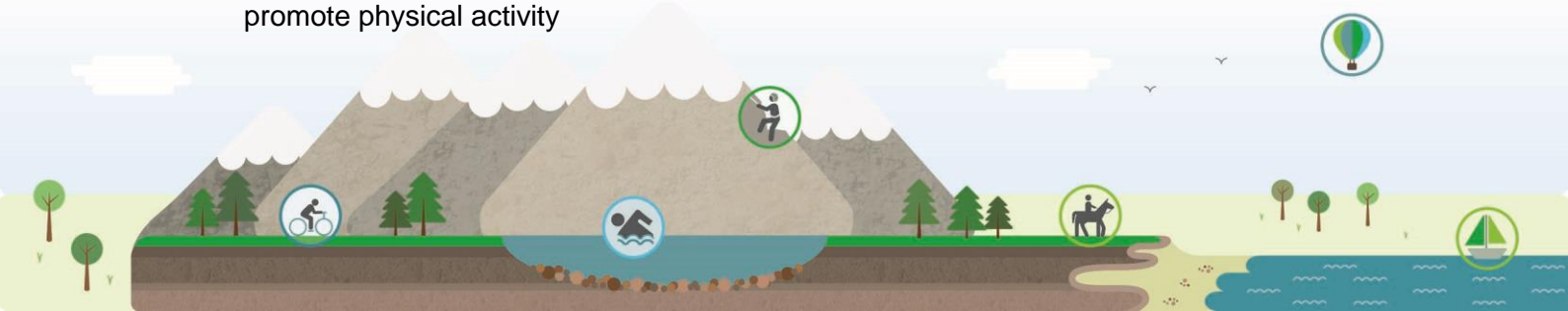
There is also an opportunity for Sport England to provide leadership around outdoor recreation:

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport to recommend Sport England continues to take an active role in the outdoor recreation sector, following up on its early insight work - *Getting Active Outdoors* - and ensures that the next round of Sport England funding from 2017 looks at the 'whole active person' and includes outdoor recreation as one of the sport solutions

Theme 3: The outdoors helps people be happy and healthy

Outdoor recreation benefits individuals' health and wellbeing, and creates cost savings for the state. It can also contribute to local drivers such as community cohesion and economic development. An outdoor recreation strategy could make a clear statement that Government recognises the value of outdoor recreation to health and will place outdoor activity and green spaces at the heart of a strategy to improve health. To achieve this, Government departments, health agencies and the outdoor recreation sector need to work together:

- Department of Health to work with Public Health England to integrate outdoor activity into the full range and breadth of health strategies and frameworks, including Everybody Active, Every Day and strategies relating to obesity, diabetes and mental health
- Department of Health and Public Health England to support local areas to understand how outdoor recreation can help them improve public health outcomes such as sickness absence, social isolation, excess weight, self-reported wellbeing and cardiovascular diseases
- Government departments - including sport, health and transport - to work with the outdoor recreation sector to embed being active in the natural environment into campaigns that promote physical activity



Theme 4: The outdoors helps children and young people achieve their potential

Evidence shows the positive impact that quality outdoor learning experiences can make to children and young people's personal and social development yet many do not get the opportunity to benefit from this. To increase opportunities for children and young people:

- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to provide outdoor learning training opportunities for the current education workforce and include a specific focus on outdoor learning in initial teacher training to enable newly qualified teachers to have more options to increase engagement and attainment
- Department of Education to promote the use of outdoor learning not only in physical education as identified in the curriculum but across all subjects - including Personal, Social Health and Economic education, English and Maths – recognising its value for not only physical development but also character education. It should also be considered across the full range of education settings including special schools and Pupil Referral Units. The sharing of good practice would help with this
- Department of Education to work with Ofsted to ensure that schools are meeting the national curriculum requirements around outdoor and adventurous activities and share good practice, especially where there is progression through more adventurous activities as a child moves through school

Theme 5: The outdoors is accessible and protected

Individuals, families and communities need easy access to inclusive urban and rural natural environments to maximise the benefits of outdoor recreation. Government is already committed to completing the England Coast Path by 2020 and delivering a cycling and walking strategy as part of the Infrastructure Act 2015, however more could be done as part of a national outdoor recreation strategy:

- Department for Communities and Local Government to provide guidance to local agencies on how outdoor recreation and tourism should be considered for its social value under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 when commissioning local services
- Department for Communities and Local Government to 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
- Department for Communities and Local Government to strengthen the National Planning Policy Framework to better protect our best and irreplaceable landscapes, including their setting, from major and intrusive development
- The Department for Communities and Local Government to introduce a statutory requirement that all new developments must have appropriate facilities for outdoor recreation
- Department for Transport to 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
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 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



Theme 6: Outdoor recreation contributes to the economy and society

There is already a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the value of outdoor recreation. However more could be done to show the impact that outdoor recreation can have as well as maximise its contribution to the economy and society:

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport to work with tourism leaders and the outdoor recreation sector to embed outdoor recreation into the implementation of 'Backing the Tourism Sector – A Five Point Plan'. This could include:
 - effective marketing of the natural environment at national and local levels so that people know what is on offer, where and when
 - ensuring access to outdoor recreation opportunities through effective transport networks
 - supporting skills and jobs within the outdoor sector, including apprenticeships
 - publishing guidance that promotes the economic importance of outdoor recreation tourism, particularly to the rural economy, and supports local areas to prioritise it within existing funding mechanisms such as Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport to identify appropriate resources to enable the development and coordination of tools to assess the social value of sport and recreation that can benefit everyone within the sector¹

Additional considerations

Crucial issues that Government could also consider are:

- **Strategy or action plan?** - the Government launched a consultation on a new strategy for sport after the commissioning of this report. Any strategy for sport needs to include outdoor recreation and the title of the new strategy needs to reflect a definition broader than sport alone. There should be specific recommendations for outdoor recreation and whether as part of a wider strategy or as a standalone one, it would be helpful if Government is clear what the purpose of the outdoor recreation strategy is from the beginning. It is suggested that it sets out a clear vision and commitment to outdoor recreation that unites Government departments. This should be underpinned by a specific plan of action
- **Timeframes** – it is proposed that an outdoor recreation strategy should have at least a ten-year time span out to 2026 and that there are individual timeframes on each recommendation so that they are more specific and measurable
- **Definition of outdoor recreation** – *Reconomics* provides a definition of outdoor recreation which was repeated in Sport England's *Getting Active Outdoors*. This should remain as the basis for an outdoor recreation strategy but Government may wish to consider how active travel fits within or alongside this
- **Infrastructure** – outdoor assets such as water, land and airspace should be embedded into the definition of sport and recreation's 'infrastructure' so that it does not only focus on buildings, pitches, courts and other purpose built settings
- **Equality** – an underlying theme throughout our consultation with the sector was equality and how we can ensure everyone is able to access and benefit from outdoor recreation. For example, specific consideration could go to ensuring people with disabilities can access outdoor opportunities through effective communication and design of facilities
- **Participation** – consideration for how best to measure participation in outdoor recreation to promote the 'active person', encourage collaboration and target individual populations

¹ The Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University is part of a European consortium that has submitted an ERASMUS bid to develop a model to assess the social value of sport throughout Europe. If this is unsuccessful there would need to be another source of funding.



- **Workforce** – support and recognition of the sport and recreation workforce, including volunteers, could focus on various issues including Government support for apprenticeships in outdoor recreation and support for school leavers to enter roles related to outdoor recreation
- **Communications, marketing and promotion of the outdoors** – people need to know what opportunities are available and how to access them. This is reflected in theme 6 but there are many more actions that could be considered here, such a database of opportunities and a one-stop website to sign-post people to outdoor activities. A strategy is also an opportunity to bring the outdoors to life through stories and case studies
- **The role of technology** in developing products and engaging people in activity or self-monitoring – outdoor activities are evolving, for example geo-caching uses technology as a core component to engage and motivate people. Further consideration could go to how Government and the sector can work together to maximise the potential of technology to get people active outdoors
- **Monitoring and evaluation** – an outdoor recreation strategy for England could follow the Northern Ireland action plan model of setting out success indicators for each action to provide a clear basis for monitoring and evaluation

