

The Country Land & Business Association – Written evidence (NPS0151)

The CLA is the membership organisation for owners of land, property and businesses in rural England and Wales. We help safeguard the interests of landowners, and those with an economic, social and environmental interest in rural land. Our 28,000 members own or manage around half the rural land in England and Wales – around 10 million acres - and run around 250 different types of businesses. The vast majority are involved in farming and it is the majority income for over half.

How important is sport and recreation to the rural economy and how do businesses and land-owners deliver and/or support outdoor activities?

Sport and recreation are fundamental to the rural economy, and landowners recognise their place within the community that they live and participate in. A recent survey of CLA members found that many provide facilities to communities/groups for sports or recreational use either free of charge or on leasehold agreements at peppercorn rents. These include:

- Buildings used as a village halls
- Land on which village halls located
- Land used as campsites (scouts, etc)
- Land used for village fetes, shows, horse events etc
- Land for local: cricket ground, football club, rugby club, tennis club, bowling green etc
- Playing fields

These are typically informal arrangements between the landowner, and their local community.

It is also important to recognise the economic value that is attached to sporting and recreational activities in rural areas. The level of spend from visitors to rural areas engaged in recreation is significant. In its response to a Sports England consultation on improving people's activity levels, England's National Parks Authority noted that "English National Parks are home to more than 300,000 people and collectively account for over a 90 million visitors a year. Many are involved in a range of activities including walking, cycling, horse riding, climbing, water sports, air-sports and events as well as simply 'getting away from it all'."¹

Table 1 below sets out annual tourism spend for leisure activities, the value attributed to each activity and the value for rural tourism.

¹ [Sports-England-Consultation-NPE-Feb-2016-final.pdf \(nationalparksengland.org.uk\)](#)

Table 1: Annual tourism spend – leisure and recreational activities

Activity	Total spend (£m)	Calculated rural spend (£m)
Cycling or mountain biking	520	350
Golf	456	380
Fishing	474	380
Water sports	317	180
Watching wildlife/bird watching	306	225
Long walks / hikes	1,800	1,200
Sightseeing (exploring the coast)	1,400	1,400
Sightseeing (exploring the countryside) £1.2 billion.	1,200	1,200
Zoos/parks/gardens	3,200	1,600
Total	9,673	6,915

Source: House of Commons Library, Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation² (2015); CLA estimates

Sport and recreation not only improve a person's mental and physical wellbeing, they add to the intrinsic quality of life in the countryside and, as importantly, they provide an economic platform for rural businesses. Put simply, sport and recreation are integral elements of the rural tourism offer that generates employment, maintains rural business and embodies the concept of sustainable tourism.

Case Study – Cholsey Farm Riding

Farming just 190 acres profitably in the Chiltern Hills, Buckinghamshire was proving an impossible challenge for Ted & Jackie Howard-Jones. Five years ago they diversified to meet the need for horse-riders seeking safer places to ride. Cholsey Farm Riding allows riders to 'Park & Ride' for the day, using the farmyard for their horsebox and riding either on the farm (around the margins of their fields) or by accessing the wide variety of local Public Bridleways. They also sell riding 'Permits' to neighbouring livery stables so that their clients can ride on the farm year-round. The business attracts hundreds of riders a year. All ages and abilities make use of the opportunity to ride in open countryside, from Pony Club children, through to a Para Olympian. Most riders opt for the 'Self-Guided' option using a map, but others join a Guided Ride (led by Ted or Jackie) or use the farm as a base for a 'Horse Holiday', either camping or staying on site. The farm, set high in the AONB has magnificent views and is bisected by 3 public footpaths and includes The Chiltern Way.

² <https://www.outdoorrecreation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CDP-2015-0082.pdf>

To what extent do current planning and other regulations help or hinder businesses and land-owners engaged in delivering outdoor activities and opportunities?

The planning system is one of the most significant barriers to economic growth in rural areas. The wide-ranging interests of CLA members frequently brings them into contact with the planning system and they find it inefficient, ineffective and opaque. Respondents to a 2018 CLA member survey described the planning application and decision-making process for business and diversification-related projects as plagued by delays, additional costs and unrealistic demands. Many members cited planning delays and costs as a reason for not diversifying their businesses further.

The CLA published a report entitled *Rural Powerhouse: A planning system designed for the rural economy*³ in July 2020. This report set out how a transformed planning system can help to close the productivity gap that exists between rural and urban businesses. In particular the CLA recommended that the use of the Permission in Principle⁴ process (currently only aimed at housing-related development) should be widened to include rural economic development proposals.

Permission in Principle is a two-stage process that the CLA believes would encourage and deliver an innovative and broader economy in rural areas by granting permission in principle for a development proposal (first stage) and allow the applicant to pull together all the necessary reports and surveys required to obtain the final planning permission proposal as the technical details consent (second stage of Permission in Principle). Pushing the huge levels of up-front costs back to the second stage of the process would help to de-risk the process for land managers, and could unlock new economic development in rural areas.

How could Government policy better support businesses and land owners in the countryside to support sustainable and inclusive access to the countryside for sport and recreation purposes?

CLA members support increasing education and engagement with the outdoors; these are important foundations for sustainable and inclusive access. They appreciate the benefits linked to a greater understanding of nature, food and health; many already have a big role in maintaining the 140,000 miles of public rights of way and 1 million hectares of open access land in England and Wales. However, the benefits and opportunities to society come with costs to landowners (vegetation management, signage, litter picking etc).

The proposed Environmental Land Management scheme in England will, in principle, provide financial assistance for access, which the CLA warmly welcomes. Similarly,

³ https://www.cla.org.uk/sites/default/files/Rural%20Powerhouse%20-%20A%20Planning%20System%20designed%20for%20the%20Rural%20Economy%20-%20July%202020_0.pdf

the Welsh Government has included access as one of the social benefits landowners can provide under Sustainable Land Management proposals. COVID-19 has shown that there is appetite for re-connection with the countryside, but also significant maintenance, risk management and clear-up costs.

Funding to cover enhanced maintenance, improved signage and information, replacement furniture, better parking and toilet facilities, and organised bus routes to the start and finish of popular walks from nearby transport or urban centres would provide a huge benefit to society. It would encourage more landowners to facilitate access to the countryside for sport and recreation, and mitigate the additional costs ensuring facilities are enjoyed by a significantly higher number of people.

During recent discussions with CLA members across England and Wales, many confirmed they would be willing to facilitate more public access on their land if there was the right support, flexibility and incentives. Responding to an appetite for greater access from different categories of users requires time and investment from landowners. It also needs to be balanced against the environmental drivers of nature recovery, as well as health and safety considerations. Working with nature and with the right assistance, landowners could provide not only additional access but also improvements to the existing public rights of way network, making it more accessible for everyone.

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