

Response from the Open Spaces Society to request by Minister for Housing and Local Government on thoughts to support future post-Covid recovery and reconstruction in Wales

It is evident that through the Covid crisis people have valued the opportunities for public access and nature close to home. We therefore propose that resources be directed to actions which support public access, nature and the environment, and away from environmentally-damaging projects.

Examples include the following.

Open spaces

The government should introduce a national plan for open spaces, with a national standard for the amount of green space and ring-fenced funding which will secure good-quality spaces close to people's homes.

It should require the revision and update of TAN16 Open space and recreation guidance note.

It should place a duty on local authorities to ensure that everyone can enjoy good-quality, well-maintained, varied and safe open space within 300 metres of their homes. This can be assisted by requiring:

- local authorities to manage and protect their green spaces, and to provide the resources to achieve this;
- developers to provide open space as an integral part of all major development, and to dedicate the land as town or village green so that local people have rights of recreation there and it is secure for ever;
- developers to provide multi-user green routes as part of development.

Public rights of way and public access

We understand there is to be significant new funding for rights of way improvement plans, and this is excellent news. In addition, new agricultural funds must require landowners in receipt of funds to keep all the public paths on their land in good order or risk losing the grant. This will save the resources of highway authorities who have a duty to take enforcement action and, in many cases, lack the capacity to do so.

New agricultural funding must also incentivise improvements to public access where people need them—new and better paths, new access points to access land, and dedication of land to access or as town or village green.

Landscapes for people and nature

Welsh Government should invest in national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, and in those places which qualify for protection on landscape and recreation grounds but have never been designated. These places provide unparalleled recreational opportunities, challenge and immense beauty, grandeur and wilderness, for people and nature. Whereas spaces close to home are crucial for daily use, those grand landscapes are also vitally important, especially as we are now focusing on staycations.

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