INTRODUCTION

Cycling UK was founded in 1878 and has 68,000 members and supporters. Cycling UK’s central mission is to make cycling a safe, accessible, enjoyable and ‘normal’ activity for people of all ages and abilities. It was previously known as CTC or the Cyclists’ Touring Club. Our interests cover cycling both as a form of day-to-day transport and as a leisure activity, which can deliver health, economic, environmental, safety and quality of life benefits both for individuals and society. We represent the interests of current and would-be cyclists on public policy matters.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Cycling UK believes that non-competitive recreational cycling can provide a huge range of benefits, both to individuals (improved physical and mental health) and to rural economies, including the public transport connections serving them.

The following headline figures provide evidence not only of the economic benefits, but also the fact that Scotland’s more liberal access laws have enabled these benefits to be exploited far more successfully than in England:

- 8% of the 91 million annual visits to the public forest estate in Scotland involve cycling or mountain biking (an increase from about 5% over the past decade). By contrast, cycling accounts for just 2% of visits to forests in England.
- On average forest visitors who take part in cycling and mountain biking spend £26 during their trip, significantly more than the average across Scotland’s public forest estate as a whole (£18).
- It is estimated that just under half of all Scottish mountain biking trips are made to dedicated trail centre facilities, and the rest to less formal countryside and wilderness locations.
- The economic value of mountain bike tourism in Scotland is estimated at £119m per annum, while mountain bike and leisure cycle tourism together are worth up to £358m.

In order to maximise these benefits in England, is important though to recognise and provide for the different needs of different types of recreational cycling and cyclist, from the family group (for whom a day’s cycling may be a single day’s activity during the weekend, or during a longer holiday, or a complete holiday in itself) to the mountain-biker seeking a challenge (again, this can be a single-day or multi-day activity).

In essence though, people engaging in all forms of cycling activity need:

- Suitable routes and/or locations where they can cycle safely and enjoyably, free of conflict with other users or uses of the countryside;
A ‘support package’, including safe and convenient access to the locations where they can go cycling, information on and promotion of these locations (including maps and waymarking), and opportunities for refreshments and (where appropriate) accommodation.

Unfortunately, English and Welsh rights of way law serious impedes off-road cycling in all its forms. Our rights of way law is based on historic use of different types of way, and a route’s classification (e.g. as a footpath, a bridleway or a byway) no way reflects the uses for which it is suitable. This undermines the value of cycling not only as a recreational activity but also as a means of making day-to-day journeys (e.g. to work or to school).

Cycling UK therefore advocates a review of English and Welsh rights of way law, along the lines of the Scottish access model. This is already being currently considered by the Welsh Government.

We urge the Committee to call for consideration of a similar framework in England.

RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Marketing:

How well do agencies promote rural destinations across England?
What more should the Government do to support this work?

We would distinguish four main types of recreational cycling and cyclists, whose distinct needs should be addressed as part of any strategy to promote rural tourism:

• Touring cyclists on longer linear/circular routes with a minimum of one overnight stay, generally travelling by cycle or combination of cycle and train.
• Enthusiast road or MTB cyclists who will travel to an area for a short break (or as part of a longer road trip of several locations) riding local routes, generally travelling by car.
• Non-enthusiast holidaymakers, often families or couples, who may cycle once or twice during a longer holiday, generally travelling by car.
• ‘Day trip’ cyclists including cycling event participants who will visit the area for a short period of time and not stay overnight.

The various agencies involved in promoting recreation and tourism need to work together to provide cyclists and would-be cyclists not just with ‘routes’ or facilities, but also a supporting ‘package’. Depending on the type of cycling they want to take part in, this could include: car parking, public transport connections, online and paper maps, waymarking, refreshments and accommodation.

For example: the Coast to Coast is a widely promoted multi day cycle route, with variant routes for on-road and off-road cyclists alike. However the lack of cycle-accessible public transport connections at the western end of the route undermines its usability, and hence its potential contribution to the wider economies of Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Tyneside.

More positively, the 120 mile ‘Sandstone way’ in Northumberland was recently created, using existing rights of way, as England’s the first mountain bike specific multi-day route. It is
accompanied by mapping, waymarking and promotional materials, and has already attracted an estimated 3000 visitors since its launch last year.

The Forestry Commission has been similarly successful in promoting forest lands in Scotland and Wales as destinations for mountain-biking. It has fostered partnerships with local mountain bikers and businesses to create routes and facilities with an aim of boosting tourist income. All have benefited from the dedicated websites, television advertising and promotion by their devolved Governments’ tourist boards – see www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAwXBDZ64ZY.

We ask the Committee to recommend a similar approach in England.

Access:
What, if any, changes are needed to give people better access to the coast and countryside?

The rights of way network available to horse riders and cycle users is much less comprehensive than the footpath network. In England, just 22% of the rights of way network carries a legal right of access for cycles. Similarly, only a tiny proportion of access land is available to cycle users.

Cycling UK believes that greater access for off road cycling and mountain biking is a vital step to enhancing recreational cycling. Ultimately we wish to see the adoption of a right of responsible access to the countryside, similar to that adopted in Scotland. This would allow mapping and waymarking to guide cyclists to the routes which are most suitable, rather than to routes which happen to be legal but which may in fact be unrideable.

Image 1: single-track public bridleway

Image 2: wide, tarmac public footpath

Image 1 shows a bridleway which carries rights of way for cycling, but which is unrideable in practice. Conversely, image 2 is a public footpath, which carries no such rights. In practice, such paths are generally used for cycling with no objections, hence a reclassification would simply formalise what is already happening on the ground.

To be clear, we are not calling for blanket reallocation of all public footpaths as cycle routes, but suggest that a widespread review of rights based on suitability and sustainability rather
than historic use is long overdue. The idea of a ‘right of responsible access’ has been successfully adopted in Scotland – including the busy urban fringes of Glasgow and Edinburgh – and a similar approach is now being considered in Wales. Adopting a similar approach in England could bring huge benefits to rural economies as well as to the health and wellbeing of individuals who could be encouraged to enjoy this safe, enjoyable and environmentally benign activity.

To pave the way for such an approach, Cycling UK recommends the following steps:

a. **Extension of CROW access to bikes and horses (existing tracks and paths)**

In the UK, we already have over three million acres of access land designated under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW), where people have an established ‘right to roam’ on foot. This access land includes many thousands of miles of farm, forest and moorland vehicle tracks where cycles remain prohibited, without rational justification. Extending access to these paths to horses and cycles could open up valuable access opportunities, providing significant health and local economic benefits with minimal environmental impact.

In July, Cycling UK was joined by British Cycling, OpenMTB and the British Horse Society in writing to the Environment Secretary, seeking support for formal trials of possible models for extending access to existing open access land. These proposals have seen broad support from several other organisations, including the Ramblers, and a number of potential trial areas have been identified.

Cycling UK urges the Committee to support our call for pilot projects to assess the impact of creating a right of responsible access within England.

b. **Development of National Trails towards a presumption of multi-user access**

The network of rights of way available for cycling and horse-riding is not only limited but also fragmented. Many bridleways and byways end with no safe or convenient continuation. Specifically, just three of England’s 15 National Trails are fully open to horses and cycles, with two other routes being incomplete. For example, the western half of the Ridgeway comprises a continuous 43 mile bridleway route, yet its eastern half is punctuated by short lengths of public footpath, undermining its value not only for potential users but also for the local economy.

Cycling UK urges the Committee to call for National Trails to be upgraded to multi user access where possible, with future developments being planned as multi-user routes from the outset.

**Funding and fiscal policies:**

*How can public funding be best targeted to get new rural tourist businesses off the ground and keep them going? Are changes needed to tax levels and business rates?*

Cycling UK urges the Committee to recommend the following proposals:
a. Lower tax thresholds for purchasing adapted cycles and electric bikes via the
Government’s salary sacrifice scheme

Cycling UK, in conjunction with groups such as Wheels for Wellbeing (who promote all-
abilities cycling) advocate a lowering of the £1,000 threshold for purchasing adapted cycles or
electric power-assisted pedal cycles (EPACs, or e-bikes) via the Government’s cycle to work
salary sacrifice scheme. This would particularly support the growth of cycling in rural areas
(where distances are greater, and where electric assistance can therefore attract people to
cycle for journeys where they would otherwise drive), and among older people or people with
disabilities.

We find it paradoxical that generous grants are available to support the purchase of low
emission motor vehicles (for example, the purchase of a ‘plug in’ car currently receives a
grant of up to 35% of the value of the vehicle), yet no such support is available to support
cycle use. Evidence from countries like the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland – all of
which have well-developed e-bike markets – suggest they substantially boost cycle use for
both recreational and utility journeys, particularly in rural and/or hillier areas, and among
groups for whom longer distances would otherwise be a deterrent to cycling. The health,
economic and other benefits are very substantial.

b. Extend rural business rate relief to cycle businesses and to cafe/tea rooms in small
communities

The development of cycle facilities in a number of locations has seen the creation of a local
market and witnessed start up businesses like bike shops and hire facilities, cafeterias etc.
These businesses often run on tight margins, yet they are often critical to the wider tourist
economy of the local area.

The current rural business rate relief system offers mandatory relief of up to 50% of business
rates in towns and villages with a population below 3000. However, this mandatory relief
applies only to:
• the only general store/village shop or post office, with a rateable value of up to £8,500
• the only public house or petrol station, with a rateable value of up to £12,500

This mandatory rate relief could be extended to include a wider range of small rural business,
such as the only remaining cafeteria/tea shop in a settlement, or to cycle retail, hire and/or
repair businesses.

Similarly, the business rate exemption for short term let self-catering facilities, which
currently applies only to properties available for let for a maximum of 140 days per year,
could be extended to allow for a maximum of, say, 240 days a year in the case of low-cost
accommodation (e.g. bunk-houses) in rural areas. This would help support what is already a
growing market for year-round active outdoor sports.

Planning and regulation:
What, if any, changes are needed to planning and other regulations covering rural areas of
special character, such as National Parks, to encourage sustainable tourism?
a. **National Park authorities to have highway and transport powers delegated to them where their area covers multiple highway authorities**

A number of National Parks (e.g. the Yorkshire Moors) have developed agreements with highways authorities which allow them to take responsibility for rights of way creation and management within their geographic boundaries. Similar arrangements could usefully be considered in other National Parks, e.g. the Peak District, whose area spans seven different highway authorities. This current split of responsibilities cannot be conducive to developing a coherent approach to managing access and rights of way issues, and more generally to meeting the demand for access to recreation and tourism opportunities.

Cycling UK therefore proposes that other groups of highway authorities with joint responsibility for transport and highways (including rights of way) in a National Park should consider delegating these responsibilities to the National Park Authority itself.

b. **Safeguard disused railway lines and other opportunities for linear routes.**

Many rural areas have benefited from the creation of attractive walking and cycling routes using disused railway lines, canal-sides and other linear routes e.g. as part of the National Cycle Network. Examples include the popular High Peak and Tissington Trails in the Peak District National Park. However it relies on local authorities to be proactive in safeguarding these from development, with many other routes having been lost to short-sighted development pressures.

We ask the Committee to recommend that the next revision of the National Planning Policy Framework should promote the safeguarding of such routes.

**Infrastructure and skills:**

*What measures are needed to ensure transport, housing and other infrastructure meets visitor needs? How can the sector ensure there are enough people with the right skills to support customers and businesses?*

One of the challenges to promoting cycling as a sustainable form of rural recreation is the lack of integration with between tourism and public transport, and specifically the lack of provision for carrying cycles on some rail and most local bus services.

Yet good examples do exist. Cycle-carrying buses exist in the Lake District, the North Yorkshire Moors and elsewhere. These are particularly valuable for young people and others with limited means to access cycling opportunities without needing a car. It can also help reduce the congestion which blights the road networks of popular tourist areas at peak times.

The Government has in the past supported cycle / public transport integration, e.g. through a cycle-rail fund and through grants to four National Parks made in 2012. However no such funding streams are currently proposed in its draft Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy, issued for consultation earlier this year (and whose publication is expected shortly).

We urge the Committee to call for Government support for cycle-accessible public transport services in rural areas.
Local environment and character:
How can national and local policies get the right balance between growing tourism and enhancing the local environment and character?

Cycling UK respects and fully supports the Sandford principle, namely that:

"Where irreconcilable conflicts exist between conservation and public enjoyment, then conservation interest should take priority"

However, all too often, the word ‘irreconcilable’ seems to be overlooked, with relatively minor (and sometimes spurious) ‘conflicts’ being cited as grounds for not promoting ‘public enjoyment’.

For years, increased access for walkers was opposed on the basis that it would lead to devastation in the countryside. Sadly the same arguments are still being trotted out to oppose improved access for cyclists.

Whilst one National Park (the Yorkshire Dales) has recently welcomed the Tour de France, broadcasting ‘God’s own country’ globally, another (the New Forest) has been forced to hand back grant funding to the Government after cancelling a public hire-bike scheme due to “anti-cycling sentiment” amongst local decision-makers. This opposition to cycling is often entirely irrational. Extensive research into issues such as wildlife disturbance, erosion and perceptions of conflict has repeatedly disproved the relevant arguments.

Cycling UK urges the Committee to recommend that the duty to promote opportunities for outdoor recreation should be enshrined within National Parks and AONB legislation.

Defra role:
What more should the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs do to ensure government departments (including Departments for Communities and Local Government, Business, Innovation and Skills, Culture Media and Sport and HM Treasury) support rural tourism?

a. Support for sustainable transport, particularly the cycling / public transport combination

We reiterate the point about the need for cycle-friendly public transport services to allow multi-modal transport. Funding that used to be available to local authorities through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund now rests with Local Enterprise Partnerships, who often lack the knowledge or awareness of the potential economic value of investing in cycling. This is clearly a matter for the Department for Transport to address.

b. Encourage cycle access on land owned or managed by publicly funded bodies

We noted in our introduction that the Forestry Commission has been highly successful in promoting cycle access on land which it manages in Scotland and Wales. Whilst cycling represents a lower percentage of trips to the forest estate in England, there are important success stories too. For instance, at Dalby Forest (Yorkshire), Cannock Chase (Staffordshire) and
Sherwood Pines (Nottinghamshire), as many as 70% of recorded users were cyclists. The Alice Holt centre in Hampshire is an example of good practice in promoting inclusive cycling, with a well-used fleet of adapted cycles which enables people with disabilities, and their carers, to enjoy some hugely valuable outdoor recreational opportunities.

Other bodies are less supportive. For example, a four year review by Natural England of access opportunities on National Nature Reserves resulted in a net gain of only about 30 kilometres of paths for cycling. A similar pattern has been witnessed with the Ministry of Defence, whereby established protocols on access (JSP 362) state:

05115. The defence estate currently has a number of areas available for open access on foot. However, access on horseback and bicycle is generally restricted to existing routes that permit such access.

We question the rationale behind banning cyclists, while allowing others to continue using the same route: do cyclists pose more of a risk than walkers and runners who are allowed access to the same land? Repeated discussions have so far failed to elucidate an answer.

We ask the Committee to call on the MoD and other public bodies to follow the Forestry Commission’s good practice in opening up opportunities for recreational cycling.

c. Look for synergies with flood management and other rural programmes

In the aftermath of last year’s floods, DEFRA has been considering the potential for reforestation to address flood risks. Such a programme is seen by some as a threat to farming. However it could bring also bring economic opportunities. Off-road cycling in forests is not only an important contributor to rural economies (as we have seen), but also one which can be enjoyed pretty much throughout the year.

We also note that the run-up to Brexit will prompt consideration of rural farming subsidies. Rural farm payment schemes have been used in some cases to secure or improve rights of way and other access opportunities. DEFRA should look at least to retain these in any revisions to these schemes, and where possible to extend them.

September 2016