



The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DEFRA
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

7 July 2016

Dear Secretary of State,

The government's new sports strategy for England, [Sporting Future](#) firmly anchors public investment in the societal value of sport and physical activity – better physical and mental wellbeing; individual, social and community development; and economic development. There is clear recognition that different government departments need to work together to create the right conditions for more people to get active.

We believe that where public access exists to outdoor places then that access should include responsible cycling. We call on the government to take steps to make this a reality.

The [Scottish Land Reform Act](#) proves that responsible access by people on bikes is sustainable, manageable and highly beneficial to tourism, health and the economy. We believe that a version of this responsible access model should be explored for England.

Rights of way and other public access laws have not kept pace with the changing ways that people want to access the outdoors. Cycling is booming in the country with two million people cycling regularly and nearly 400,000 people mountain-biking every week.

At present, people on bikes only have access to less than a third of the 140,000 miles of public paths in England and Wales plus little access to the three million acres of Open Access Land or the 2,800 miles newly created Coastal Access. People on foot have free and open access to all of this land.

A British Cycling commissioned poll by YouGov revealed that almost two-thirds of people do not know that they are not allowed to cycle on the majority of public paths in the countryside. The majority of people also believe they should be allowed to cycle on the majority of publically accessible paths in the countryside. Younger people are the least likely to know where they can cycle and also the most likely to support greater public access. There is also massive demand for more countryside cycling – despite only 6% of people saying they cycle regularly in the countryside, half would like to cycle more.

In this context we believe that a broader review of access and rights of way provision, led by DEFRA but involving all relevant stakeholders – including those representing walkers – in a consensual approach, is a necessary step to turn the Government's new sports strategy into action. This process could incorporate lessons learned from the Scottish Land Reform Act and, if agreed, experience from pilots run on an enhanced responsible access model in England.

British Cycling recently supported a joint response alongside Cycling UK and Open MTB to the Welsh Government's consultation on Improving Opportunities to Access the Outdoors. The consultation, which closed in October 2015, received nearly 6,000 responses, 4,000 of which were submitted by the cycling community. Overall it received the highest number of responses of any Welsh Government consultation to date.

The majority of the responses were in favour of wanting changes to the legislation on public rights of way to allow increased access, including the view that existing rights of way could be upgraded to allow for multi-user paths. Although mountain biking is already one of the most popular activities, the consultation also noted that people would like to be able to do more.

As an indicator of the wider interest in this area, Sport England has developed its own new strategy [Towards an Active Nation](#). With more than one in four people doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week and one in six deaths caused by inactivity at a cost to the economy of £7.4 billion a year, Sport England is particularly interested in what we can do to get more people active.

Similarly, the Outdoor Industries Association report [Getting Active Outdoors](#) highlights the need to break down barriers to accessing the outdoors and the need to let people undertake outdoor activities no more than two miles from their front doors.

Our own research based on this report shows that nearly one million people who don't currently ride a bike off road would like to in future and two-thirds of people say they would like to cycle more if they felt safer and more confident in route-finding.

Taking steps to break down the barriers to participation, encouraging people from all backgrounds and modernising the approach to access and rights of way would provide a real opportunity to deliver the outcomes of the new sports strategy.

We call on the government to act.

Yours sincerely

Ian Drake, chief executive officer, British Cycling
Anne Adams-King, chief executive officer, Welsh Cycling
Craig Burn, chief executive, Scottish Cycling
Phillip Darnton, executive director, Bicycle Association
Dave Turnbull, chief executive, British Mountaineering Council
Paul Tuohy, chief executive, Cycling UK
Victoria Ward, general manager, Welsh Sports Association
Emma Boggis, chief executive, Sport and Recreation Alliance
Lynn Petersen, chief executive, British Horse Society
Tom Hutton, Chair, OpenMTB
Tracy Moseley, former world downhill champion
Simon Watts, Mountain bike Olympic development programme coach
Great Britain Cycling Team mountain bike squad
Chris Boardman, Olympic gold medallist

cc. Richard Lochhead MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food & Environment

cc. Rt Hon John Whittingdale OBE MP as the Secretary for State for Culture, Media and Sport.

A version of this letter has also been sent to Lesley Griffiths AM Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs

