

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Cyllid](#) ar [Cyllideb Ddrafft Llywodraeth Cymru 2025-26](#).

This response was submitted to the [Finance Committee](#) consultation on the [Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26](#).

WGDB_26-27 26: Ymateb gan: Ffŵl V'Yfg'7na fi |Response from: Ffŵl V'Yfg'7na fi





25th September 2025

Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026/27

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your consultation in advance of the 2026/27 draft budget. Our response touches on some of your wider questions on prevention, infrastructure and the Future Generations Act obligations, namely:

- Has there been adequate investment from the Welsh Government in basic public sector infrastructure?
- Is the Welsh Government's approach to preventative spending represented in resource allocations?
- What are the key opportunities for the Welsh Government to invest in supporting an economy and public services that better deliver against the well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?

Our 21,000 miles of public paths, and the 22% of Wales which is open access land, are an often overlooked part of our public infrastructure. Previous budgets have not been sufficient to realise the potential of outdoor activity, especially walking, to support healthier, greener and more cohesive communities.

Our path networks and open spaces are a national asset, full of cultural and historical significance. We should be proud, protective and ambitious in how we utilise them. They present a variety of opportunities to support the Wellbeing goals, especially a healthier Wales.

We want to see a budget which:

- Triples the value of the Access Improvement Fund to £6m.

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- Provides revenue funding for the establishment of a pan-Wales programme to help people get more active through walking.
- Supports a high-profile campaign to help people make the right choices about safe and responsible walking.

Investing for future generations

In his 2025 statutory report, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales described the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act as ‘*a pathway for positive change*’. This is an apt analogy because the miles of physical pathways which cross our nation can indeed offer a literal route to positive change – for health, wellbeing, education, and economy.

In a Ramblers poll, **89%** of people agreed that the path network should be protected for future generations and **72%** thought more time, money and resource should be invested in the network.ⁱ

Actions with multiple benefits & and prioritising prevention

The Commissioner has also directed public bodies to ‘*supercharge actions with multiple benefits*’ and to “*prioritise prevention,*” highlighting that years of cuts to “*the infrastructure that keeps people well, such as... green spaces – are storing up problems for the future.*”

With the right support from Welsh Government, Wales’s walking infrastructure can help deliver multiple wellbeing and preventative benefits for our communities.

Health and Wellbeing benefits

A recent major studyⁱⁱ showed just 7000 steps per day reduces the risk of serious health conditions, including lowering cardiovascular disease risk by 25%, dementia risk by 38% and the risk of depressive symptoms by 22%. Investing in excellent quality, accessible paths near to

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where people live, and supporting initiatives to help people become more active through walking, can bring significant health benefits, and contribute to reducing demands on the NHS.

Our 2023 research reportⁱⁱⁱ identified our path networks as having an estimated wellbeing value of over £33 per person in England and Wales.

Economic benefits:

Accessible walking infrastructure is crucial for attracting visitors and holidaymakers to all corners of Wales. It is a key part of our tourism infrastructure. Research undertaken for Ramblers showed visiting walkers make 31.7m day trips to Wales annually, with almost half their £962m spend happening in rural areas (£442m). A further 8.9m walkers stay overnight, spending another £1.9bn across the nation^{iv}.

The need for investment

Paths across Wales have neglected, with the latest figures showing 50% are blocked or not signposted^v. Highway authorities are struggling with reduced resources and lengthy backlogs of thousands of maintenance and legal cases. Too many people are unable to make use of paths. Barriers include:

- Inadequate provision in their communities
- Inaccessible structures (like stiles or narrow gates) or illegal obstructions
- Poor quality paths and signage
- A lack of publicly available information
- A lack of confidence and skills.

We need the Welsh Government to deliver a budget which:

1. Retains and increases the Access Improvement Grant

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The Access Improvement Grant from Welsh Government to Local Authorities and National Park Authorities is a crucial investment in our access infrastructure. It helps repair vital connections in our communities, through improved signage, path surface improvements, replacement of bridges, new more accessible gates – helping more people gain access to the outdoors. For many struggling authorities, it is their main resource for improving paths. This Grant must be retained and enhanced.

Over recent years, the Access Improvement grant has remained a small fund - just £2m per year since 2023 with no adjustment for inflation, and shared between 25 authorities. While highly valued, it equates to just 64p per person in Wales, which is not reflective of the benefits quality access can bring.

2. Facilitates a pan-Wales programme to get people out walking.

Welsh government should provide funding to support the creation of pan-Wales community focused programme which enhances people's wellbeing through walking. Many people lack confidence or skills to explore the outdoors on foot, and organised walking-focused initiatives can help increase physical activity levels. This could build on previous successful community and volunteer-led models, such as the Paths to Wellbeing programme, run by Ramblers Cymru. This project showed significant wellbeing benefits for participants and improved local walking networks. Such initiatives have the added benefit of boosting volunteering – something which the Future Generation Commissioner is calling for, and recognises is beneficial for community cohesion.

3. Educates and informs for safe and responsible walking.

Public education on how to enjoy the outdoors safely and appropriately has been under resourced for many years. Increasing pressure is being felt particularly by our volunteer rescue services and by land managers dealing with instances of inappropriate behaviour. Dedicated investment is needed in the promotion of the Countryside Code by NRW and partners, and in the

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Outdoor sector-led AdventureSmart campaign.

The next step

Welsh government must make a more holistic and meaningful investment in public access and walking infrastructure. The 2026/27 budget must set the scene for a concerted effort to realise the benefits of the outdoors for current and future generations.

If you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Brough'.

Rebecca Brough
Policy and Public Affairs Manager
Ramblers Cymru

ⁱ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1061 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th – 14th March 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Wales adults (aged 18+).

ⁱⁱ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(25\)00164-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(25)00164-1/fulltext)

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/ramblers-research-reveals-wellbeing-value-our-paths>

^{iv} Unpublished Ramblers research (pending publication)

^v <https://erammp.wales/sites/default/files/2025-03/Report%20105.%20Wales%20National%20Trends%20and%20Glastir%20Evaluation.pdf>

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