

ACCESS & environment

Parliamentary call for access

Question



Baroness Scott of Needham Market

Liberal Democrat

Life peer



To ask His Majesty's Government how much DEFRA spent in total in the past financial year to create new opportunities for the public to access nature, or to improve existing public access, excluding engagement programmes.

Answer



Baroness Hayman of Ullock

Labour

Life peer



Answered on

8 July 2025

We are committed both to creating new opportunities for the public to access nature, and to improving existing public access. For instance, in FY24/25 we spent £5.5 million on progressing delivery of the King Charles III England Coast Path and £5.6 million on progressing delivery of the Coast to Coast National Trail. We also spent £5.8 million on our Access for All programme to increase accessibility of the countryside. This excludes funding for engagement programmes such as Generation Green and Green Social Prescribing, and funding for access casework, maintenance, monitoring, and staff costs.

Question



Phil Brickell

Labour

Bolton West



To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of expanding access rights for (a) swimming and (b) non-motorised craft on inland waterways.

Answer



Emma Hardy

Labour

Kingston upon Hull West and Haltemprice



Answered on

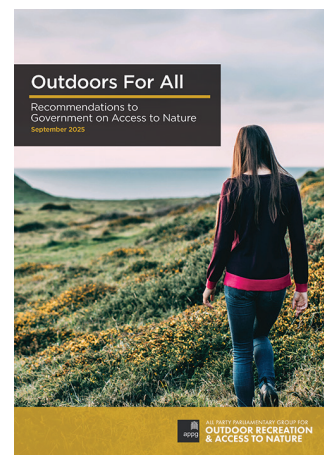
16 October 2025

The government recognises the importance of providing access to nature and is considering the approach to improving that, including access onto unregulated inland waterways. We are committed to working with stakeholders as this develops, and a further update will be provided in due course.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Outdoor Recreation & Access to Nature have issued the 40 page *Outdoors for All*, including input from the British Mountaineering Council, Ramblers and PUK. Four pages on water access begin 'The longstanding confusion around public rights of access on unregulated inland waters must be resolved by creating a clear, consistent right in legislation. Currently, just a tiny proportion of our inland waters have a clear, uncontested right of access. This is the biggest barrier preventing people from having the confidence to enjoy local blue spaces. Voluntary access agreements have proven to be impractical and inconsistent. Negotiation across thousands of landowners is restrictive, time-consuming, and creates inconsistencies from river to river.'

The appendix points out 'CRoW land provides almost a million hectares for walking but excludes cycling, paddling and camping. Access to blue spaces is particularly limited: only about 7% of all inland waterways offer clear public right of navigation, compared with the broader rights to water established under Scotland's Land Reform Act (2003).' Note that most of that 7% is canal.

The whole report draws heavily on the Scottish act and it is wishful thinking but it is the biggest step forward we have seen in the last century, put in such a way that it is harder for intransigents to appeal. A PWA to Andy MacNae, Rossendale & Darwen, Lab, who chairs the APPG, gave a Government welcome without mentioning blue space.



Questions, questions

Parliamentary Written Questions continue to chip away at the access situation. Those who have asked recently include Phil Brickell, Bolton W, Lab, Jun 19th, Sep 4th, Oct 16th Kate White, Leeds NW, Lab, Jul 9 and 10th Dr Simon Opher, Stroud, Lab, two on Nov 11th Helen Maguire, Epsom & Ewell, LD, Nov 18th Dr Roz Savage, S Cotswolds, LD, three on Dec 3rd Neil Duncan-Jordan, Poole, Lab, Dec 11th Baroness Scott of Needham Market, LD, asked how much Defra had spent on access in the last year. A total of £16,900,000 was spent on Access for All, meaning those on foot, contrasting with lack of expenditure on water and the claim that checking what laws, if any, relate to river use restriction would not be good use of public money.

A question from Lord Kamall on drowning prevention